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GRAZER PHILOSOPHISCHE STUDIEN 94 (2017) 460-493

Grazer
Philosophische
Studien
brill.com/gps

Husserl's Philosophy of the Categories and His Development toward Absolute Idealism

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Abstract

In recent work, Amie Thomasson has sought to develop a new approach to the philosophy of the categories which is metaphysically neutral between traditional realist and conceptualist approaches, and which has its roots in the 'correlationalist' approach to categories put forward in Husserl's writings in the 1900s–1910s and systematically charted over the past few decades by David Woodruff Smith in his studies of Husserl's philosophy. Here the author aims to provide a recontextualization and critical assessment of correlationalism in a Husserlian vein. To this end, the author presents, first, the reasons why, later in his life, Husserl himself found his earlier treatment of categories philosophically naive, and why he increasingly advocated for a more genetic-teleological account. The author then draws upon arguments made a century earlier by Schelling and Hegel, in criticism of Fichte, to point up what might remain philosophically unsatisfying about even the post-correlationalist genetic position of the later Husserl, in light of the pronounced trend in Husserl's own development, on the questions of reason and spirit, toward absolute idealism.

Keywords

Husserl – Kant – Hegel – phenomenology – idealism – categories – German philosophy – correlationalism – metametaphysics

1 Introduction: A Neo-Husserlian Doctrine of the Categories?

Recently it has been suggested by Amie Thomasson that Husserl's approach to the philosophy of categories during the 1900s–1910s is one that might offer a

promising third alternative that brings together some of the key commitments of both traditional realist and traditional conceptualist accounts, while avoiding some of their more controversial aspects (cf. Thomasson 2015; Thomasson 2013). Unlike straightforward realists who view categories as part of the *world's* own structure, and unlike straightforward conceptualists who view categories instead as merely components of our ways of *thinking* about the world, the Husserlian approach conceives of categories instead from the point of view of the *correlation* that would obtain between our thoughts and the world, if our thoughts were true – though bracketing (at least in the first instance) whether or not such correlation actually obtains (cf. Thomasson 2013). Thomasson also thereby highlights the extent to which taking the Husserlian approach is meant to allow us to remain essentially 'neutral' metaphysically speaking, insofar as the Husserlian approach aims to be merely *descriptive* of these correlations from within the requisite bracketing, rather than either claiming to *demonstrate* their objective validity or to offer an *explanation* of their existence, in terms of their causes.

To be sure, Thomasson herself only provides a handful of references to Husserl's writings of this period, rather than developing a thorough reading of these works. Nevertheless, just such a reading of Husserl's writings during the 1900s–1910s has been articulated in recent work by David Woodruff Smith (cf. especially Smith 2007; 2nd edition Smith 2013). Indeed, perhaps more clearly and systematically than any of Husserl's recent interpreters, Smith has charted out both the basic presuppositions of Husserl's philosophy of the categories, as well as the central systematic divisions and intercorrelations among the different dimensions of categoriality, especially as Husserl presents them in Husserl's 1900–1 *Logical Investigations* and 1913 *Ideas* Volume I.

There is certainly much that is of philosophical interest both about this period of Husserl's own thought concerning the categories (Smith's focus), as well as about the prospects for the neo-Husserlian account of the categories that Thomasson means to develop along these lines. What I want to explore in this essay, however, are two reasons one might have for being suspicious that an approach modeled on this period of Husserl's thought will ever be able to provide a satisfying conclusion to the philosophical investigation of the categories.

The first is drawn from Husserl's own philosophical development. For even if we were to accept Thomasson's suggestion that this sort of position represents an important advance on the traditional realist and conceptualist positions, the fact that Husserl *himself* was dissatisfied with this period of his thought – and, in fact, foregrounds some of the reasons for this dissatisfaction already in *Ideas* I itself (as I will show below) – is something that should give us pause. Most notably, as we will see below, Husserl himself came to insist that

his previous account of the categories presented only what he came to call a 'static' largely logical/conceptual analysis of their essence (or 'sense'), and that this must be supplemented by a more 'genetic' and specifically teleological account of the 'origin' of such categories themselves.¹

The second sort of reason for concern arises once we see that the trajectory of Husserl's shift to a genetic-teleological account parallels in striking ways the initial development in the philosophy of categories that occurs within the early stages of German idealistic philosophy, in the steps from Kant and Reinhold to Fichte. I will suggest below that Husserl's own genetic position is on a trajectory *toward* the more 'absolute' idealism in Schelling and Hegel, though without actually advocating all aspects of their idealism. If this is correct, then there will be motivation to assess how Husserl's later views respond, or fail to respond, to the criticisms that these later absolute idealists leveled against Fichtean idealism as not yet providing a satisfying stopping-point for rational reflection. Here I will argue that, when viewed from the perspective of absolute idealism, not only Husserl's earlier static account but even his later genetic account of the categories will be judged to be still too 'subjective' in the scope of its analytics.² I will also show that this will remain their judgment of Husserl's project even though (as the Husserlians will rightly remind us) the originating subjectivity Husserl thinks is responsible for the genesis of the categories is conceived of as transcendental and intersubjective, rather than empirical and solipsistic; even so, the criticisms by Schelling and Hegel of Fichte's genetic teleologism can still get their grip.

I will proceed as follows. First I will sketch a general background framework for the discussion of the philosophy of the categories (cf. §2). In §3, I will then present Husserl's early static correlationalist account from the 1900s–1910s, largely following Smith's lucid overview, with the aim of bringing out

1 Discussion of the later developments is almost wholly absent from Thomasson's remarks, though compare Thomasson 2016 §2.1 for a very brief treatment of Husserl's 'transcendental' idealism as exemplified in *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*, in the context of Thomasson's presentation of Roman Ingarden's resistance to Husserl's later shifts toward idealism, and Ingarden's advocacy of something closer to Husserl's earlier (allegedly) more metaphysically neutral approach. Discussion of Husserl's late developments are also largely absent even from Smith's otherwise excellent and thorough overview. This is especially true of the 1st edition of Smith's *Husserl*, where (for example) there is no entry relating to 'genetic' in the index. In the revised concluding chapter of the 2nd edition, Smith does now include some brief supplementary remarks pertinent to Husserl's motivations for genetic phenomenology, along with a discussion of how the genetic approach helps to shape Husserl's *Crisis*.

2 I will also suggest that a closer look at the motivations for Husserl's own later 'genetic' line of development will already indicate the seeds for this further discontent.

the extent to which Thomasson is right to think that it represents an advance over traditional realism and conceptualism. In §4, I will then turn, however, to the later period of Husserl's work (which Smith and especially Thomasson leave largely to one side), in order to focus on the reasons that Husserl himself already anticipates in *Ideas I* for the need to move beyond static analysis toward the later genetic teleological account of the categories. From here I will then turn (in §5) to Husserl's even later, more explicitly 'genetic' writings (in the *Crisis* and surrounding texts) to begin to draw out Husserl's shift toward a position that he himself acknowledges shares deep affinities with German Idealism. I conclude (in §6) by highlighting key points at which Husserl's development will nevertheless be judged not to go far enough, from the absolute idealist point of view. I will also try to bring out the extent to which absolute idealism itself might plausibly be thought of as the dialectical 'truth' of Husserl's own trajectory, as it aims to provide what, *by Husserl's own lights*, would seem to be an even more rationally satisfying, fully 'self-responsible', account of the categories.

2 Realism, Conceptualism, Correlationalism: Some Preliminaries

In order to orient our discussion of the philosophy of categories, let me begin by highlighting some of the more traditional, if often overlapping, philosophical questions concerning categories that any account of categories will be expected to address, before turning to some of the more familiar traditional answers given to these questions. Here is a non-exhaustive list of some of the more central questions:³

- *intensional*: how should we define (the concept of) being a category? (what do we think 'in' the concept <category>?)
- *extensional*: what things are categories? (or fall 'under' the concept <category>?)
- *ontological*: what sort of thing is a category itself? (to what category do categories themselves belong?)
- *scope*: does everything fall under (some) categories? (sui generis?)
- *genetic*: where do categories come from? what causes them to be?
- *teleological*: do the categories (their existence, their use) have a purpose, aim, or goal?
- *epistemological*: how do we come to know (grasp, understand) categories?
- *linguistic*: how are categories expressed in language?

3 Here I will draw upon some of the methodological remarks made in Gracia and Newton 2012.

We might also organize these questions about categories under the point of view of Aristotelian four ‘causes’: what are categories made of (material cause)? what brings them into being (efficient cause)? what structure or nature do they have (formal cause)? what is the purpose for categories (final cause)?

As Thomasson notes, in the history of philosophy, two broad families of answers to these questions have been especially common, as noted above: one broadly *realist* account of the nature of the categories, and one broadly *conceptualist* account (cf. Thomasson 2013). More realist accounts hold either that a category is a high-level *genus* (kind, species, class) that groups together entities; or that a category is a very-common *property* that many entities bear in common. In either case, the category itself is a feature of the world itself. The account of ‘*megista gene*’ given in Plato’s *Sophist* has been taken to be suggestive of the former version of realism about categories; the doctrine of the ‘most universal predicates of entities’ given in Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* might be taken as exemplary of the latter version.⁴

Throughout its history realism has come under criticism largely based on skeptical worries about the epistemic standing of any claims about how things are ‘in themselves’, whether we are considering things as individuals or at the more universal (categorical) level. In line with this more critical perspective, ‘conceptualist’ accounts of categories have arisen which hold categories to be instead something mental, either because it is something *psychological*, e.g., a very general representation that occurs in our minds and that our minds use to group entities together, or something more *logical*, in the sense that a category is a very general predicate-concept used to form propositions which are true of many entities, propositions which themselves are ideal or abstract contents which, though perhaps grasped ‘in’ consciousness, enjoy an existence beyond anyone’s occurrent consciousness. Kant’s account of categories as pure concepts of understanding in the first *Critique* has been taken as exemplary of both of these versions of conceptualism, depending on whether his underlying doctrine of concepts is understood to place concepts more generally in a more psychological or logical register.⁵

4 In his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Bolzano argues for a realistic interpretation of both Aristotle and Leibniz as well; cf. Bolzano 1837: §117. Eisler, by contrast, takes Aristotle to initiate the conceptualist position, claiming that, for Aristotle, the categories provide the ‘basic forms of assertion about entities, the highest concepts under which entities can be subsumed’ (Eisler 1922: 323–24). For some discussion of the interpretive options concerning Aristotle, see Shields 2007.

5 For more discussion of Kant’s account of the categories as concepts, and how this relates both to logic and psychology, see Tolley 2016 and Tolley forthcoming. Beyond the realist and conceptualist approaches, a further, *nominalist* account of the categories is worth noting, according to which a category is ultimately a particularly common *word* (label) that we use

Versions of each of these approaches have found more recent advocates. Among those who have sought to avoid the subjectivism or psychologism that came to be associated with Kant's account, we can note the neo-realist theories of categories put forward by David Armstrong, Roderick Chisholm, and even more recently by Kathrin Koslicki, (cf. Armstrong 1978; Chisholm 1996; Koslicki 2008). Others have sought instead to update a broadly Kantian approach by turning toward a neo-conceptualism that nevertheless also aims to avoid subjectivism and psychologism. The most recent versions of revised conceptualism have been anticipated to a large extent by Carnap's neo-Kantian-inflected work (cf. Friedman 2000, Carus 2008), and perhaps finds its contemporary form most closely in what has come to be called the 'meta-metaphysics' movement (cf. Chalmers et al.: 2009). Here authors see categories as arising not out of anything so explicitly psychological as individual acts of thinking, but instead out of social activities of scientific practice and reasoning. This sort of approach can be seen in the work of Sally Haslanger, among others (cf. Haslanger 2012).⁶

It is against this continuing oscillation between realism and conceptualism that Amie Thomasson has recently suggested that we might turn to Husserl's account of categories, in order to carve out a more promising alternative approach, a third way which can incorporate some of the core motivations from each side, while avoiding some of their more metaphysically contentious

to collect together many entities. This sort of position is often developed as a response to the felt lack of reality given to categories themselves on the conceptualist account, insofar as most conceptualists themselves accept that categories so construed are not 'real' in the same way that things are real. By associating categories with words, by contrast, the nominalist re-instates categories back into the real world, since words are themselves species of real individual things. Hobbes's insistence in the *Leviathan* that 'there is nothing in the world universal but names', since 'the things named are every one of them individual and singular' (Part I, Section 4), has been taken to imply a nominalist account of categories.

- 6 It is also true that more attention is placed on the way such activities find their ('real') expression in language, and in this way making some connection with the new 'constructive' nominalism developed by (and after) Quine and Goodman. A still further, perhaps equally widespread response to the traditional investigation of the categories which is worth noting, though one which I won't discuss here, is what might be called categorial *nhilism*. This would consist in the outright rejection of the very idea of categories, perhaps as simply an out-moded holdover from a time when we thought there were universals or essences or apriori truths or a timeless rational order, and thought something like classical epistemology and ontology were possible – but since (so the position would claim) now we all know everything is in flux, historically and socially constructed (including social construction itself), there is no interesting identity of the sort required for categories either in reality or in thinking, or even in our word-use.

assumptions. In her words, this approach takes up a more ‘neutral spirit’ toward categories, by ‘describing the categorial structure that the world would have *according to* our thought, experience, or language, while refraining from making commitments about whether or not these categories are occupied’ (Thomasson 2013). Though Thomasson herself develops elements of this sort of theory of categories in her own work (cf. Thomasson 2007, 2015), Thomasson also sees Husserl’s approach as embodying this same spirit, insofar as Husserl lays out both ‘categories of *meaning*’ (ways that we mean things) and then categories of *being* as ‘categories of possible objects meant’, with the latter construed strictly and simply as ‘the *correlates* of the meaning categories, without concern for any empirical matter about whether or not there really are objects of the various ontological categories discerned’ (ibid.; my ital.).

Even from this brief description, we can see that the approach Thomasson advocates looks to share a few things in common with both of the traditional approaches. First, it shares conceptualism’s methodological prioritizing of our ways of meaning or being intentionally directed toward things, rather than skipping straight ahead to the things themselves; it also shares the ontological humility of the conceptualist approach, insofar as it, too, means to limit the claims made within the theory of categories to objects-as-meant, rather than objects-in-themselves. Nevertheless, this approach also shares key components of the realist approach as well, both insofar as it treats the categories of being as a distinct set of categories from the categories of meaning (e.g., the category of substance is a different kind of category than the category of proposition), and insofar as it is committed to the idea that the categories of being will have genuine ontological import *if* the world is as our ways of meaning make it out to be. Even so, the approach itself stops short of making such ontologically committal claims, and rests content with charting out the analytical differentiation and then systematic ‘correlation’ that obtains between categories of meaning and categories of objects-meant.⁷

7 Thomasson articulates her version of the neutral correlationalist position instead in terms of coordination of existence-predications (categories of being), on the one hand, with the application conditions for sortal terms as used by ordinary speakers (categories of meaning) on the other; cf. Thomasson 2007: 157f. The neutrality about the (‘empirical’) fulfillment of such conditions is what leads her to characterize her approach as closer in some ways to a kind of conceptualism about categories: ‘the most basic conditions of existence, identity, and persistence for the objects we refer to are discoverable by a kind of conceptual analysis, and the most basic claims about these conditions are analytic’ (Thomasson 2007: 54). In her recent book, Thomasson aligns this approach not just with Husserl’s descriptivism but also with investigations into what Carnap calls ‘internal questions’ (cf. Thomasson 2015: 4–8; 31f). Nevertheless, Thomasson also thinks that, ‘once the relevant conditions ... are laid out, it’s

3 Beyond Realism and Conceptualism: Husserl's Early Static Correlationalist Account

Now, in these works, Thomasson herself does not offer anything like a thorough reading of any of Husserl's texts along these lines.⁸ For this we can turn to David Woodruff Smith's recent systematic overview of Husserl's philosophy as a whole, with a special focus on Husserl's middle-period works between 1900 and 1920 or so (cf. Smith 2007; 2nd edition: 2013). Indeed, one of the (many) virtues of Smith's interpretation here and in earlier work (cf. Smith 1995, Smith 2002), is that it provides a careful and nuanced map of the general doctrine of the categories that Husserl lays out in this period. Smith's work shows both the basic lines of differentiation and also the systematic angles of correlation, and also shows how this account lies at the very heart of the philosophy Husserl developed at this time.

This account is articulated and defended at length in Husserl's 1900–1 *Logical Investigations* (*Logische Untersuchungen*) and then recapitulated at the outset of his 1913 *Ideas* (*Ideen*) Volume I. Smith's work helps to crystallize the systematic core of the picture, showing as well the way in which Husserl himself aims to clarify what is at stake in the traditional debates between realists and conceptualists (and nominalists) through three important analytical strategies: first, by more carefully distinguishing between *domains* of analysis or description; second, by aiming to demonstrate a mutual *interdependence* among these domains; and third, by more sharply carving out what is and is not involved in the special *perspective* from which the philosophical investigation of categories is to be undertaken.

The last methodological aspect is only hinted at in the *Investigations*, and only fully conceived and articulated by the time of *Ideas* I. Here Husserl comes to argue that the proper perspective for philosophical investigation is one that involves what he calls an '*epochē*', or 'bracketing'. What is bracketed, in particular, is the everyday ('natural') belief ('thesis') that 'there is a natural world of objects beyond our consciousness' (Smith 2007: 29). Once this thesis is put out of play, in a mental operation akin to generalized doubting of its validity, Husserl thinks that we will see, like Descartes, that the bracketing has its limits, insofar as there will remain something whose existence cannot be doubted – namely,

overwhelmingly obvious that the world *does* satisfy these conditions' (Thomasson 2007: 159), which might be thought to push her ultimate view toward something closer to realism.

8 In an earlier essay, Thomasson does talk a bit about Husserl's conception of the 'reduction' required to achieve the appropriately neutral standpoint, noting similarities she sees between this and Sellars's methodology (cf. Thomasson 2005: §3).

the existence of the bracketing 'consciousness [Bewußtsein]' itself. After the bracketing of the ordinary thesis of the existence of *objects* transcending our consciousness, what we will be left with for consideration is what is immanent in our *consciousness* of this world of objects, a domain which itself (thinks Husserl) will remain necessarily, 'regardless of whether they exist' (ibid). In Husserl's own provocative phrase, from the point of view of the reduction, this 'immanent being is therefore doubtless *absolute* being, in the sense that it principally needs no other 'thing' in order to exist [nulla 're' indiget ad existendum]' (Husserl 1913: §49, 92); it survives as a 'residuum' of 'world-annihilation [Welt-vernichtung]' (op. cit.: 91).

Now, this turn toward consciousness might, on first blush, seem to move us back toward the subjectivism often associated with Kant. What Husserl is at pains to emphasize, however, is that the consciousness in question *also* does not presuppose the existence of a *subject*, as that 'thing' which 'has' the consciousness itself as a predicate or property. In fact, the belief in (thesis, positing of) the existence of a thing-like (substantial, enduring) subject transcending the moment of consciousness is itself every bit as bracketed as the belief in the existence of any other object transcending consciousness (cf. Husserl 1913: §57). Rather, what is immanent to this consciousness is only a *subject-relatedness*, coordinate with an *object-relatedness*. That is, consciousness is characterized essentially, on the one hand, by a directedness toward objects, i.e., by *intentionality*, or by various modes of meaning or intending objects, which Husserl also came to associate with 'sense' or 'noema' (cf. Smith 2007: 12, 56f). By virtue of its essential object-relatedness, the consciousness that remains after bracketing will therefore not only not be essentially anything merely subjective, in the sense of being a monadic predicate of some subject, it will contain within itself a reaching out toward objects. By the same count, however, consciousness can also never be thought of as merely a potential predicate of the objects meant either. This is because consciousness is characterized essentially, on the other hand, by a directedness to a subject – even though (again) not including any subject-thing in its immanence. In effect, the bracketing shows that the domain of consciousness (or 'being-conscious [bewußt-sein]') will be something that itself is constituted as a kind of in-between, or a relatedness *toward* an 'object-pole' that is oriented *from* (or *for*) an 'ego-pole', but whose being which is identical neither with that of the object nor that of the subject, nor any of their properties (cf. Husserl 1930: §31).

Now, though Husserl clearly believes that the operation of 'phenomenological' bracketing (the 'reduction' of objects of consciousness to 'phenomena' *in* consciousness) is a crucial first step in philosophy, as it secures a domain of inquiry that is immune from the sort of doubt that renders problematic the validity of the general thesis of the existence of consciousness-transcendent

objects and subjects, Husserl at the same time insists that, if it is to be a science, philosophy cannot rest content with considering this domain as initially 'given' after such bracketing. This is because, like all science, philosophy is interested in the universal and necessary features of its domains, rather than any concrete (factual) individual cases (cf. Husserl 1913: §6). Husserl's way of putting this at the outset of *Ideas I* is that philosophy should aim to be 'pure', as a science of 'essences', rather than a science of 'facts [Tatsachen]' or 'realities' (cf. Husserl 1913: 3–4). Hence, in order to attain not just the right domain, but the right aspect of this domain, we need to perform a second 'eidetic' reduction, in order to bring into view the essences of what is present immanently in the field of consciousness, to achieve what Husserl calls the 'seeing of essences [Wesensschauung]' or 'eidetic intuition' (cf. Husserl 1913: §§3–4). This new sort of intuition is achieved by using our 'fantasy' to imaginatively bring to the fore, or light up, various aspects that would remain invariant across changes in what is initially factually immanently given in the consciousness of ordinary (though bracketed) empirical intuition (cf. Husserl 1913: §4; cf. Smith 2007: 330f).

Once in possession of such eidetic intuition, then Husserl thinks our next task becomes simply to 'describe' what invariants in the intuition remain present to consciousness; in this way, we come to 'clarify' the essence of consciousness, its intentionality, subject-relatedness, and so on. With this we will have moved to 'pure' phenomenology, which is 'a purely descriptive discipline, exploring the field of transcendently pure consciousness by pure intuition', and whose 'norm' is: 'To presume nothing but what we can make perspicuous according to essence [wesensmäßig einsichtig] to ourselves for consciousness in pure immanence' (Husserl 1913: §59, 113). Its descriptions begin with the discovery of the essential properties, structures, and relations of this field of immanence in consciousness, and lead to the uncovering of laws according to which such aspects of consciousness necessarily and universally interrelate.

Crucially, however, this pure phenomenological *description* of the field of consciousness is something Husserl means to distinguish both from any sort of 'explanation [Erklärung]' of consciousness by appeal to the real causes or conditions that make it possible, but also from any 'theorizing' about consciousness, in the sense of providing deductions of truths about consciousness from pre-established definitions: rather, philosophy restricts itself to 'clarifying [aufklären]' the very 'idea' of consciousness and its 'elements' and 'laws', to 'understand [verstehen]' its essence (cf. Husserl 1900–1: II.20–22).⁹

9 As Smith notes, this distinction is something Husserl develops from Brentano, who sharply separated 'descriptive' from 'genetic', explanatory psychology (cf. Smith 2007: 190f; cf. also Thomasson 2015: 5–6).

From within this bracketed, doubly-‘reduced’ perspective, Husserl thinks we will notice that the essential aspects or moments of consciousness differentiate themselves along relatively clear faultlines. Especially in his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl in effect partitions the field of pure consciousness into the following four-fold sub-domains: (i) the way in which consciousness bears its relatedness toward (intends) its object, which Husserl associates with the *meaning* or sense of consciousness (e.g., concepts, propositions); (ii) the *object* meant or intended through such meaning (the target at the end of the object-pole; e.g. individuals, states of affairs, essences); (iii) the *subject* (ego, the I; target of the ego-pole) that is performing such an intending or meaning in such act of consciousness, and these psychical *acts* themselves (e.g., thinking, judging); and finally (iv) the expression of these meanings and acts in *language* (e.g., names, sentences) (cf. Smith 2002: §2).

It is here that we finally get to Husserl’s nuanced and sophisticated account of *categories* in particular, with Husserl focusing especially on the invariances that obtain in relation to the first three aspects above (meaning, object-relation, subject-relation).¹⁰ Focusing successively on what is given in eidetic intuition with respect to each of these aspects, Husserl thinks we can find both the highest *genera* of each of these aspects (via what Husserl calls ‘generalization [Generalisierung]’) and also the basic elementary *forms* that all species of each aspect will be characterized by (via ‘formalization [Formalisierung]’; cf. Husserl 1913: §13). Through these procedures, we can identify certain universal and necessary *laws* that obtain among essences and their species and forms. Crucially, these laws include not just those that govern the forms and species *within* the domain of each aspect (meanings, objects, acts, expressions), but also those that specify universal and necessary *correlations across* these domains – teasing out the universal and necessary connections, e.g., between forms of meaning and forms of objects-meant, and also forms of mental activity. These take the form of certain implication-relations that we can see obtain across the domains. For example, Husserl thinks that there are certain general ‘equivalent transformations [Umformungen]’ that we can see obtain between propositions about *meanings* (propositions, truths) and propositions about psychical *acts* (judging, having insight) – even though, considered ‘in itself [an sich]’, the former sort of proposition does not ‘say’ anything about psychical acts (cf. LU Prolog §50 1.184). Understood in this correlational sense, Husserl claims, for example, that ‘the assertions ‘this *truth* obtains’ and ‘it is possible that a *thinking*

10 Though it is true that the 1st *Investigation* is all about expression, the bulk of the remainder of the text (the *Prolegomena*, too) concerns itself with ontology (2nd and 3rd *Investigations*), meaning/grammar (4th *Investigation*), and mental activity (5th and 6th *Investigations*).

being can have *insight* into a judgment with the relevant meaning-content' are of the same worth' (LU Prol §39 I.129; my ital.). Similar general correlations or transformations also obtain between the categories of grammar and of ontology, which allow for certain equivalences to be charted out from the categories and laws at the level of *meanings*, over to the level of *being* or objects. Husserl thinks, for example, that we will see that 'truth and being are themselves 'categories' in the same sense and are *obviously correlative*' (LU Prol §39 I.132; my ital.). Further on, he writes (LU Prol §62 I.229):

Something cannot *be* without being determined to be so and so; and *that* it is and is so and so determined, this is the *truth* in itself, which forms the necessary correlate of being in itself. Obviously, the same holds both for individual truths in relation to states of affairs [Sachverhalten] and also for connections of truths in relation to connections of states of affairs.

Though, taken out of context, this will surely sound straightforwardly metaphysical, when understood from the pure phenomenological point of view developed more fully by the time of *Ideas I*, strictly speaking these sorts of correlations among categories are all only claimed to be demonstrable in eidetic intuition from *within* the point of view of the phenomenological bracketing mentioned above. Hence, they are not (at least in the first instance) meant to be a claim about a more absolutely universal and necessary correlation of the categories of thinking, meaning, and being *per se*. This keeps faith with Husserl's aforementioned characterization of his account as one restricted to pure description of what is given in eidetic intuition, rather than offering anything like a more objective deduction of the obtaining of these categories in some reality that transcends the brackets. Husserl's claims also do not purport to give any explanation of consciousness itself in terms of these correlations, including any that would trace back to certain really existent causes underlying the possibility of consciousness itself.

4 Beyond Correlationism: Conditions for Consciousness and Categoriality in *Ideas I*

At this point, we hopefully have a better sense of what Thomasson has in mind by highlighting Husserl as someone who might help articulate a third way beyond realism and conceptualism. As Smith puts it, in these works Husserl means to 'maps the basic forms of thought or meaning, the basic forms of objects in the world, and the basic correlations between forms of meaning and the forms of objects represented by such meanings' (Smith 2007: 82). The last

qualification is key to avoiding straightforward realism, since the methodology of the epochē entails that this map is meant to chart out only the forms and categories according to which our ways of thinking and meaning are correlated with the ways of being and with objects-*as-meant*. Husserl's account, therefore, only ultimately claims to specify categories that *would* characterize the objects meant *if* they were to obtain in reality, though bracketing the question of whether they do, in fact, so obtain. And yet it is just this object-directedness – i.e., the intentionality that structures consciousness and hence the overall context of the target of phenomenological-eidetic description – which is what allows Husserl's position to avoid straightforward conceptualism either, since the categories of objects at issue are judged to be the very same ones which *would* characterize the existing world itself if there were to be such a world.¹¹

What I want to begin to take up now, however, are the two sets of reasons I identified at the outset as reasons for being dissatisfied with this alternative correlationalist approach as it is exemplified in Husserl's work in the 1900s and early 1910s. The first comes from the later development of Husserl's own thinking, in response to a felt need for a more *genetic* account of the categories to supplement what he came to see as the limitations in his early 'static' account.¹² The second set of reasons will push us beyond even the later Husserl, insofar as Husserl's own genetic development can usefully be seen as following only the first part of the path charted by earlier genetic projects in German Idealism after Kant, especially Fichte. Seeing this parallel in turn will invite criticisms motivated by the same concerns that pushed Schelling and Hegel past Fichte, on to more 'absolute' forms of idealism. I will take up Husserl's own development here, and then turn to absolute idealism in the next section.

11 There is in fact considerable debate over whether this stage of Husserl's career is best characterized as embracing a form of ('transcendental') *idealism* about the categories in general and about the realm of meanings in particular, with a main focus being on whether a noema, or a way of meaning an object, somehow involves or metaphysically implicates the objects meant, or whether a noema is more like a Fregean 'sense [Sinn]', which is ontologically separate from its object (as Fregean 'referent [Bedeutung]'). For very helpful discussion of many of the different sides of the interpretive issues here, see Smith 2007: 168–81 and 257–312; compare also Zahavi 2002: 58f.

12 As noted above, this is a development which is more or less completely absent from Thomasson's treatment of Husserl – perhaps unsurprisingly, as it is a development which is motivated by concerns that push us beyond Thomasson's own proposed perspective. What is more surprising is that this shift in Husserl's thinking is largely absent from Smith's treatment in Smith 2007, though this has been remedied to some extent by the discussion of the *Crisis* in the new final chapter for the 2nd edition (cf. Smith 2013).

One way into the motivations for Husserl's genetic turn can come from further reflection on the 'mapping' metaphor used by Smith above. It can seem as though Husserl rests content with charting out the coordinates that separate and connect various types of categories as they are 'given' within eidetic intuition, i.e., showing *that* there are these differentiated aspects to consciousness, each with their own highest genera and forms, and *that* there are correlations that obtain. Yet however analytically important this sort of task surely is, it is hard to see how this could count as reaching the end of the philosophical investigation of the categories themselves. This is because it would seem to allow for us to immediately go on to raise the deeper questions of *why* such differentiation and correlation obtains – that is: raise questions about the grounds or causes both for these elements (genera, forms) and their interrelations (laws), and, indeed, for the whole system itself.

In Smith's hands, the interrelations of the regions in Husserl's system are largely cast, at least officially, as standing in a holistic structure of mutual interdependence, with no one part playing a uniquely 'foundational' role in any privileged order of explanation.¹³ There is, however, one feature that Smith does ultimately point to, to begin to provide something at least in the direction of an explanation for why the categories are differentiated and coordinated – namely, the core *intentionality* of the full domain (bracketed consciousness) under description.¹⁴ It is because intentionality essentially includes both object-directedness and subject-directedness (the object-pole and ego-pole) that the categories of objects-meant, of meanings themselves, and of psychical acts involving meanings, are at once differentiated from one another and yet all

13 Compare: 'when we look at Husserl's philosophical system, we see mutual dependencies among the various theories falling in phenomenology, logic, ontology, and epistemology. One theory cannot do its work without the others.... In that way, the several theories are mutually interdependent, mutually 'founding' (Smith 2007: 75). And: 'phenomenology, logic, ontology, and epistemology are in certain ways mutually founding', with the result being that 'Husserl's philosophy developed with a kind of structured holism, even as phenomenology became the avowed centerpiece and the proclaimed foundation for the whole system' (Smith 2007: 12). In particular, Smith does not want to place the phenomenological method itself at the basis: 'within Husserl's system, phenomenology cannot be the sole foundation of the edifice' (Smith 2007: 75). Even so, Smith admits that there is a sense in which, '[f]or Husserl, by contrast, all philosophy is founded on the phenomenological theory of intentionality' (Smith 2007: 12). (See also the discussion below.)

14 As Smith puts it in an earlier essay, over and above the fact that 'there is an *isomorphism* among the four levels of entity', there is also the dimension of the specifically '*intentional* relationship' between them, such that 'however the intentional relationship works, there is *more* to it than the alignment of form' (Smith 2005: 114; my ital.).

universally and necessarily correlative with one another. It is, in effect, the tie that binds the whole together.

Because of this, Smith allows, first, that intentionality provides a grounding for the theory of *meaning* (logic): ‘for Husserl, logic, and thus (what we today call) semantics, is *grounded in* intentionality’ (Smith 2007: 265; my ital.). Intentionality also provides the ‘deeper’ basis for the broader theory of mental *acts*: ‘Deeper than the structure of either reason or sensation, or Kantian categories of the understanding, Husserl held, is the structure of consciousness itself: what he called *intentionality*, that is, the way that consciousness is “directed” toward or represents objects of various kinds in the world. Phenomenology studies just this structure, and thereby provides the proper *foundation* for knowledge’ (Smith 2007: 12; my ital.). It is also what grounds the categoriality of linguistic *expression*: ‘a sentence expresses a sense that prescribes an appropriate object if such exists. ... [F]or Husserl, this linguistic relationship is itself *grounded in* an intentional relation wherein an act of consciousness has a certain content or sense that prescribes an appropriate object’ (Smith 2007: 122; my ital.).

How then does intentionality ‘ground’ the categories of *objects*? Again, if the objects to be ‘grounded’ were objects as they are ‘in themselves’, then Husserl’s view might be naturally thought to push toward a more radical idealism, according to which consciousness and its structure was actually responsible for bringing about (in some sense) the way that objects are. Nevertheless, recalling the relevant context of inquiry (i.e., the *epochē*), Husserl need only describe how the categories of objects-*as-meant* are determined or grounded in intentionality. And it seems to be a primitive fact about the structure of consciousness that it is object-related, which on its own allows for at least the derivation of the most fundamental category of object-as-meant – namely, the category of ‘something [Etwas]’ or ‘objectivity [Gegenständlichkeit]’ *in general*, or as Husserl puts it at one point: ‘*originary* objectivity [Urgegenständlichkeit]’ (Husserl 1913: §10).

In this way, Smith’s account does contain at least an initial recognition of Husserl’s responsiveness to the ‘why’ questions above, insofar as Smith shows that Husserl takes the core essence of the original domain disclosed through the reduction (namely: the intentionality of consciousness) to be able to provide something like an explanatory ‘principle’ for the systematic unity of the elements analytically identified in this domain, and hence a *prima facie* ‘grounding’ both for why its elements are the way that they are, and why they are universally and necessarily correlated.

Even so, this helpful clarification simply invites us to ask the further question of why *intentionality itself* is the way that it is – not: how it is, in the sense

of what it is like, or what its aspects consist in; but: how has it come to be possible, in the sense of what are the causes or grounds for its being the way that it is and having the structure that it has. Here Smith's account bottoms out, with nothing concrete to say on Husserl's behalf. While this might be in keeping with Husserl's aforementioned eschewing of explanation, it is hard to see how philosophy can ultimately avoid addressing these sorts of questions.

When we look more closely, however, to Husserl's own writings during this period, we find clear evidence that *Husserl himself* fully recognizes that an eidetic-descriptive approach alone will leave us philosophically unsatisfied. Perhaps the most clearly articulated of questions along these lines that Husserl pursues is one that leads him toward an investigation into the way which consciousness itself, along with its intentionality, seems to be conditioned by (and dependent on) *time*. In *Ideas I* and then more fully in lectures during the period, Husserl identifies an 'absolute' flow of time-consciousness, whose form is 'phenomenological time' (rather than 'objective' or 'cosmic' time), which organizes 'mental happenings [Erlebnisse]' within 'one stream [Strom]' (cf. Husserl 1913: §81). Within both the (e.g., 'natural') forms of consciousness in which there is orientation to an object which *transcends* the moment of consciousness itself (substance, whether physical or psychical; essence), and also in those (e.g., 'bracketed') forms in which there is orientation toward an object which is instead *immanent* within consciousness (the immediately given sensory manifold, 'appearance'), Husserl thinks there is a more primitive temporal structuring which underwrites intentional orientedness *per se*, regardless of the kind of object. In fact, at times Husserl makes it seem as though there is a more originary form of time-consciousness itself, one which consists solely in realizing this merely temporal structure, being-conscious of 'the living now' in the midst of a flow of 'retentions' and 'protentions' of past and future.¹⁵ This flow is more primitive both in the sense that it provides that within which, and out of which, all the more ordinary concrete acts of meaning are 'constituted' or 'generated' – and also in the sense that it is not itself constituted in the same way, and perhaps not constituted *at all* (cf. Smith 2007: 202–8; Bernet et al. 1993). For this reason, the structure of intentionality itself, which (as we saw above) had initially been seen as a kind of 'absolute' (cf. again Husserl 1913: §49) – or at least as 'the ultimate [das Letzte]' as the stopping-point for

15 Compare *Ideas I* §78, 'each mental happening [Erlebnis] is in itself a flux of becoming, it is what it is in an originary production [ursprüngliche Erzeugung] of an unchangeable essence-type; a standing flux of retentions and protentions mediated through a self-flowing phase of originarity, in which the living now of the mental happening becomes conscious over and against its 'before' and 'after' (Husserl 1913: 149).

description left over after the bracketing involved in the reductions – now turns out *not* to be itself actually so ultimate after all. Though Husserl continues to want to claim that consciousness ‘is something that constitutes itself in a certain profound and wholly *sui generis* sense’, he also admits that consciousness is nevertheless something ‘that has its originary source [Urquelle] in an ultimate and truly absolute’ (Husserl 1913: §81, 163). Here we might see Husserl as gesturing toward something like the beginnings of a partial explanation of why or how consciousness has the structures of intentional orientation that it does – it does so, in part, *because of* the more originary temporal orientations that characterize the absolute flow.¹⁶

Yet while this absolute flow of phenomenological time here provides one sort of even more ‘absolute’ condition (‘source’) for structuring of intentionality itself, a closer look at *Ideas I* reveals still others besides. Most importantly for our purposes are the conditions Husserl recognizes for the factual realization (*facticity* [Faktizität]) of intentionality (vs. its essence), as well as the *teleological* orientation that characterizes this factual realization. As Husserl sees it, these aspects of consciousness are both things which give us ‘occasion for the question’ of ‘*ground* [Grund]’ – first, about the ground for the sheer fact of existence itself, and second, about the ground for the existence of ‘just this *ordering*’ (cf. Husserl 1913: §51, 96). The factual realization of consciousness must have conditions which lie outside of the essence of intentionality per se; otherwise a form of the ontological argument would be valid for intentionality itself (i.e., its essence alone would imply its existence). In Husserl’s words, ‘the rationality that actualizes what is factual [die Rationalität welche das Faktum verwirklicht] is not the sort that essence demands’ (Husserl 1913: §58, 110). Rather, Husserl thinks that the realization of consciousness exhibits ‘an amazing *teleology*’, a ‘rationality’ of a sort that is oriented by something *beyond* mere essence (Husserl 1913: §58, 110). Secondly, with respect to the specific ‘ordering’ that we find within such facticity, Husserl is even more explicit that it is entirely ‘according to reason [vernunftmäßig]’ that we would suppose there to be ‘a *theological* principle’, by which Husserl means something which, ‘for essential grounds’, would have to be treated as both *transcendent* of consciousness in a wholly different way than the world is (or would be if it exists), and also at the same time as something *absolute* yet in a still further sense than anything that is ‘immanent’ to consciousness might be said to be absolute (ibid.) – i.e., intentionality itself, or (as we have just seen) the originary temporal flow.

16 Whether this more originary time-consciousness itself already bears any marks of intentionality (e.g., contains proto- object- and ego-polarity) is a vexed question.

We can follow out these lines of thought further in several directions. First, even limiting ourselves to what happens within the immanent field of consciousness, we can pose the same sort of question of development or realization: the reference to a deeper temporal orientation 'below' intentionality does not itself explain why something over and above this merely temporal orientation – i.e., the full-blooded object- and ego-polarized intentional structure – comes into real existence in the first place, let alone why it is even so much as really possible for it to arise out of the flow. It would seem instead that there must be some sort of potentiality or capacity already within the flow, but not yet actualized by it, which pushes the flow to 'polarize' itself, as it were, *toward* objects, *for* subjects, *through* various ways of meaning – and so to become responsible for really constituting intentionality (object- and subject-relatedness) in the first place (though again not (necessarily) producing or generating the objects or subjects themselves). This is in addition to the question of what it is (what still further potentiality or capacity) that could possibly give rise to *the temporal flow itself*.

To be sure, all of these questions lie well afield of the method of 'pure description'. What is worth emphasizing at this point, then – not least to help head off a certain kind of objection – is that, far from taking these questions to lie beyond the scope of the emerging phenomenological philosophy, Husserl himself not only takes all of this line of questions to be perfectly in 'accord with reason', but also admits that it is the very 'transition to pure consciousness by the method of transcendental reduction' *itself* that 'leads necessarily to the question about the ground [Grund] for the now-emerging facticity of the corresponding constituting consciousness' (Husserl 1913: §58, 111). It is true that, at this (mid-)point in *Ideas* I, Husserl takes pains to exclude these sorts of transcendencies from the initial characterization of pure consciousness itself as the immediate field of research. Nevertheless, it is precisely these general demands of 'reason' concerning consciousness-transcendent grounds which take centerstage in the concluding Part of *Ideas* I. Tellingly, this Part is entitled 'Reason and Actuality [Vernunft und Wirklichkeit]'.

What is especially striking in these later sections is that Husserl now suggests that he finds that a teleological orientation *is* a part of the *essence*, and not just the factual realization, of consciousness. This feature is brought to light in Husserl's reflection on the specific modes of consciousness which 'judge about actuality, ask about it, surmise, doubt it, resolve the doubt and thereby complete the *'legitimations of reason* [Rechtsprechungen der Vernunft]" (Husserl 1913: §135, 281). Here and in the next sections (entitled: 'Phenomenology of Reason'), Husserl begins to demonstrate that this process of 'legitimating' itself is

internally connected with the very meaning of the category of ‘actuality’ itself, in effect now analyzing the latter as the correlate of what can be legitimated (via ‘seeing’ the requisite evidence) in a ‘rational consciousness [Vernunftbewusstsein]’. While this might seem simply to recapitulate Husserl’s earlier claims from the *Investigations* about the essential *correlation* of truth, being, and the possibility of judging with evidence (cf. Husserl 1913: §139, 290 for an explicit restatement of such correlation), he now emphasizes, in addition, the fact that it is the orientation *toward* the processes of legitimating which is what provides the principle for ‘fixing’ the ‘group of formations [Gestaltungen] of consciousness’ – namely, the principle for all of them “*teleologically*’ belonging-together’, into a ‘wholly determinate *system* of teleologically unified formations of consciousness’ (Husserl 1913: §145, 302–3).

That all of this can be found already in the *Ideas* puts at least some pressure on the foregoing characterization of Husserl’s method at the time *purely* in terms of a description of correlations (Thomasson) or a description plus initial explanation of such correlation via the basic structure of intentionality (Smith). That is to say, though it is surely true that Husserl thinks description is the place to start for a new, more rigorous or scientific philosophy, and though he surely thinks that the categories and correlations so described do find a kind of principle of (at least partial) intelligibility in the overarching intentionality of the consciousness under description, Husserl actually seems to think it is rationally demanded by the methodology of phenomenology itself that we raise the deeper questions about the further grounds for intentionality as well. And beyond asking after the grounding of intentionality provided by the absolute temporal flow, Husserl takes it to be a legitimate demand of reason as well to ask after the grounds of the realizing of time-consciousness itself – a question itself which points to a still further ‘absolute’, and which helps to further uncover the thought of a deeper rational teleology (viz. theology) at work, one which (essentially) orients the whole system of the realization of intentionality itself.

5 **Toward Absolute Idealism: The Life of Reason and of Spirit in and around the *Crisis***

While these late sections of *Ideas I* do not always garnish the most attention, it has been more widely acknowledged that, in his later work, Husserl became still more preoccupied with just these sorts of questions, especially questions of whether there might be a teleology (rationality) underlying the genesis of

intentionality itself in time and history.¹⁷ What is more, especially in his writings from the late 1920s and 1930s, Husserl begins to explore the way in which these overarching questions about teleology should in turn shape his earlier account of categoriality itself.¹⁸ As he puts it in the 1930 *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl now requires the 'radical clarification [Klärung]' not just of the 'sense' of the categories, but of their 'origin [Ursprung]' as well (Husserl 1930: §64, 180; my ital.). Here Husserl also affirms even more directly that, despite its methodological prioritizing of bracketing, reductions, and so on, phenomenology ultimately 'does not exclude *metaphysics as such*', and 'by no means professes to stop short of the 'highest and ultimate' questions', such as those concerning 'the in itself first being [das an sich erste Sein]', 'the problem of the 'sense' of history', and other 'ethico-religious problems' (Husserl 1930: §64, 182).

The consequences of this shift come especially to the fore in Husserl's 1929 *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and the 1936 *Crisis of the European Sciences*. In the *Logic*, Husserl now insists that the theory of the categories 'must overcome its phenomenological naivete', that it must not only uncover the various correlations among categories but must also 'make these structures [Gebilde] intelligible' by showing how they come to be as 'essentially *accomplishments* [Leistungen] of the correlative structures of the accomplishing *life* of cognition [Erkenntnisleben]' (my ital.), and 'thereby order them ... within [einordnen] the broader *concrete* interconnection [Zusammenhang] of transcendental subjectivity' (Husserl 1929: §100, 233). The reason Husserl gives is one that both echoes, but also goes beyond, the earlier remarks from *Ideas I* (Husserl 1929: §100, 232):

Intentionality is not something isolated, it can only be considered in the synthetic unity that connects every individual pulse of psychic life *teleologically* in the relation of unity to *objectivities*, or rather in the double polarization of the ego-pole and the object-pole.

It is hence in 'this teleological structure of intentional *life*, as universally-objectivating' (and 'subjectivating') that we find the reason for categoriality

17 For an early treatment of some of these themes in the later works, see Carr 1974.

18 It can also be seen in later-period unpublished writings – including Husserl's lectures on active and passive synthesis – in Husserl's increasing recognition of the importance of accounting for the role of drives, instincts, and motivations, in the elementary structure of life more generally, including the life of consciousness (cf. Smith 2003: 149f). (Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing attention to the lectures on synthesis as a key transitional work for the narrative I am developing here.)

per se and its intercorrelations – the reason, e.g., for ‘the belonging-together of object and judgment in the broadest sense’, the reason that ‘any already given object can be subordinated in freedom to categorial actions’, and the reason for meaning- and act-forms as well, such as that of predication: ‘even the predicative judgment achieves its universal meaning for psychical life (and as an index of this same teleology)’ (Husserl 1929: §100, 232; my ital.).

To achieve this ‘overcoming’ of naivete in logic and the doctrine of the categories more broadly, Husserl here again concludes his book with preliminary investigations into what he again calls ‘the phenomenology of reason’ (Husserl 1929: §101, 235f), in a further echo and deepening of themes from the conclusion to *Ideas I*. The emphasis now, however, is even more squarely on the overarching teleology provided by certain ‘goal-ideas [Zielideen]’, closely akin to Kant’s regulative ideas of reason, as what ultimately provides ‘the originary grounding [Ursprungsbegründung]’ of all sciences including logic and formal ontology and ‘gives them unity’ (Husserl 1929: §103, 240). The highest of such ideas, for Husserl, and the one that provides the ultimate orientation for what Husserl here himself calls ‘*absolute* life [absolutes Leben]’, is that of an intersubjectivity (community of egos) living in ‘the constant ethos [Gesinnung] of *self-responsibility* [Selbstverantwortung]’ (Husserl 1929: §105, 246; my ital.). This is *the* goal that ultimately unifies all categoriality, all intentionality, and indeed the temporalizing orientation itself, by giving an ultimate ‘sense’ to the history of the realization of consciousness.

This helps provide some relevant context for how best to understand Husserl’s more well-known genetic-historical analyses in the later 1936 *Crisis*, and its accompanying texts. Here as well Husserl aims to account for the emergence of categoriality in terms of the ‘accomplishments’ of ‘life-practice [Lebens-praxis]’ within the ‘life-world [Lebenswelt]’, which is again essentially teleologically oriented toward the rational goal of ‘the verification of being [Seinsbewahrung]’ (cf. Husserl 1936: §§34–36).¹⁹ It is now this ‘life’ which is said to provide ‘the universal pre-logical apriori’ from which ‘everything logical [alles Logische]’ receives ‘its rightful sense [rechtmäßige Sinn]’, as that ‘through which logic itself is first normatively oriented [erst zu normieren]’

19 For preliminary discussion of the *Crisis*-period accounts of the ‘origin’ of geometry, see the final chapter of the 2nd edition (cf. Smith 2013: Ch. 9). As noted above, this aspect of Husserl’s views was largely absent from the 1st edition; the new edition begins to rectify this, though it still does not integrate the later genetic discussions with the deeper methodological questions that (as we have seen) arise already at the end of *Ideas I* about the rationality of seeking still further absolutes, including those underlying the origin of intentionality in general.

(Husserl 1936: §36, 144). And as in the *Logic*, the ultimate goal toward which this life is oriented is said to be 'self-responsibility' – with its realization constituting what Husserl now characterizes as the life of 'apodicticity'.²⁰

It is this context which also provides the analytical framework for Husserl's more specific account of the genesis of particular categories out of more originary life-practices and pursuits. In the fragment on the origin of the categories of geometry from 1936, Husserl acknowledges, first, that, from the point of view of history, 'clearly geometry must have come to be out of a first acquiring [Erwerben], out of some first creative activities [schöpferischen Aktivitäten]', and more specifically, that its 'sense' itself must 'have an origin in an accomplishing [Leisten]' (Husserl 1936: 367). The meaning-formations (forms of intentionality) that are 'acquired' within these first geometrical activities are distinctive in that they initiate an 'originary establishing [Urstiftung]' that makes accessible a special kind of 'geometrical existence', which consists in a domain of 'ideal objectivities' (Husserl 1936: 368). The main problem Husserl identifies here is the following (Husserl 1936: 369):

How does geometrical ideality (just as that of all sciences) go from its originally person-internal [innerpersonalen] origin, in which it is a formation [Gebilde] in the space of consciousness of the soul of the first discoverer, to its ideal objectivity?

Husserl's initial answer is perhaps more familiar – namely, that this transition depends on such meaning-forms coming into '*language* [Sprache]' (acquiring a 'language-body'), insofar as language itself is an intermediary interconnecting 'humanity' (ibid.). By the end of this fragment, however, Husserl once again points to the need to introduce an even more overarching perspective to help account for the question of why these sorts of 'accomplishments' (by way of language) should have been motivated in the first place. This is the perspective of the 'essential content [Wesensbestand] of the universal-human, in which a *teleological reason* [teleologische Vernunft] running throughout the whole historicity announces itself' (Husserl 1936: 386; my ital.). It is only once we introduce a rational-teleological orientation at the core of universal humanity

20 '[H]uman existence [is] existence in the spatio-temporal pregiven world as the self-objectification of transcendental subjectivity and its being, its constituting life, [and has] in broader consequence the final self-understanding of humans as self-responsible for their own human being, their self-understanding as being in being-called to a life in apodicticity' (Husserl 1936: §73, 275). Incidentally, this is an ideal that Husserl here acknowledges is shared by 'the great systems of German Idealism' (cf. Husserl 1936: §26, 103).

that Husserl thinks we ‘indicate a proper [eigene] problematic which is related to the totality of history and what gives whole sense [Gesamtsinn] to its ultimate unity’ (ibid.). It is this problematic that provides ‘the *highest* question’ – namely, that of ‘a universal teleology of reason’ (ibid.; my ital.).

In this period, Husserl also clearly recognizes and openly admits that the introduction not just of teleology, but also of the idea of reason as exemplified in ‘the universal-human’, are both features that push his views much closer toward that of the later German Idealists (cf. Husserl 1936: §26, 103). This impression of increasing alignment is further encouraged by Husserl’s appeal in his 1935 Vienna lecture to the actions of ‘*spirit* [Geist]’ in world-history (as manifest, e.g., in the ‘spiritual shape [geistige Gestalt]’ of Europe) as the primary unit of analysis that will help explain the emergence (acquisition) of the various categorial meaning-forms peculiar to scientific consciousness. Here Husserl is even more explicit not only that every ‘spiritual shape’ of humanity contains within itself an ‘immanent *teleology*’, but also that each shape has its own ‘*history* [Geschichte]’ (Husserl 1935: 319; my ital.). Concerning the former, Husserl speaks of a ‘spiritual *telos*’ and an ‘inborn entelechy’ which ‘holds sway through [durchherrscht]’ the historical ‘change of shapes [Gestaltenwandel]’ and ‘accords to this change the sense of a development [Entwicklung] toward an ideal shape of life and of being [eine ideale Lebens- und Seinsgestalt] as an eternal pole’ (Husserl 1935: 320). Concerning its history, Husserl speaks of ‘a spiritual birthplace’, out of an ‘original phenomenon [Urphänomen]’ (Husserl 1935: 321).

While one might have hoped that Husserl would have something to say about the first, most originary birthplace of spirit in general, Husserl’s main focus in this essay instead is the specific spiritual shape that constitutes what he sees as the essence of ‘European humanity’ in particular. This is a shape whose history he sees as rooted in ‘Greek’ life and the emergence of the distinctively philosophical ‘attitude [Einstellung]’ – specifically, the emergence of ‘a universal critical attitude toward each and everything pre-given by tradition [traditionale Vorgegebenheit]’ (Husserl 1935: 335). Its *telos* arises out of this attitude, consisting in ‘the historical teleology of the infinite *goals of reason* [Vernunftziele]’ (Husserl 1935: 347; my ital.). This teleology has oriented European humanity toward engaging in the activities of ‘free critique and norm-giving’ in relation to ‘infinite tasks’, in the ‘creation of new, infinite ideals’ – and, more concretely, the creation of a ‘synthesis of nations’, or a ‘supra-nationality’, thoroughly guided by this new attitude (Husserl 1935: 336). Husserl also characterizes this *telos* in terms of the realization of an ‘absolute *logos*’, one which Husserl himself suggests would be ‘borne’ by nothing other than something on the order of *God* – though admittedly one who has been ‘idealized’ or ‘logicized [logifiziert]’, yet still as that which provides the ‘proper

and deepest form of grounding of true being [Art der Begründung wahren Seins]' (Husserl 1935: 335–6).²¹

At this point Husserl even more explicitly aligns his own quasi-theological conception of '*logos*', '*ratio*', and 'reason' that he sees animating European humanity, with the more radically idealistic conception of reason provided in German Idealism, rather than with the more familiar one championed during the 'period of Enlightenment' (Husserl 1935: 337). In fact, Husserl here suggests that it is *only* 'German Idealism emerging from Kant' that was able to successfully 'overcome the naivete' of the 'objectivism' and 'naturalism' in the conceptions of reason that Husserl sees as the unfortunate inheritance from the 'period of Enlightenment' (Husserl 1935: 339). The Enlightenment period fundamentally mistakes the sort of being that reason itself is, since it itself is *spirit*. Hence, Enlightenment accounts will always be dissatisfying to the *true* demands of reason. In words that more or less paraphrase Hegel's own in his *Encyclopedia* (Husserl 1935: 345–6; my ital.):

Only when spirit *returns back* [zurückkehrt] from the naive outer orientation to itself, and remains *with itself* [bei sich selbst] and purely with itself, can it *satisfy itself* [sich genügen].

Spirit and indeed only spirit is *in itself and for itself* [in sich selbst und für sich selbst], is *self-sufficient* [eigenständig], and in this self-sufficiency, and only in this, can it be treated truly rationally, truly and from the ground up scientifically.

Hence, the true conception of reason itself, as that which provides the deepest teleology of spirit, must be reimagined accordingly (Husserl 1935: 346; my ital.):

The '*ratio*' which is now in question is nothing other than the actually universal and actually radical making-*self*-intelligible [Selbstverständigung] of spirit, in the form of a universal, responsible [verantwortliche] science, in which a wholly new mode of scientificity is brought into view....

21 To this, compare Husserl's slightly more humanistic approach to 'absolute logos' in the fragment that Biemel appends as the concluding section (§73) to the *Crisis*, in which Husserl writes that, with his phenomenology, philosophy has achieved 'the deepest and most universal self-understanding of the *philosophizing ego* as the bearer of *absolute reason coming to itself*', where this 'ego' self-understands as being a part of an '*absolute intersubjectivity*' which is 'objectified in the *world* as universal humanity [Welt als Allmenschheit]' (Husserl 1936: §73, 275; my ital.).

And the self-sufficient self-intelligibility that results will allow us to finally appreciate the true relation of spirit and nature, and the ultimate ‘absoluteness’ of spirit itself, and the absoluteness of *its* temporality (historicality): ‘the universality of absolute spirit comprises [umspannt] all entities in an absolute historicity to which nature is subordinated as a formation of spirit [Geistesgebilde]’ (Husserl 1935: 347). The origin of the categorialization achieved in ordinary spirit (consciousness) – and in fact, all of its meaning forms, and indeed the very subject- and object-relatedness per se – is therefore all now explained by a ‘final causality’ – i.e., by reference to this final task of absolute spirit in history.²²

6 Keeping the Absolute ‘in Idea’: Late Husserl’s Fichteanism and the Lingering Dissatisfaction of Reason

We can now better appreciate just how far Husserl shifted beyond conceiving of the ultimate task of phenomenology as the description of the (static) essence of pure *consciousness*, its structures (aspects, categories), and their systematic internal correlation according to laws. What is more, we can now also better appreciate that the path that led Husserl in this direction – toward questions of genesis, origin, history, teleology, reason, metaphysics; in short, toward absolute *spirit* – is one whose motivating questions were already indicated in the conclusion of the *Ideas* I. All of this suggests that, for the last several decades of his working life, Husserl himself would never have been satisfied with the merely logical-conceptual correlationalist account of the categories that Thomasson has recently aligned him with, in light of the position charted expertly by Smith on the basis of Husserl’s earlier writings on logic, ontology, and philosophical methodology. For Husserl, the static-descriptive stage represents just that: a stage reason requires, but also requires that we push

22 Let me here simply note that there has been considerable debate about just how revisionary Husserl’s turn toward history during this later period means to be. Some readers have argued that even this later period does not mean to present anything like an empirical or factual causal explanation for consciousness in general, or for particular categories, via an appeal to any particular historical facts (cf. Bernet et al. 1993: 196f and Ch. 7 passim). For a perhaps even more austere, ‘transcendentalized’ interpretation of the history that Husserl means to include in the later writings, see Hopkins 2011: 187f and esp 197f. My own interpretation means to situate the sense of apriority at issue more within the context of the way that a goal functions as a (final) cause *prior* to its realization, rather than attempt to retain fidelity to the apriori as the domain of the eidetic-phenomenological, as it had been more frequently articulated in the earlier pure descriptive phenomenology.

beyond, toward a more dynamic-teleological world-historical understanding of the nature, origin, and purpose of categoriality, along with the whole field of intentionality in which it emerges.

What is also clear, though, is that however much closer to Hegelian idealism Husserl himself acknowledged that he moved in his later work, both in his choice of thematic treatments and even in his terminology, Husserl also means to resist the idea that he is advocating a full-scale return to absolute idealism itself. For despite all of this admitted convergence with the Idealists – including the shared (and deeply problematic) notes of triumphalism concerning the specifically European shape of spirit as what serves as the highest goal and purpose of ‘the universal-human’ as such – Husserl also claims explicitly during this period that it is actually only his *own* ‘intentional phenomenology’, *rather than* German Idealism, which should be accorded the merit of ‘having effected for the first time the systematic experience and science of spirit as spirit’ (Husserl 1935: 347). In Husserl’s view, the Idealists themselves were not able to achieve ‘the stage of higher reflexivity that is decisive for bringing about the new shape of philosophy and European humanity’ (Husserl 1935: 339) – though why they were not able to do so is not elaborated in any detail. It is also left unclear what exactly Husserl has in mind by ‘the new shape’ or reflexive stage that his own account will contribute, since the conceptions of reason and absolute spirit that Husserl seems to advocate here are expressed in terminology that more or less repeats (almost verbatim) various characterizations given by Hegel and others.²³

A more interesting question, however, may be whether Husserl *should* have been more sympathetic than he was to the other aspects of German Idealism. The Idealists themselves would have surely thought so, and would have certainly judged Husserl to stand at an irrational arms’ length from truly ‘absolute knowing’, in Husserl’s own sense of a fully rational philosophical self-explication and self-comprehension. Indeed, as we will see below, the points of departure that such criticisms would take up are all ones that build upon a conception of reason that Husserl would seem to share.

While no comprehensive comparative analysis can be hoped for, given the constraints of space, let me use this concluding section to simply highlight several of the specific points at which Husserl’s later account will be judged to be insufficiently ‘rational’ from the point of view of the absolute idealists. I will take the presentation of ‘philosophical science’ in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* as my

23 For a very brief further elaboration on some of the reasons for Husserl’s dissatisfaction with German Idealism, see Husserl 1936: §73, 271–72.

main point of reference, though I will also refer to other texts by Hegel and also from Schelling from his absolute idealist period.

The first – and in today’s climate of persisting embrace of naturalism, perhaps the most important – difference lies in Husserl’s seeming absence of concern (at least in his published work) for providing an analysis of what must be involved in the general transition from nature to spirit, of the specific sense in which spirit ‘presupposes’ nature, as Hegel puts it at the outset of his own *Philosophy of Spirit*. As we saw above, though he gestures at a kind of dependence of ordinary object-oriented consciousness on a more originary (‘absolute’) temporal flow in consciousness, Husserl does not take up the question of the origin or genesis of this temporal flow itself, or the possible *natural* conditions that must be in place for a temporal stream of the sort enabling human consciousness in particular to be possible (rather than ‘mere’ plant or animal orientedness).²⁴

The second, related, point concerns a lack in Husserl’s account of the constitution of nature itself as an intentional object for consciousness, according to various meaning-forms (and categories of objectivities), especially as it is spelled out, e.g., in *Ideas I*.²⁵ In Husserl’s picture, nature as object is ‘subordinated’ to spirit, as essentially a kind of ‘relative’ being (cf. Husserl 1913: §49), because it is itself a ‘spiritual formation’, as we saw him claiming above. In this respect, Husserl stands quite close to Fichte, at least as Hegel and Schelling understood him. Fichte sought to go beyond what he saw as Kant’s earlier eschewing of any explanation of the forms of subjectivity, including the categories, and also beyond Reinhold’s later, more direct anticipation of phenomenological correlationalism about forms of consciousness and categories, in order to provide an elaborate genetic account of how *consciousness* of nature is possible, on the basis of the derivation of the categories for understanding nature from certain primordial, oriented activities of ‘the I [Ich]’ (‘positing’, ‘oppositing’), which give rise to consciousness of ‘the not-I [nicht-Ich]’ and eventually nature itself.²⁶ Even so, Schelling and Hegel found that Fichte ultimately had very little to say about nature ‘*in itself*’, other than that it is (or belongs to) the

24 For further discussion of the prospects for a naturalizing of Husserlian phenomenology, compare Smith 2013: Ch. 9; see also Yoshimi 2015 and Suarez forthcoming.

25 There is also a relative lack of detail in Husserl’s account of nature itself as intentional correlate, at least in his published works, though it is clearly of keen interest, as he devotes several lecture courses to this topic, as well as foregrounding the constitution of the meaning-formations relating to nature in particular in the constitution-studies published as *Ideas II*.

26 For Reinhold’s anticipation of phenomenology, compare Beiser 1987: 228. For more on Fichte’s genetic deduction, see Bruno forthcoming.

'not-I' which is there, confronting consciousness, to be determined (cognitively and volitionally) by the I's activities.²⁷ Because of this lack, the later idealists judged that Fichte does not do enough to show how it could ever even be possible that spirit *could* 'come back to itself' in its confrontation with nature 'in itself'. Instead, Fichte leaves nature 'in itself' either (at best) as something whose reconciliation with the I is (hopefully) to be fulfilled at the end of an 'infinite task', or else leaves nature as perhaps ultimately wholly alien to spirit, as perhaps even an un-thing from the point of view of spirit, if nature itself turned out to be absolutely not-I. Schelling and Hegel's strategy, by contrast, is to show how the natural and life sciences are reaching agreement in their accounts of nature 'in itself' which show it already to be '*for itself*', in itself – i.e., to already have an orientation and proto-perspective 'in itself', even in forms which are 'lower' than (human) spirit itself. This can be seen e.g. in the scientific turn at the time from a merely mechanical physics toward a dynamics of electro-magnetism, and is also something manifest in the turn from the post-Cartesian mechanical physiology toward an 'animal magnetism' as well.

Returning to Husserl, there is reason to think that the judgment of the absolute idealists of his later genetic-historical perspective would be quite similar: though Husserl also gives many nuanced treatments of the kind of *consciousness* involved in, e.g., the natural and life *sciences*, he, too, does not provide a philosophical treatment of nature from its *own* point of view, i.e., a *Naturphilosophie* in the sense of Schelling.²⁸ In the terms of the critique given of Fichte by Schelling and Hegel, Husserl never undertakes to show that nature is, already in itself, an 'objective subject-object' (cf. Hegel 1801: 2:94). Instead, Husserl will seem to the absolute idealists to have only gotten as far as Fichte, in having provided an elaborate derivation of the form of the subject-object correlation *from the point of view of the subject* (the I), i.e., a 'subjective subject-object'. For though Husserl does not rest content with showing (in the early writings) that spirit (consciousness) has the structure of subject-object in its *internal* intentional orientation (ego-pole, object-pole), in the later writings he only gets as far as showing that the emergence of this structure is motivated and guided by a rational teleology which has the complete self-sufficiency of

27 In Schelling's words: 'It is as if Fichte perceived no distinctions at all in the external world. Nature for him disappears in the abstract concept of the non-I, which designates merely a limit, in the concept of the completely empty object, of which nothing can be perceived except that it is opposed to the subject....' (Schelling 1827: 10:90).

28 While this is true at least of Husserl's published work, an anonymous referee has noted the at least partial development of a philosophy of nature in Husserl's *Natur und Geist* lectures from the summer of 1927.

consciousness or spirit as its *goal* or *aim* or *hope*. Indeed, as we have already seen, Husserl describes this absoluteness to-be-achieved in the precisely Fichtean terms of an infinite ‘task [Aufgabe]’.²⁹ But this means that Husserl, too, leaves open the possibility that this task of absolutizing the I in relation to the not-I in fact cannot be realized, because he nowhere demonstrates that the not-I (nature) is ‘in itself’ not essentially alien to the I (spirit). And this in turn leaves room for a kind of deep skepticism about the possibility of reason achieving ultimate self-responsibility for itself.

Now, it might well be that there is *no* way to satisfactorily respond to the sort of skepticism that Schelling and Hegel see as still standing in the face of the Fichtean teleological version of rationalism, and so the only rational conclusion should be to leave the door open to this sort of skepticism, while perhaps finding ways of rationally coping with such uncertainty – perhaps by embracing a successor-version of Kant’s ‘rational faith [Vernunftglaube]’ in the complete realizability (‘making-actual [Verwirklichung]’) of reason itself, without ever claiming to achieve rational ‘knowledge [Wissen]’ of the absolute. The absolute idealists, however, think they can use the findings of the natural sciences to demonstrate that it is the very same reason – and indeed, by means of the very same forms (categories) – which is *already* at work in nature as in spirit, that ‘what is actual [das Wirkliche]’ in both the I and the non-I is *already* ‘rational [vernünftig]’, and vice versa, as Hegel’s famous ‘Doppelsatz’ from the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* puts it.³⁰

Moving us to the perspective from which this kind of truth could be comprehended – and from which the system of the truly absolute categories can be articulated – is one of the central ambitions of *Hegel’s* ‘phenomenology’,³¹ one which shows how reason can overcome the failure of earlier shapes of philosophical consciousness, embodied in Kant, Reinhold, Fichte, even Schelling. Importantly, from the point of view of the absolute comprehension provided at the end of *this* phenomenology, these categories will not be left merely divided into four regions which are then seen to stand in universal and necessary correlation with one another, nor will they be shown merely to contribute

29 Though he did not publish or even lecture much on Hegel, and still less on Schelling, Husserl did give a series of lectures on Fichte in 1917, which touch on Fichte’s doctrine of the I as it is explicated in the original 1794 *Grundlage* and the later ‘Introductions’ to Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* (cf. Husserl 1917). For further comparisons with Fichte concerning the role of teleology in Husserl’s lectures on Fichte, see Seeböhm 1985 and Hart 1995.

30 For a very helpful discussion of Hegel’s own often-neglected naturalism, see Pinkard 2011.

31 For a *begriffsgeschichtliche* analysis of Husserl’s take on previous uses of the term ‘phenomenology’ itself, compare Schuhmann 1984.

to the rational movement of consciousness oriented toward absolute self-responsibility; they will be shown instead not only to constitute this absolute self-responsibility itself, but to be already realized in the culminating philosophical consciousness itself, as the *achievement* of a genuinely radical 'making-self-intelligible', to use Husserl's own turn of phrase.³²

Once viewed from the proper perspective, we will be able to take a formal or logical perspective on the categories, characterizing them 'in idea' as the forms of the single underlying activity and life that is responsible for the creation of *both* nature *and* spirit, yet also prior to either one. This perspective yields the 'absolute idea' of reason itself, considered prior to either nature or spirit, in a perspective in which '*the opposition between subjective and objective (in its common meaning) falls away*' (*Encyclopädie Logik* §24 8:81), though it will be just these forms which are realized concretely in both what is subjective (spirit) and what is objective (nature), providing 'the foundation and the inner simple scaffold' for everything real (*Wissenschaft der Logik* 6:257). The resulting 'absolute idea' is what Hegel also infamously describes as 'the presentation of God in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit' (cf. *Wissenschaft der Logik* 5:44) – with the remainder of philosophy after the logic presenting the rational-teleological 'development' of reason itself from this 'essence' into its 'actualization' in world history (as is charted by the rest of Hegel's *Encyclopädie* after the *Logik*).

To be sure, these theologically inflected counter-claims concerning the possibility of a still yet more *rational* doctrine of the categories will admittedly sound grandiose, especially to those that see a virtue in the more 'neutral' correlationalist approach of the earlier Husserl, and (of course) especially in the absence of a more sustained elaboration of both the critique of such correlationalism and the positive positions by the Idealists themselves.³³

32 Compare Pippin 1989 for further discussion along these lines of the way in which, for Hegel, the *Phenomenology* is to lead to the *Logic* as Hegel's doctrine of the categories of the absolute self-satisfaction of reason.

33 In addition to these critiques from 'below' (the relation of nature to consciousness) and from 'above' (the relation of the categories to the absolute), it is worth noting several other forms of complaints that critics, often inspired by Hegel, have leveled against Husserl for his failure – especially in his publications from the earlier period – to provide an adequate analysis of the relations in the 'middle' (so to speak) of spirit itself. This is the level connecting the forms of individual solipsistic consciousness (what Hegel calls 'subjective' spirit) and the forms of collective intersubjective (Hegel: 'objective') spirit, in the form of 'an I that is We'. While it has emerged from recent publications of his later lectures that Husserl spent considerably more attention to the forms of intersubjectivity than one might have suspected (cf. Smith 2007: 225–33), even here the emphasis will seem unsatisfactory from the point of view of absolute idealism for several reasons. First,

Nevertheless, it is surely striking that, as we saw above, the path of Husserl's own development can be seen as retracing (even in his terminology) much of the lines of thought that ultimately lead Schelling and Hegel beyond Fichte – lines, importantly, which they, too, took to be lines set by *reason*, as it aims to become *completely* 'answerable' to itself, without excuse, remainder, or brackets.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Johannes Brandl, Samantha Matherne, David Woodruff Smith, and an anonymous referee for very helpful comments on an earlier draft. Thanks also to audiences at University of Richmond and Georgetown University for very useful feedback on presentations of earlier versions of these ideas. Thanks, finally, to the members of the California Phenomenology Circle, including Wayne Martin, Ron McIntyre, Martin Schwab, and Jeff Yoshimi, for providing such a welcoming and supportive group in which to develop phenomenological research – and a special additional thanks to David Woodruff Smith for being such a great interlocutor, mentor, and friend over all of these years.

because Husserl's analyses remain largely focused on the lower-level or simplest cases of intersubjectivity and their general forms (pairs, I-you, etc.), providing little to no treatment of the relation between these forms and 'higher' ones, such as are exemplified in the family, in corporations, in government, etc. (There are some initial suggestions, e.g., in *Ideas* 11; compare Stein 1917 and then Schütz 1932 for further early steps in this direction.) Second, even these lower-level analyses are largely focused on how the constitution of the shared objective experience *of nature* is possible, rather than on how the shared objective experience by spirit *of itself* is possible – whether in ethical or political forms (though cf. Smith 2007: Ch. 8 for some discussion of Husserl's forays into (meta-)ethics), or eventually in cultural forms in art and religion, with Husserl himself having nearly nothing to say about the other forms of what Hegel would call 'absolute spirit', besides science or philosophy, either as to the distinctive meaning and origin of these shapes of spirit, or as to their ultimate relation to philosophy and the 'infinite task' of self-responsibility that Husserl himself sets for absolute spirit to achieve. Third, and relatedly, there is very little re-integration into the account of intersubjectivity of those dialectical-teleological claims that Husserl himself eventually seems to embrace, that the 'truth' of these lower forms is only to be found in the higher ones, insofar as these put pressure on the sense in which the solipsistically egological sphere could have any claim to a radical independence, even when the scope is restricted to considerations within the sphere of spirit itself (let alone the aforementioned criticism concerning the dependence of spirit on nature floated above). Cf. Ricoeur 1977 for further discussion of Husserl and Hegel on intersubjectivity and the notion of objective spirit.

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