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Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and the project of science

Agnieszka WESOŁOWSKA*

ABSTRACT

The article presents Edmund Husserl's idea of transcendental phenomenology in the perspective of the project of science. This aspect of Husserl's writings was pointed out by, for example, Rudolf Bernet, Manfred Brelage, Iso Kern, Eduard Marbach, Eugen Fink, Ludwig Landgrebe, and Roman Ingarden. The main aim, realised in the article is to prove the main hypothesis claiming that transcendental phenomenology is closely connected with Husserl's conception of philosophy, the idea of philosophy as a science (eidetic and transcendental). The project of transcendental science and knowledge is also connected with Husserl's conception of transcendental reduction taken as a mode of revealing those constitutive achievements of consciousness which were covered in the natural attitude. In the paper, I focus on presenting the most important points (epistemological, methodological, and transcendental) connected with Husserl's evolution of phenomenology in the perspective of the project of science.

KEYWORDS

philosophy; consciousness; transcendental reduction; subjectivity; cognition

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of philosophy as a science is a permanent subject of Edmund Husserl's philosophizing. According to Rudolph Bernet, Husserl's philosophizing concentrates on the magnetic area of the notion of science (Bernet, Kern, & Marbach, 1989: 11). Phenomenology as a science on transcendental subjectivity has been established through criticism of the bases, importance and consequences of science practised in the natural attitude. Originally, Husserl's intention is justified by the question of the basis of mathematics and logic and then phenomenological criticism of science also includes the humanities and natural science and therefore, it is extended to the general theory of cognition. Such general theory of cognition, as a science on the source of all cognition, anticipates not only all other sciences but it also founds them in a methodological and theoretical way. The science on the source of all cognition finds its establishment in the philosophy referring to the idea of scientific viability and transcendental phenomenology is to accomplish this aspiration. In the following text, making only an outline of some aspects of Husserl's thought, we will try to show that the idea of phenomenology evolves in connection with considerations concerning science.

PHENOMENOLOGY AS A PROJECT

In accordance with Husserl's intention, presented in *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, phenomenology is to be a critical science, absolutely established, validated, universal and free from any superstitions. In his *Nachwort* in *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Husserl characterizes philosophy as an exact science:

Philosophy, according to its idea, is universal for me, and "exact" science in an extreme sense. This is a science derived from definitive bases and — which is the same — it is finally self-independent, where no ante-predicative obviousness (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) serves as not examined base of cognition (Husserl, 1971: 139).¹

The possibility of revealing universal unity of knowledge, the idea of all possible cognitions in general (Husserl, 1959: 196) appear along with the idea of phenomenology as a science. Phenomenology as an exact science, that is scientific philosophy, where all knowledge is established, should be based on systematic research and should aim at reducing results of philosophical investigation to a unity. This aspect of transcendentalism, which is underlined by

¹ Quotations, unless otherwise indicated, translated by author.

Manfred Brelage, is tightly connected with Husserl's understanding of philosophy as knowledge where the idea of universal science possibilities (Brelage, 1965: 120) appears to be a fundamental problem. According to this commentator, Husserl's phenomenology appears to be idealism which shares many assumptions proper to gnoseological idealism, and particularly the assumption that subjectivity is a universal base for any natural objectivity. Simultaneously, phenomenology cannot be reduced either to metaphysical idealism or psychological idealism (Brelage, 1965: 106). As opposed to metaphysical idealism, phenomenology does not deal with making an object but with constituting its sense and therefore, in consequence, phenomenology does not deal with transcendent world but with a presumed transcendent world (Brelage, 1965: 108). Unlike psychological idealism, consciousness is not a subject to natural apperception, it is not apprehended anthropologically, biologically, psychologically or historically because by virtue of reduction it is cleared of everything that grants reality to it (Brelage, 1965: 115–117).

The question of understanding transcendental basis of the sense is a particular difficulty encountered by such philosophy. Access to this source of justifiability of all judgments, to the area of direct experience is enabled by phenomenological reduction which consists in the change of attitude: transcendental consciousness is nothing else but empirical consciousness because the difference between empirical "me" and transcendental "me" is actually reduced to different ways of apperception of one and the same "me" (Brelage, 1965: 117). Phenomenology as a science is supposed to be a science including totality of reliable cognitions. Explicating such understanding of phenomenology, Husserl is known in the history of philosophy as a thinker who, within the range of his philosophical project, is trying to give philosophy its radically scientific character. In *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* Husserl starts a reversal towards transcendental phenomenology, which, as opposed to other sciences, is to realize the postulate of definitive justification of cognition and, as such, constitute a common source from which other sciences should start their notions, rules and methods. In contrast to positive sciences, phenomenology does not only disagree with any imposed superstitions but also — referring to Brelage — in an objective way, it does not consign transcendental life of consciousness in oblivion. Enabling explanation of the world in its actual existence by reducing it to transcendental subjectivity and taking into consideration metaphysical issues, it becomes a transcendental philosophy — a science which is realizing the ideal of fully justified knowledge.

It is worth emphasizing the fact that the project of phenomenology as a way of establishing philosophy is accompanied with a postulate of critical analysis of all experience and its gradual explanation and correction along with relativity of any obviousness. Co-occurrence of two tendencies in Husserl's philosophy,

authoritative and critical ones, and their mutual penetration causes distinction of two kinds of motives in phenomenology. These motives, completing each other, create together the project of phenomenology. In this context, Ernst Tugendhat makes a distinction of two motives in the thought of German philosopher: a dogmatic and critical one (Tugendhat, 1967: 194–196). A dogmatic motif has its source in Cartesian aspiration to reach an absolutely reliable knowledge. It is developed by Husserl in such texts as: *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* or *Cartesianische Meditationen*. A critical motif — though — described as the Kantian way or as the way through ontology, is realized by Husserl in *Formale und transzendente Logik*, *Erste Philosophie*, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, and particularly in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. In the last work, which can be called Kantian meditations, as Iso Kern refers to it (Kern, 1964: 50), the way through ontology is described as the way through *Lebenswelt* (“experienced world”).

According to Bruno Biemel, Husserl in *Philosophie der Arithmetik* (in the work published in 1887) discovers the attitude of basic importance to all philosophical and scientific projects (Biemel, 1959: 187). According to this commentator, describing numbers as formations of spiritual character, Husserl considered them as an act of spiritual activity, which included the first idea of constitution underlying active contribution of consciousness in defining the structure of cognitive subject, being the foundation of the whole later phenomenological project of philosophy. The very idea of phenomenology as a science already appears in *Logische Untersuchungen* and in *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*. However, it was only verbalized *explicite* in the first book of *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. For we cannot forget the fact that when *Logische Untersuchungen* was appearing, Husserl understands phenomenology as a descriptive project, while in *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, the work in which he shows the object, aims and method of phenomenology, he gives true and fair view on his own project of scientific philosophy. *Ideen...* constitute the first serious attempt of systematic presentation of phenomenology, its method, problems, and especially new discipline of research which is pure consciousness, comprising all sphere of broadly understood experience and its object correlatives.

At first, in the period of appearing of *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl presents his own project of science, being a result of comprehending phenomenology as — *ex nomine* — a descriptive project. In *Logische Untersuchungen*, the work which aims is a new justification of pure logic and theory of cognition, Husserl, characterizing the range of phenomenological research, writes about restriction only to descriptive analysis of experience as for their effective contents (Husserl, 1984: 28). According to his intention,

phenomenology as a science makes acts and their contents make the object. Husserl writes directly about it:

Instead of considering naively objects presumed in their sense, describing them, considering them hypothetically, drawing conclusions, etc., we should rather make a "reflection", that is, make objects out of these acts with their immanent contents of the sense (Husserl, 1984: 14).

While in *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl asks about the method enabling research of problems connected with the nature of logic and mathematics objects, in his *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* he shows phenomenology as the only way to reach any real knowledge, the way of overcoming spiritual misery of our times. Let us quote the following passage:

There is only one medicine — scientific critique — and additionally a radical one, a science starting building from the bottom, based on reliable foundations and going forward according to exact methods: a philosophical science which we defend here (Husserl, 1987: 57).

In this programme text phenomenology is presented as philosophy which finds the guarantee of validity of cognition in the absolute obviousness and constitutes exactly authoritative science. According to the founder of phenomenology, it has to realize the idea of philosophy as an exact science, the science which is absolutely justified and universal, as opposed to natural cognition and positive sciences (Husserl, 1959: 6).

As a result of Husserl's thought on the shape of philosophy, after he presented the idea of philosophy as an exact science in 1911, a new project of science is presented in 1913, the one that deals with research domain not revealed until then. As he developed his own ideas concerning philosophy as a science, recognizing insufficiency of purely descriptive phenomenology, Husserl introduces changes which become the reason for an animated discussion and critique from his disciples' part, changes which started a reversal towards transcendental phenomenology in the first book *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Considering insufficiencies which he notices in relation to his philosophical intention, Husserl states: if somebody really wants to understand a relation between the act, meaning and object, they have to leave descriptive phenomenology for transcendental phenomenology.

In *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* transcendental phenomenology is shown *in statu nascendi*, as a project of science based on methodological foundation, the science using its own method, culminating in systematic analysis of a new area of research, which is pure transcendental consciousness, including all sphere of broadly understood experience

and its object correlatives. In *Nachwort in Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* Husserl writes:

During long years of considerations I entered various, the same possible ways to be able to show such an absolutely transparent and captivating motivation which would insist on rising above natural positiveness of life and science, and would make indispensable transcendental change of attitude and phenomenological reduction. Therefore, they are ways which lead to beginning of seriously practised philosophy, which have to be considered in reflexive consciousness and which actually belong to this beginning if the beginning can be accomplished in the very “beginning” considering itself. Obviously, a necessary starting point of any of these ways is natural, naïve attitude which considers experienced world as an “obviously” (*Selbstverständlich*) imposed (because there were never questioned in its existence) being’s basis (*Seinsboden*) (Husserl, 1971: 148–149).

In *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* Husserl has an intention of accomplishing Cartesian hopes of shaping philosophy as a science, and it would have the value of universality and undoubtfulness. Characteristics of phenomenological principle of principles, presented in paragraph 24 of *Ideen...*, seem to be essential in this context. The founder of phenomenology argues that originally presenting eye witnessing should be allowed to become the source of all knowledge, the source which no authority could question (Husserl, 1976: 45). Just phenomenology has been entrusted the ideal of fully justified knowledge, the ideal which positive sciences were not able to accomplish. It is worth mentioning here that considerations of positive sciences included in *Ideen...* are continued by Husserl in later works, especially in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, the work in which he follows the way through the critique of positive sciences, the way through *Lebenswelt*.

The author of *Ideen...*, convinced about the need of revision of theoretical and scientific aspiration and analysis of basic assumptions and statements, assumed by positive sciences, treats his philosophical project as a revolution whose task is to make the critique of statements and methods of other sciences possible. His critical aspirations are accompanied with the conviction that while positive sciences, which solely concentrate on achievements without any reflection on epistemological and metaphysical assumptions, were not able to avoid scientific superstitions so the task of phenomenology, culminating in critical and non-dogmatic research, concentrated on what is actually given, is realization of the idea of fully justified knowledge. In already mentioned paragraph 24 of the first book of *Ideen...* Husserl considers the conviction that the possibility to deliver the bases of validated knowledge, the knowledge in a source sense, not anticipated by any speculations, in the shape of “the principle of principles of phenomenology”, proclaiming that the basis of validity of any statements is “source presenting eye witnessing”, described also as

obviousness or source experience. Principle of principles includes a conviction that source presenting eye witnessing constitutes the source of any knowledge, the source which could not be questioned by any authority, or even modern science. As opposed to empirical and positivist sciences, restricting the notion of experience to sensual experience, formulating the principle of phenomenology, Husserl adopts diversity of possible forms of source self-presentations of the object and, therefore, he avoids naturalistic limitation of experience. Reaching adequate obviousness remains a regulative idea, as an infinite process. Critical analysis of experience data is tightly related to a systematic description, constituting the base of reliable philosophical reflection.

PHENOMENOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

In the light of considerations, it is beyond doubt that the idea of philosophy as a science, developed by Husserl as an idea of pure phenomenology, constitutes only a draft of transcendental phenomenology's project, the philosophy which starting with its origin and referring to the idea of mind, culminating in considerations dealing with combination of the area of consciousness and the world, constitutes a critical and scientific reflection on cognition and knowledge in general, and on philosophy itself. In *Erste Philosophie* Husserl shows that phenomenology aspires to be the first philosophy and as such is to constitute the foundation of any knowledge. To reach this, phenomenologist has to criticize what seems to be obvious in the natural world and take "unnatural" stand. According to the founder of phenomenology, philosophy is to be cognition validated only in itself, and the basis of all sciences and the totality of culture (Husserl, 1959: 3–6). As Rudolf Bohem aptly notes:

According to Husserl philosophy should be cognition from general highest and final self-consciousness, understanding itself, its own responsibility considering cognitive achievements as its own, or, what is the same, it should be the science which absolutely justifies itself and after all a universal science (Husserl, 1959: 3).

Adopting transcendental position, Husserl is aiming at explaining a specific role of phenomenology and admits that revealing transcendental subjectivity means penetrating into the structures, owing to which all other sciences can be explained.

In *Formale und transzendente Logik* Husserl writes that justifying all sciences ensures them all unity as branches of constitution function, (grown) on the grounds of one (the only one) transcendental subjectivity. In other words, there is only one philosophy, one real and authentic science, and authentic sciences (as) separate (fields of knowledge) are just its non-independent element (Husserl, 1974: 278–279).

We should underline though that Husserl means a philosophical and scientific research project, including a totality of reliable cognitions, in which both all sciences as well as sections of philosophy would find justification. As the author of *Ideen...* proves, phenomenology finally includes and contains everything that at the beginning was taken into brackets for methodological reasons. Fully developed phenomenology aspires to the name of first philosophy, in which all ontological notions and categories are explained in their correlation with constituting subjectivity. Showing possibility of transcendental change of attitude and entering new level of research, Husserl realizes the idea of philosophy which, within the frames of critical reflection including correlation of consciousness and the world — the reflection which concerns independent area of being — rises above natural attitude. Transcendental *epoché* overruling the importance of general thesis of natural attitude, would therefore consist in suspending this natural fact and bringing it in a genetic sense to its absolute beginning — authoritative transcendental and non-relative basis constituting the source of the meaning, that is to the consciousness which fulfils the very thesis of natural attitude. The basis, owing to which, and at the same time in which the cognition can be established for ever, is transcendental consciousness. Reduction leads to revealing an absolute field of being, constituting the source of all other fields, that is to the field of pure consciousness. Carrying out *epoché* enables de-absolutization of any realities, both real and ideal ones, and their relativity towards transcendental subjectivity, being the source of sense of all being (Wesołowska, 2008: 65). It is worth mentioning the comment of Eugen Fink who states that phenomenology is not about opposing the world to transcendental subjectivity but about becoming of the world in the constitution of transcendental subjectivity (Fink, 1966: 139). In other words, it is about the sense that transcendental subjectivity gives to the world.

In the first book of *Ideen...* Husserl shows that, as opposed to phenomenology, positive sciences are practised in natural and dogmatic attitude and they do not care about any epistemological or sceptical problems: penetrated by theoretical naiveties, they are stuck in the naivety of natural attitude and their obviousness remains unexplained.

Any natural obviousness — obviousness of all objective sciences (not excluding formal logic and mathematics) belongs to the area of “intelligibilities by themselves” which actually have non-intelligibility as their background (Husserl, 1962: 192).

Not succumbing to self-intelligibilities, the author of *Ideen...* turns against dogmatism of positive sciences. The cognition of the very transcendental phenomenology is being critically considered as well. With the help of transcendental reduction he releases cognitive consciousness from naivety of natural attitude, the naivety generating superstitions concealing transcendental

character of consciousness. At the same time, phenomenology appears to be the first philosophy, the science from which all reliable sciences have to derive the source of their basic notions, principles and methods, becoming the branches of only one phenomenological philosophy. Concluding, according to the author of *Ideen...* there exists only one philosophy — a universal, real and authentic science and sciences as separate fields of knowledge are its non-independent element.

Convinced that philosophy designed by him has priority over all other sciences, he shows phenomenology — as we have already mentioned — as science concerning research area which has not been explored and revealed yet. Systematic research of the area which is not directly available, that is transcendental subjectivity, requires methodical means, enabling access and analysis of this specific, autonomous and absolute sphere of being. At the same time phenomenology is not only placed over any cognition but it also has a different object in relation to all other sciences (both sciences on facts and all other eidetic sciences). Husserl underlines that he means transcendental knowledge, concerning autonomous field of being — transcendental consciousness and its consciousness life. This question is accurately presented in the context of overall philosophical thought by Manfred Brelage, claiming that transcendental phenomenology is nothing else but universal and systematic revealing of consciousness transcendental (Brelage, 1965: 107).

The procedure leading to revealing transcendental *residuum* and enabling the change of attitude (transition from natural consciousness to transcendental consciousness understood as primary constituting source) is — as it has been already mentioned — phenomenological reduction. This procedure, known also under the name of *epoché*, which consists in suspending natural realistic inclination, which is common sense (*naïve*) accepting of natural attitude, is aiming at neutralizing some dogmatic attitude towards reality, that is concentrating closer and directly on what is phenomenologically given — on the objects as they manifest themselves. To be more specific, *epoché* implies the change of attitude towards reality, and it does not exclude it. In order to make scientific character of phenomenological research more clear, we should emphasize that the field of phenomenological research does not concern private thoughts but ways of manifestation which are intersubjectively available. As opposed to private introspection, cognitive exploration of subjectivity, that is research of transcendental subjectivity in its constitutive correlation with the world, is supposed to be intersubjectively important, and therefore corrected by any phenomenologically oriented object. For, if we aim at discovering what the object really is, in its essence, then we go beyond what is only phenomenal and we show what is recognized in the aspect of conditions of manifestation's possibilities.

The change of attitude enables extension of phenomenological field of

research. It leads to revealing a transcendental basis because permanently functioning transcendental subjectivity, concealed until now, suddenly reveals itself as a subjective condition of possibility of any manifestation. In the first book of *Ideen...*, the same as it occurred in *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl is not interested in actual and empirical nature of subjectivity but in clear, essential structure, purified from accidental context. Presenting complexity of correlation between subjectivity and the world, the author of *Ideen...* underlines autonomy and exceptional way of giving subjectivity and, therefore, he makes this aspect of a subject more clear, which, as a rule, escapes from naturalistic and empirical research. Owing to the thought experiment, referring to Descartes, Husserl shows the priority of subjectivity and overcomes naturalistic understanding of consciousness, the consciousness which from now on reveals itself as a pure autonomous region of the being and experience, as a condition of possibilities of any manifestation.

One can notice that, starting from *Ideen...*, the combination of transcendentalism and egology appears to be a characteristic feature of Husserl's considerations concerning science. Husserl's idea of transcendental philosophy is connected with transcendental and reductive method, with constant work, with cognition of subjectivity. Jan M. Broekmann claims directly that cognition of subjectivity constitutes the method of transcendental philosophy in Husserl's approach (Broekman, 1963: 101). After performing phenomenological reflection pure "me" is becoming the subject of eidetic and phenomenological research, phenomenological research which is not subject to any further exclusion. The world appears to be something which finds importance and justification in cognitive activity of the subject. According to Husserl, it is not enough to have a vision of the world, worldview or philosophy; subjective, functional justification for them, available only in transcendental attitude, is important as well. Every truth, proper knowledge is a result of cognition's activity. From phenomenological point of view, the cognition has to be transcendently justified. Philosophy, as opposed to other sciences, constitutes an absolutely justified science, which does not accept any superstitions, pretends to a final justification of knowledge and any research. In the polemics with positivism, Husserl says that philosophical standpoint, taken without self-cognitive and self-critical and just transcendental verification and justification, without rigorous tracing of its genesis, without subjective sources, is just a groundlessly accepted superstition and its objective truth might only be accidental. Transcendental phenomenology projected by Husserl, is supposed to be a science without assumptions, deprived of superstitions and liberating it from these superstitions.

Initially, Cartesian way, developed by Husserl, is the only way to transcendental phenomenology. Later, however, it appears that it is one of possible ways. In *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente*

Phänomenologie Husserl, continuing the idea of positive sciences critique — already presented in *Ideen...* — shows the value of transcendental phenomenology — scientific and beyond history — within the frames of Kantian way (by *Lebenswelt*, by common, initially given world of natural attitude, interpreted in this work as a common sphere of personalist attitude). By realizing the idea of return to transcendental subjectivity in the horizon of project that is beyond history, phenomenology is supposed to eliminate superstitions and overcoming general crisis of science and humanity. It has to be emphasized here that the will of shaping philosophy in the sense of science was a superior intention of Husserl's tendencies: Cartesian (dogmatic) and Kantian (critical) ones.

Coexistence of two motives decides on exceptional specificity of philosophical and scientific project: its internal dynamics, historical vitality, progressive character and self-criticism, which happens inside the very phenomenology. If discovery of an absolute domain of source pure presenting consciousness decides on radical and scientific character of phenomenological philosophy, then constant complexity, analysis of obviousness decide on problematic and open character of phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology is supposed to constitute realization of philosophical idea as a science without assumptions, anti-dogmatic, open, problematic and self-critical. Husserl does not only keep distance to axiomatic and deductive ideal of the method but also does not consider the results of his transcendental analysis a decisive and ultimate thing. It constitutes the exploration of the field which is absolutely impassable. However, the analysis of this field can still be improved, extended and corrected. In *Formale und transzendente Logik* Husserl explains that an attempt to establish a science which will be exclusively based on absolute reliable truths is an attempt accompanied with incomprehension of the very nature of science. According to the founder of phenomenology, full and ultimate truth about transcendental character remains a regulative idea.

CONCLUSION

With reference to historical, philosophical and scientific predilections of Husserl, it is worth stating that phenomenological philosophy is a transcendental project, combining two motives inside: phenomenological motif and transcendental one. Husserl, showing that his reduction is of transcendental and phenomenological character, assumes that he combines the transcendental and phenomenological motives within his project of scientific philosophy.

According to Józef Czarkowski Husserl rejects the thesis on opposition of phenomenological and transcendental establishing of cognition, assuming that

only together can they allow to obtain final establishment and simultaneously transform philosophy into a science (Czarkowski, 1994: 29). Transcendental phenomenology is supposed to be a universal science, absolutely justified, revealing the possibility of liberation from naturalistic dogmatism and exposing a primary, constitutive function of subjectivity, the function in the process of cognition.

In conclusion of presented considerations, it has to be clearly stated that development of transcendental phenomenology undergoes in the light of considerations on the idea of philosophy as a science. Husserl never abandoned the idea of philosophy as a science but he was only searching for the new ways of its realization. Transcendental philosophy projected in *Ideen...*, which has been established on the way of positive sciences' critique is a science on transcendental subjectivity, the source and unity of any justification. Transcendental phenomenology, realizing the idea of philosophy as a science, aspires to be philosophy including all possible cognitions in general.

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