

## Chapter 2

### LEVINAS' CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

#### 1 Introduction

Although the apparent interest of Husserl's Logical Investigations involved the foundation of logic, it soon became clear, according to Levinas, that the method Husserl began working out in this text was "the soul of the phenomenological movement."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Levinas' first major publication, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, can be read as a sustained (and critical) reflection on Husserl's phenomenological method, a method which was developed to distinguish philosophical investigation as a fundamental "science" from that of the natural sciences. It was Levinas' contention that Husserl's understanding of phenomenological intuition was at the heart of the whole question of method and that the question of method necessarily led to ontological considerations. "Our problem here," Levinas says in the Introduction to The Theory of Intuition, "is to study intuitionism in Husserl's phenomenology, so we cannot separate in our presentation the theory of intuition as a philosophical method from what may be called Husserl's ontology."<sup>2</sup>

In Levinas' view, intuition, i.e., immediate, sensible contact with determinate being, is an essential element of the phenomenological method Husserl was developing.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, an adequate understanding of

intuition cannot be separated from the general question of Husserl's methodology. And because the method of a science presupposes a certain ontology, Husserl's new method also involved, according to Levinas, under Heidegger's influence, a new understanding of being and truth as well.<sup>4</sup> But as the result of his bias toward theory and his claim of the absoluteness of consciousness as the necessary prerequisite of apodicticity, Husserl, according to Levinas, failed to recognize the ontological implications of the method he was developing, implications which Levinas believed Heidegger had taken up in a more fundamental manner.<sup>5</sup> Keep in mind that at the time Levinas was working on The Theory of Intuition in Freiburg (1928-29), Husserl had already resigned from his teaching post, although he continued giving seminars. But Heidegger had been catapulted to notoriety after the publication of Being and Time in 1927. Husserl was the old master, but Heidegger was the rising star.

Since we are privileged to be able to look at this situation from a position distanced by fifty years of Husserl scholarship, including Levinas' later reflections on Husserl's phenomenology, we would like to propose our own modest thesis in regard to it. It is certainly not anything new that Levinas has been influenced by Husserl's work, although the exact manner of this influence is still in need of some clarification, as we will see. But perhaps it was also the case that Husserl's understanding and development of his method, beyond the period of Ideas, was also influenced by Levinas and Heidegger. Levinas himself admits that Husserl's philosophy was a living, growing process of development and not merely a set of static propositions to be proven or disproven. It would be in keeping with the spirit of Husserl's thought, therefore, which Husserl himself characterized as a constant "beginning anew," to be affected by critical challenges to it, to be responsive to them and to

grow from them.<sup>6</sup> We will utilize this possible reciprocity of influence as one of the guiding threads of our investigation of Levinas' complex relation with Husserl which will occupy us in the present as well as the following chapter.

Specifically, here is how we intend to proceed in this chapter. We want to ascertain whether there is a transformation and development in Husserl's thought from his earlier to his later work concerning the issues which Levinas raises in a critical manner in The Theory of Intuition, namely, Husserl's "intellectualism," his primacy of theory, his understanding of the reduction — particularly in regard to the notions of intentionality, representation, and sensation — and his position on the nature of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In order to accomplish this we will begin by looking at Husserl's methodological formulations in the Logical Investigations and then try to see how these changed in Ideas and what motivated this change. But it is not so much Husserl's work that we are interested in here as it is Levinas' response to Husserl. Thus, having established the general movement of Husserl's early methodological formulations, it will be necessary to look more closely at Levinas' critical response to this.

In general, the primary goal of our analysis of Levinas' response to Husserl's phenomenological methodology, which will be of crucial importance for the whole of our study, as will become clear throughout the course of this work, will be to determine how Levinas' initial contact with Husserl's phenomenology established the basic methodological and substantive perspective that would ultimately lead to, in Levinas' own philosophy, the notion of responsibility and its priority. Our position in this regard is that Levinas' ethical philosophy cannot be adequately understood without a firm grasp of the manner in which its roots are

deeply embedded in the fertile soil of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy. And nowhere do these roots plunge more deeply than in regard to the question of the phenomenological method, with all its ancillary tendrils of thought.

## 2 Husserl's Early Methodological Formulations

### 2.1 The Logical Investigations

In The Theory of Intuition Levinas points out that Husserl's philosophy is a sustained attack against the empiricism and skepticism of thinkers such as Locke, Berkeley and Hume on the one hand, and, on the other, the psychologistic philosophy of thinkers such as Wundt, Erdmann and Sigwart and the rationalistic, neo-Kantianism of the Marbourg school (Hermann Cohen, Natorp, etc.,). What the latter two groups have in common, according to Levinas, is the approach to philosophy understood as "theory of knowledge" based on methodological influences from the natural sciences.<sup>7</sup> Taking for granted the substantial objectivity of what is perceived, it was thought, from the perspective of naturalism and empiricism, to be merely a matter of time until the truth about the totality of 'that which is' would become known to the rational comprehension of the investigating scientist.<sup>8</sup> In this positivistic scheme of things, philosophy was retained but limited to its use in clarifying logical and epistemological issues. Speculative or metaphysical philosophy was placed under suspicion and considered to be more or less superfluous.<sup>9</sup> It was in the context of this atmosphere that Husserl began developing his phenomenological philosophy. From its inception, it arose

as a thoroughgoing critique of the positivistic judgement of philosophy's superfluity and lack of rigor. Given this context, his single-minded attempt to rigorously demonstrate the manner in which philosophy is a universal or pure science is what perhaps left him open to the critical attack of Heidegger, Levinas, and others. We will attempt to determine to what extent this attack on Husserl's position is justified.<sup>10</sup>

In the Logical Investigations Husserl discusses the essential principle of his phenomenological inquiry into the ground of universal knowledge as a kind of thinking which involves a "freedom from presuppositions."<sup>11</sup> He amplifies this principle of presuppositionlessness by saying that it is more of a "shedding of light" than factual explanation: "Its aim is not to explain knowledge in the psychological or psychophysical sense as a factual occurrence in objective nature, but to shed light on the idea of knowledge in its constitutive elements and laws."<sup>12</sup> Once the constitutive dimension of the mind is recognized, 'adequate' or 'fulfilled' (Fulle) knowledge can no longer be deduced from principles or objects which somehow exist in-themselves, independent of the mind in a Kantian sense.<sup>13</sup> A new freedom is now required to detach phenomenological consciousness from the prejudice of objectivity and the unquestioned bias of naive empiricism.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 "Philosophy as Rigorous Science"

Husserl takes this theme up again in his article "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" in the context of discussing "historicism," the prejudice that assumes that history can be made into an object that can be grasped independently of the historical subject who is nevertheless always already involved in that process, always already immersed in the ongoingness of history.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as subjective self-consciousness is itself historical

("historicity"), the objectification of the historical in an empirical sense ("historicism") will always fail to arrive at the true, or fully "valid" essence of any historical object.<sup>16</sup> Rather, what is needed, Husserl claims, is an "entering vitally into an historically reconstructed spiritual formation" through "philosophical intuition" and "the phenomenological grasp of essences."<sup>17</sup> It was exactly this that Levinas set out to describe and criticize in The Theory of Intuition.

For Husserl, the intuition of essences is not merely a methodological or theoretical problem as this is understood by the natural sciences. Rather, it is a response to a "spiritual need" which "afflicts us," Husserl says, a need that "leaves no point of our lives untouched."<sup>18</sup> In order to overcome these difficulties which are virtually ignored by empiricism, naturalism, and historicism, a radically new "science" is needed. Far from avoiding the historical content of the philosophical tradition, this radically new procedure must "penetrate the soul" of the tradition's words and theories. History, as language, thus becomes a region of phenomenological analysis. The meaning of history demands an intentional analysis itself, an analysis of the essence of history (its "fundamental structures") as the constituted correlate (what will become the 'noema' in Ideas I) of historical self-consciousness. A universal, 'scientific' philosophy is thus needed, according to this early methodological formulation by Husserl, which "for the sake of time" does not "sacrifice eternity."<sup>19</sup>

It is precisely through the epokhe, Husserl believed, that this "scientific clarity" could be achieved. Like history itself, however, the epokhe cannot be grasped as a scientific object. It is a process of self-transformation, "rising from below" Husserl says, a "living" methodology which is non-conceptualizable as such.<sup>20</sup> One cannot merely

think one's way through the "universal" epokhe. The epokhe, as a continual approach to the origin of its own being, as we will see, must always be a doing again, always a beginning anew. "Philosophy," Husserl says, "is essentially a science of true beginning."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps that is why Husserl himself returned to the epokhe again and again; not because of any inherent defect or failure of his earlier attempts to formulate it, or because he did not yet have the procedure worked out right, but because this beginning again, as Merleau-Ponty also understood, is itself the essence of philosophy.<sup>22</sup> That is undoubtedly why Ideas, Cartesian Meditations, and The Crisis are all subtitled 'Introductions' to phenomenological philosophy. It was exactly this methodological possibility of beginning anew that attracted Husserl's many students, including Emmanuel Levinas.

### 3 The Cartesian Reduction

#### 3.1 Absolute Consciousness

But let us move from these incipient forms of the epokhe in Husserl's early works to the so-called 'Cartesian' reduction of Ideas I.<sup>23</sup> Husserl's actual performance of the Cartesian reduction in Ideas I is laid out in a series of stages in the first four chapters of the text. This development has a rather unexpected culmination at the end of Section 46 where Husserl declares without reservation that his inquiry has already "reached its climax" insofar as he has now achieved the possibility of that knowledge which is the foundation of the reduction and which, consequently, will allow for "the detachability in principle of the natural world from the

domain of consciousness...." This knowledge is the work of "the region of pure consciousness" in the ego's immanent reflection upon experience (Erlebnis).<sup>24</sup> Husserl seems well-aware of the fact that the establishment of this "region" of pure consciousness (and hence the very possibility of the reduction) is wholly dependent upon the fundamental distinction between experienced things or objects in the common sense, i.e., "transcendent" experience, and the essentially different type of experience (Erlebnis) given through immanent reflection, i.e., "transcendental" experience. The first — although predelineated in a manner which is apparently complete — is necessarily perspectival, spatial, always inadequate to its object and, at best, only able to be adumbrated or sketched out in a partial and contingent way in Abschattungen. Erlebnisse, however, transcendental or immanent experiences, are not spatial objects, not "presented" at all in an empirical sense. They have no sides as such. They can be perceived "immanently," through intuition, as Levinas shows in detail in The Theory of Intuition, and only immanently. They are, therefore, "given," in Husserl's view, indubitably and absolutely as a constant and absolute presence of consciousness to itself.<sup>25</sup> We will see later that this claim of the absoluteness of immanent consciousness will become an important point of contention for Levinas and one of the critical seeds out of which his ethical philosophy will bloom.

Now even though an Erlebnis is given absolutely in its "presentation," nevertheless, "in respect to its essence" it is a part of the whole stream of mental life and consequently can never be grasped in "its full unity" or completeness. But this "incompleteness" of the essence of an immanent experience in regard to the whole stream of inner experiences, is essentially different, Husserl contends, from the



incompleteness of the sensible perception of a physical thing, which is always transcendent and restricted, therefore, not only in terms of possible future perceptions, but also in terms of the perspectival limitations of the perception of the thing within any given perceptual moment or "now-point" (Urimpression). To see all the sides of an empirical object, we must walk around it. There is some similarity between these incompletenesses, Husserl allows, but a radical, essential difference in their transcendent and immanent potential to be grasped. In any "now" of immanent experience, there is a full, adequate and absolute apprehension of the essence of that now, even if what is apprehended turns out to be an illusion or hallucination. Not so with transcendent, spatial objects which can be perceived only one side at a time.

With this analysis, Husserl has attempted to establish the absoluteness of consciousness, a move which is crucial to the effectiveness of the reduction. In this he goes beyond the Cartesian cogito which rests in the logical deduction that since I think, I must necessarily exist. But for Husserl, it is not merely a matter of having the knowledge that consciousness exists, but of the absolute existence of that consciousness itself, prior to any reflection: "I apprehend an absolute Self whose existence (Dasein) is, in principle, undeniable...."<sup>26</sup> Thus, as Levinas points out, Husserl has reversed the Cartesian terms since it is the full adequation or absoluteness of consciousness that makes adequate reflection on consciousness possible. But it is exactly Husserl's description of the absoluteness of consciousness, leading to the idea of a self-sufficient Ego and the "primacy of theory" in Levinas' view, that is vigorously criticized by Levinas in The Theory of Intuition, as we will see, where Levinas calls it "one of the most serious gaps in (Husserl's) theory."<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2 Constitution

In Section 97 of Ideas I, Husserl completes the description of the Cartesian epokhe when he accounts for the nature of perception itself insofar as this is not a process of seeing an object "out there," independent of consciousness -- as it is thought to be by the subject in the "natural attitude." Here we see the idealist leaning of Husserl's transcendental philosophy. Husserl argues for the constitutive function of consciousness through his well-known example of the hallucination. Clearly, it is possible that I may perceive an object which, through further perceptions, turns out to be not what I thought it was at all. What I think I see may, at the very next moment, turn out to have been an illusion or an hallucination -- a point which Husserl establishes in Section 88 of Ideas I where he first introduces the concept of the "noema," the objective 'pole' of the intentional act, "the perceived as such."<sup>28</sup> And yet, before I realized that my perception was an illusion, I did, indeed, have an experience of it as what I intended or believed it to be. Consequently, Husserl concludes, perceptual experiences cannot be dependent upon some static, self-same object purportedly "out there" in space, independent of consciousness. Nevertheless, I did have a perception of something, and my perception "as such," as an intentional object, a noema, did have a definite reality. But if it was not the result of light bouncing off some empirical object, as sensual realists would have it, or the result of the action of a thing-in-itself, as Kant would have it, or the excitation of the medium, as Aristotle believed, then how did this perception come about and what is its nature? Husserl's claim in this text, which marks an advancement over the alledged Platonic realism of the Logical Investigations, as Levinas points out,<sup>29</sup> is that

the perception was constituted through an intentional process, a Sinnggebung, which in-formed "hyletic" material with a certain "gift of meaning" -- the process of intentionality which we will look at more closely below.<sup>30</sup>

To summarize the ground we have covered thus far, the Cartesian epokhe and the "constitutive" dimension of consciousness, intentionality, worked out in Ideas I, establishes for Husserl "an absolute sphere of materials and noetic forms" which constitute noemata as Erlebnisse that can be grasped and described in their absolute purity by the phenomenologist as the real truth of the perceptual process, an "ultimate source" that Husserl believes offers "the only conceivable solution of the deepest problems of knowledge," because the intentional analysis of the real components of perception provide, in Husserl's view, "objectively valid knowledge."<sup>31</sup> In other words, given the claim of the phenomenological reduction to secure an absolute vantage point, the absoluteness of consciousness, together with the claim of the constitutive nature of intentionality -- the representational function of the transcendental ego -- the world of transcendent objects "out there" is now understood to be wholly phenomenal, or "irreal" (which is not to say they do not exist) and the underlying truth or real (reelle) process of perception can thus be grasped through intentional analysis and pure phenomenological description, steps of Husserl's method which follow upon the prior suspension of the thesis of the natural world.<sup>32</sup> It is at this point in Husserl's development of his method that Levinas comes on the scene.

## 4 Levinas' Critique of the Cartesian Reduction

### 4.1 Epistemology or Ontology?

It is Levinas' general contention that whereas Husserl develops a methodology which overcomes the naturalistic presuppositions of philosophy understood as "theory of knowledge," he nevertheless was unable to fully extricate himself from its influence.<sup>33</sup> The Logical Investigations and Ideas "explicitly present a theory of knowledge," Levinas asserts, "and, if only as an unconscious tribute to the prevalent attitude of the time, Husserl turns this into a central preoccupation." Misled by the very spirit of the times against which he was reacting, Husserl, in Levinas' view, was unable to intuit the deeper intentions of his own thought and thus did not adequately recognize that "in the guise of epistemology" he was actually pursuing "interests that are essentially ontological," the implications of which were pursued more directly by Heidegger.<sup>34</sup>

Let us point out immediately at this point that Levinas' criticism, seems to us to be stronger than is necessary here, particularly following upon his own presentation of Husserl's theory of intuition. In the same passage from which the above citations were taken, for example, Levinas cites several excerpts from the second volume of the Logical Investigations where Husserl is pointing out the problems inherent in the notion that knowledge transcends itself in the apprehension of natural objects. And then Levinas asks: "Is it just a question of understanding how the laws of thought and the real course of things manifest a rigorous correspondence?"<sup>35</sup> But it has been the purpose, or one of the purposes of Levinas' presentation of the notion of intuition to show that precisely what Husserl has done by virtue of this idea is to debunk the classical correspondence theory of truth and to replace it with an alternative,

phenomenological theory. The central tenet of the naturalistic approach to knowledge, the scientific approach, is that truth equals an adequation between thought and being. However, says Levinas, "we believe that this idea of 'adequation' is the source of all the difficulties and problems."<sup>36</sup> But is the notion of adequation in Husserl's philosophy the same as that of the substantialist notion underlying the correspondence theory of truth? To answer this and to get the proper perspective of Levinas' critique, we must look more closely at Husserl's understanding of intentionality.

#### 4.2 The Theory of Intentionality

Intentionality, from the phenomenological perspective, as we have already indicated, is the idea that all consciousness is directed toward an object,<sup>37</sup> and that all Erlebnisse, immanent experiences, are always conscious.<sup>38</sup> It may seem, at first, that the notion of intentionality "appears to be concerning itself with what is obvious," Husserl says, that "every consciousness is consciousness of something." But insofar as intentionality raises the whole question of understanding the being of that which is presented to consciousness, grasping the "clear-cut separation between the real (reeller) portions of one's whole experience which belong to the experiencing itself, and those which belong to the noema," is of fundamental importance for phenomenology, "is indeed quite decisive for its proper grounding."<sup>39</sup>

The theory of intentionality is exactly what overcomes the old problem of understanding the relation between subject and object, how it is that a separate subject can grasp and absorb a distinct object, the central focus of the theory of knowledge.<sup>40</sup> And, in so doing, it goes to the very heart of Husserl's new understanding of the subject. It is not

as if a subject first exists and then has experience. Rather "intentionality is what makes up the very subjectivity of subjects."<sup>41</sup> The subject is a subject, that is to say, conscious, insofar as the subject constitutes noemata through intentional noeses. Therefore, the objective reality or existence of the world is not the question for Husserl. It is not that the world is thought to be merely phenomenal in a skeptical or idealist sense, but, through the epokhe, the whole question is put out of play.<sup>42</sup> This was a key point on which Husserl was often misunderstood.<sup>43</sup> What remains over when the whole world is bracketed by the epokhe, i.e., when all the theses concerning the substantial existence of the world are put out of play, is the pure being of consciousness, of the subject, which then can become itself "the field of a new science — the science of Phenomenology."<sup>44</sup> Now Levinas' problem here is that he thinks Husserl saw the possibility for this but never adequately pushed ahead and carried it out. Husserl established the theory but he never actually undertook the full practice of it.<sup>45</sup> It was Heidegger, in Levinas' view at this time, who actually undertook, in an exciting and innovative way, the practice of phenomenology in his existential analyses contained in Being and Time.

Nevertheless, it was Husserl who worked out the masterplan for the phenomenological program, the keystone of which was the phenomenological reduction. But the heart of the reduction is the theory of intentionality and constitution in which it is intuition that actually puts us in contact with or makes present "'in flesh and bones'," "in person," as noema, the experienced object.<sup>46</sup> Thus, truth is no longer understood as the correspondence between thought and external reality but, rather, the correspondence between reflection and intuition.<sup>47</sup> "Husserl was looking for the primary phenomenon of truth and reason, and he found it in intuition, here understood as an intentionality which reaches being."<sup>48</sup>

Thus, it is perhaps an overstatement on Levinas' part to assert that Husserl's "central preoccupation" was the theory of knowledge. In establishing a new ground for the possibility of knowledge against the empiricism, rationalism, and psychologism of his day, it was necessary for Husserl to thoroughly investigate the underlying presuppositions of these theories in order to fully work out his own. One must achieve a more general view of a theory before criticizing the initial steps toward it. Furthermore, exactly what Husserl means by "knowledge," since he clearly does not mean what the natural sciences mean by this, will have to be looked at more closely.

#### 4.3 Husserl's 'Intellectualism'

In general, the negative or critical aspect of Levinas' response to Husserl in The Theory of Intuition has two parts. The first part focuses on the primacy of consciousness, theoretical reflection, and representational knowledge, all of which are intertwined with the problem of the absoluteness of consciousness.<sup>49</sup> Levinas asks: "Is our main attitude toward reality that of theoretical contemplation?" And he answers himself with another rhetorical question which once again points out Heidegger's influence on this early text: "Is not the world presented in its very being as a center of action, as a field of activity or care — to speak the language of Martin Heidegger?"<sup>50</sup> We might note in passing that the opinion exposed in this rhetorical question will be retracted, or at least modified, by Levinas in his later, and more heated disputes with Heidegger.

The second part of Levinas' critique focuses on Husserl's failure to deal adequately with the question of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, a failure that is due again to the primacy accorded to

reflection in Husserl's Cartesian version of the epokhe.<sup>51</sup> In his discussion of the intentionality of consciousness in Husserl's thought, Levinas asserts that "in Ideen the ego remains an empty form, impossible to determine," although this criticism is softened by the suggestion that forthcoming works by Husserl will consider "the self in all its concrete aspects...." We shall see that Husserl does begin to consider these "concrete aspects" of the subject in The Crisis.<sup>52</sup>

But the core of both of these problems in Husserl's early work — the primacy of consciousness and the failure to account for intersubjectivity — in Levinas' view, is that Husserl's understanding of intuition and the role it plays in the approach to truth through the reduction is "tainted" by what Levinas characterizes as Husserl's "intellectualism."<sup>53</sup> Although it is by intuition that we come into contact with the object, in imagination, perception, and memory, every object of an act of intuition is nevertheless grasped as existing through a representation which posits the object as existing and by which we say we know it exists.<sup>54</sup> Regardless of the specific character of the intuition — feeling, value, will, desire, etc., — they are all thought to exist by virtue of what Husserl calls a "doxic act," a positing of the intentional object as existing.<sup>55</sup> Now, for Levinas, this "doxic thesis" further reveals Husserl's unflinching commitment to the primacy of theory and representational knowledge, his intellectualist bias:

It is because each act of consciousness includes a doxic thesis that the objects of these acts ... exist. Husserl's assertion here demonstrates that the notion of existence remains for him tightly bound to the notion of theory, to the notion of knowledge, despite all the elements in his system which seem to lead us to a richer notion of existence than <sup>56</sup> mere presence of an object to contemplative consciousness.

The fact that Husserl claims that there is an act of representation or objectification that accompanies all intentionality, a doxic positing,



seems to Levinas not only to assert the primacy of theoretical consciousness but also to dogmatically disparage affective and axiological being: "Let us also note incidentally," Levinas says, "the dogmatism involved in juxtaposing, without justification, the theoretical, practical, and affective life, following a classification inherited from traditional anthropology and psychology."<sup>57</sup> What this means for Levinas is that Husserl's phenomenological reduction, despite the possibilities that are inherent in it, remains a mere intellectual exercise, different from the Cartesian doubt, perhaps, but not unlike it in that it is employed as a formal procedure for intuiting essences and is not exploited by Husserl to get at the deepest meanings of the concrete life of the subject.

In Levinas' view, already at this early point in his career, a view which will later become an important part of his own philosophical thought, the practice of phenomenology is understood to require sustained effort. It is not an intellectual machination, not something that can be accomplished in the blink of an eye, "as if shot out of a pistol," as Hegel put it.<sup>58</sup> The understanding for the necessity of the reduction is not the actual accomplishment of it, as Levinas suspects Husserl believes in Ideas. This merely abstract and empty theoretical accomplishment involves a disconnection from the lived world: "For Husserl, philosophical intuition is a reflection on life considered in all its concrete fullness and wealth," Levinas asserts, "a life which is considered but no longer lived." Thus, in Husserl's phenomenology, Levinas concludes,

reflection upon life is divorced from life itself, and one cannot see its ties with the destiny and the metaphysical essence of man. The natural attitude is not purely contemplative; the world is not purely an object of scientific investigation. Yet it seems that man suddenly accomplishes the phenomenological reduction by a purely theoretical act of reflection on life. Husserl offers no explanation for this change of attitude and does not even consider it a problem. Husserl does not raise the metaphysical problem of the situation of

the Homo philosophus.<sup>59</sup>

In short, it is Levinas' position that Husserl does not consider radically enough the ontological ramifications of his own method.

In Levinas' analysis of the reduction which follows this critique of Husserl's priority of theoretical thought, it is quite clear to us, however, that Levinas was limited by his sources to Husserl's Cartesian reduction.<sup>60</sup> He sees, nevertheless, how it is that the epokhe is of crucial importance to phenomenological investigation in that it produces access to transcendental consciousness: "it is not a psychological but a transcendental consciousness which is revealed to us in the phenomenological reduction."<sup>61</sup> Thus, the epokhe is not to be understood as a temporary condition like the Cartesian doubt, but, on the contrary, "the reduction has an absolute value for Husserl" because it wants "to return to absolute being or life, the source of all being."<sup>62</sup>

The purpose of the reduction is to reveal concrete life as it is, as it appears to reflective consciousness, to show us our genuine self, even if in Husserl's handling it never quite makes it to this point. He was so intent on establishing the foundations for the absolute and universal dimension of consciousness, contra the positivists, that he perhaps lost sight of "inner intentionality," the actual constituting of hylectic data, as Levinas says, "the meanderings of phenomena" in all their manifold and concrete forms, which Levinas believed that only Heidegger dared to face deliberately.<sup>63</sup> There seems to be a confusion on Husserl's part, according to Levinas, revealed in the abstractness of the reduction, concerning his understanding of the relation between consciousness and the world. In Levinas' view, influenced by Heidegger, consciousness, understood as transcendental intentionality, cannot be thought without simultaneously thinking the world. However, in many texts, Levinas claims, Husserl suggests that "he does not think that the

idea of pure immanence is contradictory and hence that consciousness could exist without the world," a point that Heidegger would also contest in Being and Time. It may be, Levinas concludes, this "indecision" and "obscurity" on Husserl's part that has led to the idea of the reduction as a mere abstraction, a bit of intellectual gymnastics like Descartes' doubt.<sup>64</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

Thus, although Levinas is moved by the possibilities for doing philosophy opened up by Husserl's reduction, possibilities which lie on the hither side of the natural attitude, he does not think that Husserl has gone far enough methodologically since these possibilities are presented "to a purely contemplative and theoretical sight which considers life but is distinct from it."<sup>65</sup> Besides being abstract and theoretical, the thesis of the absoluteness of consciousness also leads to the problem of adequately understanding intersubjectivity since it indicates, as we have already pointed out, an ego that is self-sufficient and monadic. "The works of Husserl published so far make only very brief mentions of an intersubjective reduction," Levinas says, although he adds that "this intersubjective reduction and all the problems that arise from it have much preoccupied Husserl," a fact supported by certain "unpublished works" that Levinas heard about but which he could not use prior to their publication.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps Husserl had been discussing with his students his plans for The Crisis, which he apparently began writing shortly after the publication of Levinas' Theory of Intuition.<sup>67</sup> In the following chapter we

will turn to The Crisis to see what alterations Husserl may have made in his general theory that take into account Levinas' critique.

- 
1. ThI, p. xxxi / p. 11.
  2. ThI, p. xxxii / pp. 12-13; emphasis added.
  3. ThI, p. 65 / p. 101.
  4. ThI, p. xxxii / p. 12.
  5. ThI, p. 130 / p. 187.
  6. C, III, A, 43, p. 154.
  7. ThI, p. xxxv / pp. 16-17.
  8. ThI, p. 9 / p. 30.
  9. ThI, pp. xxxiv-xxxv / pp. 16-17.
  10. Concerning this issue, see my paper "Husserl's epokhe as Method and Truth," Auslegung 14 (Sum 1988): 211-223.
  11. Edmund Husserl, Logical Investigations, 2 vols., trans. J.N. Findlay (Halle, 1900; New York: Humanities Press, 1970), II, 7, pp. 263-64; hereafter 'LI'.
  12. LI, II, 7, p. 265.
  13. LI, II, 76; cf. Levinas, ThI, pp. 69-72.
  14. Emmanuel Levinas, "L'oeuvre d'Edmond Husserl," in DEHH, p. 49; see also, n. 4.
  15. Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" in Phenomenology and the Crises of Philosophy, trans. Quentin Lauer (1911; New York: Harper and Row, 1965); hereafter 'PRS'.
  16. PRS, p. 128.
  17. PRS, p. 147.
  18. PRS, p. 140.
  19. PRS, p. 141.
  20. PRS, p. 147.
  21. PRS, p. 146.
  22. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (1962; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.xiv.
  23. 'So-called' because "it is thought of as being attained merely by engrossing oneself in the Cartesian epokhe ... while purifying it of Descartes' prejudices...." C, III, A, 43, p. 155.

24. Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, vol. I, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (1913; New York: Collier Books, 1962); I, 46, pp. 131-32; hereafter 'Ids'.
25. ThI, pp. 29-30 / p. 56.
26. Ids, 46, p. 130; and 45, p. 129.
27. ThI, p. 29 / p. 55.
28. Ids, 88, p. 238.
29. ThI, pp. 97-99 / 143-146.
30. Ids, 97, p. 262.
31. Ids, 97, p. 263.
32. ThI, pp. 34-35 / pp. 62-63.
33. ThI, p. xxxv / p. 17.
34. ThI, p. 124 / p. 178.
35. Ibid.
36. ThI, p. 84 / p. 127.
37. ThI, p. 37 / 65; p. 40 / 69.
38. Ids, 36, p. 108.
39. Ids, 96, pp. 257-258.
40. ThI, pp. 41-42 / pp. 70-71.
41. Ibid.
42. Ids, 33, pp. 101-103.
43. As Husserl points out in the Preface to the English translation of Ideas I, pp. 10-13.
44. Ids, 31, p. 102.
45. ThI, p. 142 / 203.
46. ThI, p. 70 / p. 108; p. 74 / p. 113.
47. ThI, pp. 83-84 / pp. 126-127.
48. ThI, p. 89 / p. 135.
49. ThI, p. 62 / p. 99; p. 94 / p. 141; p. 128 / p. 184; p. 155 / p. 219.

50. ThI, p. 119 / p. 174.
51. ThI, pp. 150-151 / pp. 214-215.
52. ThI, pp. 50-51 / p. 83.
53. ThI, p. 94 / p. 141.
54. ThI, p. 69 / p. 106.
55. Ids, 117, pp. 303-303.
56. ThI, p. 134 / p. 192.
57. Ibid.
58. G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Baille (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 89.
59. ThI, p. 142 / p. 203.
60. ThI, pp. 146-47 / pp. 209-210.
61. ThI, p. 148 / p. 211.
62. ThI, p. 149 / p. 213.
63. ThI, p. 155 / p. 218; p. 154 / p. 218.
64. ThI, p. 150 / p. 214.
65. ThI, p. 149 / p. 213.
66. ThI, p. 151 / p. 215.
67. C, Trans. Intro., p. xvi.