

Phenomenology and ontology in the thought of Edmund Husserl

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I examine Husserlian phenomenology and its relations with a possible ontology that the great German philosopher cultivated as a project, an undeclared ontology. Husserl's expression of the "ultimately and truly absolute" as a "primeval source" is not explained by a declared ontology and the concept of the "continuum" is in the same situation.

Claiming that the roots of all ontologies seem to belong in phenomenology, Husserl appears to proclaim the uselessness of developing any ontology. The analysis of the possible development of the Husserlian concepts of "absolute" and "continuum" shows that it would have led Husserl either to an ontology or to the overcoming and dismantling of the phenomenology, because the Husserlian phenomenology and the ontology are actually incompatible. Perhaps that is exactly what he wanted to avoid.

The guiding thread of the text is that Husserlian phenomenology is not fully realized as an authentic philosophy without a declared ontology or a clear statement about the relations between phenomenology and ontology.

Keywords: *"absolute", continuum, time, phenomenology, ontology, transcendental "Absolute", "absolute" Being, God, consciousness, "ultimately and truly absolute", sich bekunden, real world.*

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I. The “ultimately and truly absolute” and the “transcendental interpretation of all ontologies”

The analysis of the term “absolute”, as it appears in different places of Husserl’s writings, requires detailed research because this term has many significations, each of these fulfils a specific function in the architecture of his philosophical system, and at least one of these would have led the author to an ontological solution¹. Yet, surprisingly, Husserl develops a contradictory attitude towards ontology: he cultivates it, either as a project or as an undeclared ontology, or he rejects it in the name of its possible reduction to phenomenology, as I shall show in the following pages.

In his work *Ideen I*, Husserl makes an important distinction between the *transcendental “Absolute”*, which we have laid bare through the reductions is in truth not ultimate² and the “ultimately and truly absolute”³.

It should be noted that after establishing the distinction between the *transcendental “Absolute”*, on the one hand, and the absolute as *primeval source*, the “ultimately and truly absolute”, on the other hand, Husserl does not clarify this ontological problem, after all. This concept of the “ultimately and truly absolute” was supposed to be properly defined and analyzed but it is at least regrettable that the author does not do so. In one of the phrases systematically eluded by those who have analyzed his work over time, and in which Husserl establishes the aforementioned distinction, phrase belonging to his work *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Husserl argues as follows:

The transcendental “Absolute” which we have laid bare through the reductions is in truth not ultimate; it is something which in a certain profound and wholly unique sense constitutes itself, and has its primeval source in what is ultimately and truly absolute (*Ideas*, p. 165-166).⁴

¹ I consider that the term “absolute” in Husserl’s work is “a term with a constellation of notions”, to use an expression of Gheorghe Enescu from his well-known *Dictionary of logic* (Gheorghe Enescu, *Dicționar de logică*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1985, p. 255). It is therefore an error to seek or claim to identify a single concept of “absolute” in Husserl’s work.

² Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 165-166.

³ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 166.

⁴ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 165-166.

The term “absolute” is put in quotation marks at the beginning of this phrase, precisely to show that the *transcendental absolute* does not have an ultimate ontological character but has its origin in an “ultimately and truly absolute”. Now, this “ultimately and truly absolute” should be able to explain the “*transcendental absolute*” and the givenness of subjectivity as such. Husserl points us to the primordial ontological source, but he does not give us the strictly necessary details later on.

The researcher of Husserl's work should avoid identifying *the ultimately and truly absolute* referred to by the German author with the traditional concept of God. In this sense Husserl offers numerous hints in *Ideen I* and in his other writings, and we have serious testimonies confirming this perspective. Dorion Cairns tells us that:

The term God is used occasionally by Husserl in private conversation to mean the community of *transcendental egos* which “creates” a world, but this is for Husserl a “private opinion”. (*Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, 17/8/31)⁵

Returning to the analysis of the Husserlian texts, we see that the concept of “God the Subject of absolutely perfect knowledge, and therefore, also of every possible adequate perception” is presented as absurd.⁶ In other places in the work cited above, God is thought as a being who does not possess omnipotence in Cartesian sense, i.e. for Husserl the power and freedom of God could not change mathematical values and relations⁷, precisely in order to remove this concept. If “the immanence of God in the absolute Consciousness cannot be grasped as immanence in the sense of Being as experience (*Erlebnis*) (which would be no less absurd)”⁸, “the transcendence of God” must instead be “suspended”⁹. If he had admitted the existence of God, Husserl should have had to specify what role the Supreme Being plays in the ontological “scenario” he proposes and, first of all, to specify what he means by this term. The concept of absolute in Husserl’s writings is an open concept, i.e. a concept to which the definition is not finished and the search for it is deliberately not concluded. Such a concept suggests a phenomenological

⁵ Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink 17/8/31*, p. 14, Ed. Martinus Nijhoff / The Hague/ 1976.

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 81.

⁷ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 83.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 99.

⁹ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 112.

search without end, not an ontological indeterminacy in principle, but only a way of thinking that follows its own path, marking to certain landmarks. The absolute means continuum, it generates the “transcendental absolute”. Husserl thus thinks *the ultimate and true absolute* in order not to abandon the phenomenological method.

In *Ideen III*, Husserl insistently analyzes the possibility of an ontology. But here is very relevant, what he calls “the inclusion of ontologies in phenomenology”; he states here that, “pure phenomenology seemed to contain within itself all ontologies [...] the roots of all ontologies are their basic concepts and its axioms”¹⁰, which leads naturally to the futility of elaborating any ontology for his philosophy, or to the secondary place of any ontology in relation to phenomenology (as a rigorous “scientific” activity, as Husserl expresses himself elsewhere, for phenomenology is, he believes, “*strenge Wissenschaft*”¹¹ but in its own sense).

Moreover, Husserl states that “all ontologies become subject to reduction”¹² and, taking up the philosopher's idea, previously cited, that “the roots of all ontologies are their basic concepts and axioms”¹³ (talking about pure phenomenology) and that “these (roots) seem to belong in phenomenology”¹⁴, we would have expected the author to clarify this important spiritual property, which he neither does nor dwells on it. The mere fact that these concepts and axioms, “can be reinterpreted into certain eidetic interconnections of pure lived-processes”¹⁵ is not able to fully clarify their situation. A solution presented by Husserl is also not such as to clarify the situation of ontology in general or of its legitimate removal or, scientifically speaking, of any ontology at all: “it is imperative to carry out the distinction between *science* of transcendental consciousness *in general* and the *Intuitive eidetic doctrine* of this consciousness”¹⁶.

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences. Third Book. Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Ed. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980, p. 66.

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2009.

¹² Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences. Third Book. Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Ed. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980, p. 65.

¹³ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

¹⁴ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

¹⁵ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

¹⁶ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

The Husserlian solution, as we shall see below, is not to be pursued along the direction of achieving an ontology in the proper sense of the term, even if the author postulates “an ultimately and truly absolute” In *Ideen III* he proposes only “the transcendental interpretations of all ontologies”¹⁷ and the understanding of any “ontological theorem” is grasped as an “index” for “quite definite connections of transcendental consciousness”¹⁸ just as “every empirical truth, every proposition of the experimental sciences of every sort [...] becomes an index for transcendental interconnections; that, therefore, a manner of research must be possible, which makes the total realm of factual consciousness, the total stock of absolute monads with their factual make-up of lived processes, the object of scientific consideration”¹⁹. This subject of scientific research involves the interpretation of factual sciences by means of the monads that constitute the interconnections of consciousness.

Husserl's conclusion is disarming: “Everything that the sciences of the *onta* [...] offer us [...] resolves itself into something of a phenomenological”²⁰ and phenomenology is presented as “the great organon of transcendental cognition in general”²¹. Husserl should have had to explain in the fullest possible way in what sense phenomenology is a discipline that could be described in this way. He could have developed a broad theory in this sense but he did not. To speak in passing and without the necessary precision about phenomenology in this sense is a fact that can only be justified, perhaps, by the time that the author no longer had to fully realize his philosophical project.

Phenomenology, the author assures us, is “the science of “origins”, of the “mothers” of all cognition”²², taking on a metaphor of Goethe's from the tragedy “Faust” (a remarkable poetic-philosophical theme in the German writer's work), but from the Husserlian perspective, an undeclared ontology *seems* to take shape, which the philosopher intends to overcome at any moment for a higher consideration, a kind of ontology that is above what is usually accepted as ontology²³.

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

¹⁸ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

¹⁹ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66.

²⁰ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 66-67.

²¹ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 67.

²² Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 69.

²³ Perhaps Husserl invokes only an intuition of an inexpressible philosophical vision.

II. The “absolute being” and the “transcendence revealed in consciousness”

The problem of the absolute is in fact restricted by Husserl to “the realm of transcendental consciousness [...] as [...] a realm of absolute being”²⁴, “*absolutes Sein*”, and does not go beyond this limit. As the philosopher wrote: “my consciousness is absolute being and any other consciousness is absolute being”²⁵. Developed extensively, the question of the absolute would have led Husserl either to an ontology or to the overcoming and dissolution of phenomenology, and perhaps this was precisely what he wished to avoid²⁶.

Another inadmissible vagueness in the approach to “absolute” Being (Husserl puts the term in quotation marks) occurs when in *Ideen I*, in § 76 transcendental consciousness is considered “the original category of Being generally [...] in which all other regions of Being have their root”²⁷, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the “transcendent” Being (Husserl also puts this term in quotation marks) “which is “*revealed*” itself (sich [...] “*bekundendes*”) in consciousness”²⁸ (the author also puts this term between quotation marks, further complicating his exposition with these quotation marks that seem to reduce these essential terms for understanding his philosophical system to the masks of metaphors for a deeper discourse than the explicit one): transcendence has its origin in transcendental consciousness, but then how can it “reveal itself” there? In the absence of any ontologically binding clarification, we have here a contradiction, an admission of the absurd, and the invocation of the method of phenomenological reduction as the only proof in this respect it is not such as to remove the inconveniences mentioned above. The term *bekunden* appearing in the Husserlian texts of *Ideen I* as *sich [...] bekunden*, therefore in a reflexive sense, not impersonal, but as an entity manifesting itself, can be translated as to *reveal itself*

²⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 146.

²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phanomenologie der Intersubjectivitat. Erster Teil 1905-1920*, Ed. Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 6.

²⁶ In the same vein, Dan Zahavi (*Husserl and the “absolute”*, p. 73) polemically cites Dillon's view that *Husserl would have destroyed his own transcendental idealism, with its latent solipsism, if he had rigorously developed the implications of the notion of the “life-world” in his work Krisis.*

²⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 146.

²⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, p. 159.

(Christian Ferencz-Flatz)²⁹ or *to manifest itself*³⁰. Listing some contexts in which the term appears in *Ideen I* is necessary for this analysis. First of all, in § 76 of *Ideen I* Being is both, “Sein als Bewußtsein” (being understood as consciousness) and, “*Sein als sich im Bewußtsein “bekundendes”, “transzendentes” Sein*”³¹ (being understood as “transcendence”, which “reveals itself” in consciousness). Husserl puts the terms “bekundendes” and “transzendentes” between inverted commas in the original German text just as Einstein used to put the term “time” between inverted commas when explaining the theory of relativity³².

Then, in § 81 of *Ideen I*, “cosmic time reveals itself within the phenomenological time”³³ in a way that is not identical with “other real essential phases of the world present themselves phenomenologically”³⁴; in the Husserlian text, in German: “kosmische Zeit sich in der phänomenologischen bekundet.”³⁵ One of the most important Husserlian ontological problems, however, remains this term *sich bekundet* of transcendence. One cannot use this term *sich* in this context so loaded with obvious ontological suggestions and projects it without the obligatory precision. And yet, Husserl does not clarify the ontological and gnoseological situation of transcendence, as would be required.

The author states that “The relations between phenomenology and all other sciences, a topic we have frequently touched on, but must go into more deeply at a later stage, have their ground in this essential relation between *transcendental* and transcendent Being”³⁶. But the way in which Husserl understands *transcendental Being*,

²⁹ I have considered the translation of the original Husserlian text as it was done by Christian Ferencz-Flatz in Edmund Husserl, *Ideii privitoare la o fenomenologie pură și la o filozofie fenomenologică. Cartea întâi: Introducere generală în fenomenologia pură*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2011.

³⁰ As I translated after the German original text from Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, p. 159.

³¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, p. 159.

³² Albert Einstein, *Relativity. The special and general theory*, Ed. Signature Press Edition, p. 29

³³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, p. 181.

³⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 165.

³⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, p. 181.

³⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 146.

transcendent being and the relations between them, seems to frustrate finding the philosophical sought perspective, assuming that it has been clarified by the author, even as a private opinion.

III. The real world, formal ontology, regional ontologies and the specificity of phenomenology

The analysis of the concept of the “real world” in Husserlian philosophy might suggest that the author has nevertheless an ontological perspective. In his work *Ideen I*, Husserl analyzes “*the real world*”³⁷ (again the quotation marks belong to him) in a complex philosophical context of “possible worlds” and “possible non-worlds”: “the correlate of our factual experience, then presents itself as *a special case of various possible worlds and non-worlds* [Welten und Unwelten], which, on their side, are no other than *correlates of the essentially possible variations of the idea “empirical consciousness”*”³⁸. The complexity of the discourse increases far beyond the simple analysis of the idea of a possible world because Husserl surprisingly introduces the term *possible non-world*, and constructs in the most speculative possible way an unapproachable complex of worlds and non-worlds. He does not clarify, however, this wholly original construct in the history of philosophy and does not come back to this problem, *seeming once again to have the vision of a kind of ontology that is above what is usually accepted as such*. We would expect that the analysis of the “real world” together with that of “absolute consciousness” could lead us to an understanding of the “ultimately and truly absolute”, but Husserl does not directly offer such an understanding.

The returning to subjectivity and, implicitly, intersubjectivity seems to solve the problem, but as Dan Zahavi remarked, in Husserl's philosophy, “Subjectivity (and [...] intersubjectivity) is a condition of possibility for reality. Without subjectivity there can be no reality”³⁹. But, if the idea of the “*real world*” is analyzed as mentioned above, subjectivity is also not analyzed in such a way to open the understanding of the “ultimately and truly absolute” postulated in *Ideen I*. Dan Zahavi rightly criticizes the fact that in *Ideen I*, Husserl analyzes “the relation between the constituted objects

³⁷ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 91.

³⁸ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 91.

³⁹ Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, Ed. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2003, p. 53.

and the constituting consciousness [...] the way in which the givenness of objects is conditioned by subjectivity”, but he “did not pursue the question concerning the givenness of subjectivity itself any further [...] such a silence is *phenomenologically* unacceptable.”⁴⁰ . Now, we might say, going along the lines of Zahavi's criticism, the givenness of the subjective condition once clarified, if Husserl had done so, could have opened the way to the “ultimately and truly absolute” that he postulated. This clarification would have prompted Husserl to found an ontology, yet ontology is the philosophical horizon towards which the author systematically refuses to go.

In *Ideen I* and also in *Experience and Judgment*⁴¹, however, Husserl explicitly presents the project of a formal ontology, or rather an outline of such a project. Presenting formal ontology as a theoretical approach to any possible object, Husserl remains at the level of a summary Propaedeutics and of an ontological project, independent of the previously mentioned ontological project of the “ultimately and truly absolute”. In this regard Husserl states that: “We take our start from formal ontology (conceived always as pure logic in its full extension so as to cover the *mathesis universalis*), which, as we know, is the eidetic science of object in general”⁴². Husserl also specifies that there is no formal region, “*but only the empty form of the region in general [...] superordinate* (even if only formally) to all regions, with their materially [*sachhaltig*] determined specific of essence”⁴³. The conclusion that the philosopher emphasizes is that “*the formal ontology comprises in itself [...] the forms of all possible ontologies in general and [...] prescribes to all material ontologies a common formal constitution*”⁴⁴. In relation to formal ontology, regional ontologies are material ontologies referred to distinct domains of Being, ontologies distinct by matter or content. For example, geometry is the science of spatial entities, biology is the science of living organisms, etc. Each region opens up a well delimited horizon of research. However, not only does the author not present a detailed ontology, but, moreover, he makes clarifications that seem to obstruct such a possibility by considering that “in no case does a single intuition of a thing or a finite closed continuum or collection

⁴⁰ Dan Zahavi, op. cit., p. 80-81.

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment. Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*. Ed. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973

⁴² Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 23.

⁴³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Edmund Husserl, op.cit., p. 26.

of thing-intuitions suffice to obtain in *adequate* form the desired essence in the total fullness of its essential determinations.”⁴⁵

If, as Husserl concludes that “ontology is not phenomenology”⁴⁶, then the phenomenological analysis of time must avoid constituting itself in any kind of ontology but in something of a completely different philosophical or rigorous-scientific mode. Right from the beginning of his first “lesson” on time – “Phenomenology of the inner consciousness of time”, Husserl makes it clear that phenomenology does not assume the analysis of Objective time or real time intervals and their errors of appreciation⁴⁷. This is because the real object, real time, the time of nature is not a phenomenological datum⁴⁸. However, Husserl does not explain why real time should not be a datum of a well-oriented phenomenology, correctly developed and open, in a metaphysical or scientific sense, towards nature - the philosopher himself, in fact, specifies that “phenomenology [...] excludes only any naive metaphysics that operates with objects that are absurd in themselves (but not metaphysics in general)”⁴⁹ and, as we have already mentioned, he conceived phenomenology as a rigorous science.

In conclusion, however, we can situate the phenomenological analysis of time in opposition to the common intuition of time as well as to establish philosophical and scientific theories.

Returning to the problem of the undeclared Husserlian ontology, which places the problem of time in a deep metaphysical perspective, the concept of the continuum and that of passive synthesis must be analyzed as the philosopher thought them, as ontological concepts, in fact.

IV. The Husserlian concept of continuum

The importance of the concept of continuum in Husserl's philosophy has already been emphasized by some researchers. Claudio Tarditi considers that this

⁴⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 312.

⁴⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences. Third Book. Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Ed. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980, p. 117.

⁴⁷ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, Indiana University Press, 2019, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Edmund Husserl, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2019, p. 155.

Husserlian concept represents “a real *leitmotiv* of the phenomenological method as a whole”⁵⁰.

Husserl gives to the concept of continuum an essential role in understanding time and space but what makes of this concept a fundamental idea and an ontological principle or a kind of ontological medium is the way it is invoked and used to explain them, its undeniable and a self-evident reality having significance and its own grounding and explanatory power. The fact that this concept of the continuum is not mathematical but ontological in Husserl’s work is also confirmed by Dorion Cairns⁵¹ who argues that for the father of phenomenology the experience of the continuum, of each continuity, is not necessarily linked to any process of mathematization or formalization but these secondary processes can correspond to a subsequent activity. Since Husserl speaks generically about the continuum without specifying as in physics or mathematics whether it is a one-dimensional continuum, a two-dimensional continuum, a three-dimensional continuum or a four-dimensional continuum⁵², and, moreover, the problem of the continuum occupies a place of prime importance in his philosophy, we can assume that for this thinker the continuum has the status of an ontological principle or is a kind of ontological medium, as we have stated above. It remains a peculiarity and a problem of Husserlian thought that, on the one hand, he does not analyze this concept as it should be analyzed and, on the other hand, he does not take into account the concept of discontinuity as it is in his contemporary physics, a concept that Einstein and Infeld claimed that “has taken the place of continuity”⁵³. Husserl does not explain his exclusive preference for the concept of continuity. Evidently, he had his reasons for it because we cannot assume that he didn’t actually knew quantum mechanics from the perspective of which “the energy levels are, as a rule, not continuous but discontinuous”.⁵⁴ Incidentally, the concept of discontinuity was widely debated in the scientific literature of the time, especially in relation to quantum physics. Both concepts, the continuum and the discontinuous, could have found a more prominent place in Husserl’s writings, which unfortunately did not happen. As a pure conjecture, it

⁵⁰ Claudio Tarditi, *Rethinking Spatiotemporal Extension: Husserl’s Contribution to the Debate on the Continuum Hypothesis*, *Horizon* 7 (1) 2018: I. Research: C. Tarditi: 141, *Studies in Phenomenology*, <https://doi.org/10.21638/2226-5260-2018-7-1-137-159>.

⁵¹ Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink 17/8/31*, p. 17, Ed. Martinus Nijhoff / The Hague/ 1976.

⁵² Albert Einstein, Leopold Infeld, *The Evolution of Physics*, Ed. The Scientific Book Club III, Charing Cross Road, London, 1938.

⁵³ Albert Einstein, Leopold Infeld, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

⁵⁴ Albert Einstein, Leopold Infeld, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

is possible that Husserl considered the discontinuum to be a concept erroneously constructed by the physicists of his time and rejected it on such grounds, or, that he considered the continuum theory to be sufficiently consistent not to be disturbed by any exceptions. Husserl does not tell us in what relation the “ultimately and truly absolute” is with the continuum itself. We can also establish a certain ontological importance for it insofar as the concept of the continuum is systematically implied by Husserl in his philosophical discourse on time and space as well as on the flow of experiences of the pure self. But unfortunately, Husserl puts certain concepts into his philosophy and attaches fundamental importance to them but in the same time blocks any metaphysical development or clarification of them. Borrowing and reorienting a well-known clever-spoken of Constantin Noica, the terms *absolute* and *continuum* are in Husserl’s writings a kind of opening that closes itself, and with all the clarifications made by the father of phenomenology, the concept of passivity is in the same semantical condition⁵⁵.

Tarditi appreciated that “the problem of the continuum is at the very core of the general problem of the perception of space and time”⁵⁶, and Dan Zahavi in his well-known work “Husserl’s Phenomenology” approaches the concept of continuum in the philosophy of his illustrious predecessor, not in terms of the analysis of time but of space⁵⁷.

The natural conclusion is that we cannot understand Husserl’s conceptions of time and space without involving the concept of continuum, a concept independent of any strictly metaphysical, mathematical or logical interpretation, and the phenomenological interpretation of time and space does not even need the latter.

As Husserl stated, “phenomenological method proceeds entirely through acts of reflection”⁵⁸, but the real problem of Husserlianism is that of the original way in which the specificity of these acts is conceived and also the sphere of strange prohibitions that

⁵⁵ In *Ideen II*, Husserl states that “In opposition to the active ego, is the *passive ego* and wherever the active ego is, the ego is always at the same time, passive” (*Idees directrices pour une phenomenologie et une philosophie phenomenologique pures, Livre Second, Puf 1982, p. 297*). Now, this passivity which is deeply interwoven with activity, should have, in principle, either a psychological explanation (which Husserl would not admit) or an ontological explanation, given that “the realm of transcendental consciousness” must be understood in a very precise sense, as “the realm of the “absolute Being” as Husserl states in *Ideen I §76*.

⁵⁶ Tarditi, op. cit. p. 143.

⁵⁷ Zahavi, D. (2003). *Husserl’s Phenomenology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 100.

⁵⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Ed. London and New York, 2012, Routledge, p. 149.

the author establishes in relation to the possibility of extension the phenomenological method. In this sense, we have already mentioned the Husserlian idea that real time, the time of nature, cannot be a phenomenological datum. Such an idea can be discussed in relation to Stephen Hawking's assertion that "it is impossible to imagine a four-dimensional space"⁵⁹ referring to Einstein's theory of the space-time continuum⁶⁰, an impossibility that also questions the possibility of a development of Husserl's and other phenomenologists' intention to give a graphic representation to temporal consciousness. Such an interdiction cannot affect any openness or dialog of phenomenology with contemporary sciences without isolating the former.

In regard to the temporal continuum alone, Husserl stated that "every real experience is necessarily one that endures [...]; and with this duration it takes its place within an endless continuum of durations - a concretely *filled* continuum"⁶¹.

This "temporal purview concretely filled", as Husserl calls it, "stretching away endlessly on all sides"⁶². Husserl also states that "every experience, as a temporal being, is an experience of its pure Ego"⁶³, "but the stream of experience cannot begin and end"⁶⁴. The relation between the pure Ego and the stream of filled experiences, this necessary relation between a pure Ego and an endless continuum of durations⁶⁵, requires clarifications that Husserl does not make, as we have shown above, probably also for fear of not orienting the phenomenological discourse towards a purely metaphysical discourse or one proper to mathematics or logic, even though the involvement of the concept of continuum in the description of space, time and the stream of experiences of the pure Ego should have led the author to an ontological conclusion. However, Husserl postulates that "cosmic time reveals itself [*sich bekundet*]" within the phenomenological one in a fundamentally different way from the way in which "other essential moments of the material [*sachlich*] world phenomenologically appear"⁶⁶.

⁵⁹ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time from the Big Bang to Black Holes*, Ed. Bantam Books, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg, 2016, p. 28.

⁶⁰ Stephen W. Hawking, op. cit., cap. 2, *Space and Time*, p. 17-39.

⁶¹ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 166.

⁶² Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 166.

⁶³ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 166.

⁶⁴ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 166.

⁶⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, Ed. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2021, § 81, § 82, p. 180-185.

⁶⁶ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 181.

Even the very concept of revealing, necessarily refers to ontological or scientific clarifications, as also does the postulate that “time, which is essentially a matter of living itself [...] cannot be measured [...]”⁶⁷. Husserl visibly intended to keep phenomenology and the search for the “truly absolute” away from science or metaphysics, in a state of superiority that unfortunately remains an unfulfilled project (for reasons inherent to his thought, or because of the tragedy of his life that affected and ended a stage of his life, which was probably enlightening, etc.).

Husserlian thought has undergone an evolution throughout the author's life in terms of the structure of the temporal phases of consciousness in the transition from the conception shown in his work “*On the Phenomenology of the Internal Consciousness of Time*” (1893-1917) to the perspective contained in his texts from 1917-1918, the so-called “*Bernau Manuscripts*”. As for the Husserlian texts from 1929-1934, called the “*C Manuscripts*” and the later “*L Manuscripts*”, Dan Zahavi says that they are “difficult and rather enigmatic”⁶⁸, suggesting their irrelevance.

By analyzing the first two Husserl's works we can see the changes that he made within his own conceptions. If in “*On the Phenomenology of the Internal Consciousness of Time*” the author speaks of three functions in the following structural order: primal impression, retention and protention but in the *Bernau Manuscripts* the primal impression becomes the “frontier” between retention and protention. We can admit that the definitive perspective that Husserl himself assumed is the one that he formulated last in chronological order, but once this historical-philosophical aspect is admitted, we do not implicitly clarify the ontological problem pursued, we do not shed light in any way on the concept of the continuum.

The concept of the continuum also appears in Husserl's analysis of what could be called *historical time*, the humanity being conceived “as a single life comprising people and nations linked only by spiritual traits, with a multitude of human and cultural types, but flowing from one another in a continuous way”⁶⁹. Therefore, at Husserl, all that is time and becoming involve the continuum.

⁶⁷ Edmund Husserl, op. cit., p. 181.

⁶⁸ Dan Zahavi, op. cit., p. 87.

⁶⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie*, HUSSERLIANA, VI 1953.

V. Conclusions

As is clear from the analysis of Husserlian work, from *Ideen I* to *Ideen III*, the father of phenomenology does not realize an ontology: he hesitates, postpones or simply refuses to construct it explicitly. In this respect, it is not so much the ontological project, if it can be called like so, of *Ideen I*, but especially what Husserl claims in *Ideen III*, that must be taken into account, since the major importance of the author's late work in relation to his earlier one is already confirmed by well-known researches, as L. Landgrebe emphasized⁷⁰.

The *sui-generis* relation between phenomenology and ontology is proposed by Husserl in *Ideen III* as the ideal solution, for both the construction of phenomenology and for the solution of any ontological problem. We also find here an original project of Husserl's philosophy, a project that unfortunately could not be carried out by the great thinker. The relation between the "absolute" being and transcendence must be mediated by the idea of the "self revelation" or the "self manifestation" (*sich bekundet*) of transcendence, but Husserl does not make the necessary clarifications in this regard. The importance of the Husserlian concept of continuum brings to the forefront of the great philosopher's thought an extremely complex idea and a kind of ontological principle or ontological medium that becomes a constant in his philosophical discourse. But Husserl does not develop a proper analysis of this ontological concept so important for a correct understanding of his thought.

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