



The Phenomenology of Ontico-Ontological Difference

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Abstract This paper focuses on Martin Heidegger's reading of the Hegelian phenomenology of spirit as a veiled critique of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness. Ultimately, I argue, Heidegger will acknowledge the insufficiency of either phenomenology, concerned exclusively with Being or with beings, and will hint at the possibility of a third kind of phenomenology unfolding between the two—the phenomenology of ontico-ontological difference.

I. Between Two Phenomenologies

Of phenomenology, can there be more than one? There are, of course, countless phenomenologies that refer to, intend, and are *of* something, be it perception or religious experience, the social world or landscape and place. There are, also, those most intimately associated with certain proper names (e.g., Max Scheler or Maurice Merleau-Ponty), around which philosophical movements and professional organizations accrete. But what happens in the phenomenological approaches to particular regions of being and in the fragmentation of phenomenology into “schools of thought” is far from putting into question the oneness and unity of phenomenology; in the regionalization, compartmentalization, and disciplinary shaping of phenomenological thought, we witness its formalization and an institutionalized division of intellectual labor.

It is against these deleterious trends that, in 1927, Heidegger resolutely insisted on a different kind of multiplicity: “There is no such thing as *the one* phenomenology, and if there could be such a thing it would never become anything like a philosophical technique. For implicit in the essential nature of

all genuine method as a path toward the disclosure of objects is a tendency to order itself always toward that which it discloses.”¹ The proto-methodological slogan, “Back to the things themselves!” enjoins us to take our cues and our way from the phenomena themselves, from the many that are disclosed and that, in each case, themselves direct and, indeed, de-limit the movements of disclosure. If “[t]here is no such thing as *the one* phenomenology,” this is because there is not the one exemplary phenomenon that would prescribe the same method of approaching all the others, once and for all. It seems, consequently, that, when it comes to phenomenology, there *must* be more than one.

The difficulty with the unconditional endorsement of radical plurality lies in Heidegger’s own writings from the 1920s, especially *The History of the Concept of Time, Being and Time*, and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. His main concern in that period is to uncover the ontological bases of phenomenology and, indeed, to interpret phenomenology as “the *method of ontology*.”² The ontological interpretation of phenomenology ranges from reflections on intentionality as the being of consciousness,³ to an investigation of how the being of entities shows itself in the self-presentation of phenomena,⁴ not to mention an attempt to set reduction to the work of transitioning from the ontic to the ontological, from the apprehension of beings to the understanding of their being.⁵ But what does it mean, within the parameters of Heidegger’s philosophy itself, that phenomenology is or ought to be executed as an ontology? Does the ontological principle not imply that we must practice it in the difference between beings and being and, therefore, situate it in the space or, better, the spacing of ontico-ontological difference? Returning to our initial question, we can now conjecture that, so understood, phenomenology will be both one and more than one, irreducible either to the beings that show themselves or to their being that gives itself and withdraws from the self-showing of phenomena.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. Revised edition (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 328.

² Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 328.

³ Martin Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” in *Off the Beaten Track*. Trans. & Ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 107.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962), 60.

⁵ Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 21.

Already in the early twenties, Heidegger was not convinced that the phenomenology of his teacher, Edmund Husserl, held the ontological resources he had sought in it. This, perhaps, is the sense of the harsh remark Heidegger made in a letter to Karl Löwith on February 20, 1923: "...Husserl was never a philosopher, not even for a second of his life."¹ If to be a philosopher is to think ontologically, with respect to the being of beings, then, in Heidegger's estimation, Husserl, who has not attained to the heights of ontological thought, is not a philosopher. Unfair as the epistolary assessment may be, it explains why, at the height of the confrontation with Husserl, in a 1930-1 course at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger turned to another phenomenology—which could well turn out to be the other of Husserl's phenomenology—that of Hegel, which he previously deemed a sworn enemy of the "authentic fundamental tendency of phenomenology": "When today the attempt is made to connect the authentic fundamental tendency of phenomenology with the dialectic, it is as if one wanted to mix fire and water."²

My two-fold working hypothesis is, thus, the following: 1) everything Heidegger notes concerning the Hegelian phenomenology of spirit (and, especially, concerning its absolutizing, absolving, and absolved standpoint) is meant as a tacit rejoinder to or refutation of Husserlian phenomenology; and 2) "Husserl" and "Hegel" are, above all for Heidegger himself, incalculably more than two proper names associated with two schools of thought or currents in or of phenomenology; instead, they are the encryptions of what we might term "ontic" and "ontological" phenomenologies, respectively. The impossible, unsynthesizable, groundless position in the middle without mediations, in-between the two, will allow us to survey the spacing of ontico-ontological difference proper to phenomenology at once singular and plural, both one and more than one. In other words, despite the improbability of success in this endeavor, we are to mix dialectical fire and phenomenological water.

Whether tacit or explicit, Heidegger's rejoinders to and criticisms of Husserl are not outright dismissals. They are, more precisely, the obverse of

¹ Quoted in Thomas Sheehan, "General Introduction: Husserl and Heidegger: The Making and Unmaking of a Relationship." In *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931)*. Edmund Husserl's *Collected Works*, Vol. VI. Trans. and Eds. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer, 1997), 17.

² Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Trans. John van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 33.

the reproach to Hegel's philosophy *in toto*, where "everything ontic is dissolved into the ontological..., without insight into the ground of possibility of ontology itself"¹ and, therefore, without safeguarding the possibility—still alive in Husserl's thought—of phenomenologically reducing the ontic to the ontological. It is not enough to opt either for a reconstructive construction of the world from the standpoint of absolute knowledge, or for the transcendental constitution of the object by pure consciousness. Between the two phenomenologies, suspended in the "no man's land" of ontico-ontological difference, thinking will experience unrest well in excess of the dialectical "restlessness of the negative" and the negativity of phenomenological reduction.

The attempt to think in-between the two phenomenologies is complicated, in the first instance, by Heidegger's adamant insistence that the one bears no relation to the other. "The *Phenomenology [of Spirit]*," he writes, "has nothing to do with [*hat nichts zu tun...mit*] a phenomenology of consciousness as currently understood in Husserl's sense...A clear differentiation [*klare Scheidung*] is necessary in the interest of a real understanding of both [the Hegelian and Husserlian] phenomenologies—particularly today, when everything is called 'phenomenology'."² (As an aside, we must note that negation is itself highly suspicious, if only because, according to psychoanalysis, it is one of the most potent defense mechanisms of the ego. "This is not my mother," in Freud's influential essay on negation, means the exact opposite of what it proclaims: the woman in the dream *is* my mother, but it would be too traumatic for me to admit it. The same goes for the statements that concern us here, namely, "This is not phenomenology" and also "Husserl is not a philosopher.") The need for a "clear differentiation" between the two is neither a prescription for a dry scholarly comparison nor a methodological recommendation aiming, at any rate, to advance "understanding," a form of consciousness confined to the relatively early stages of the Hegelian phenomenology. A "real understanding" of both phenomenologies signifies something else altogether: a critical rehashing of the ontico-ontological difference in and through the "clear differentiation," with the undertones of *krinein*, Heidegger has just evoked. This difference and this differentiation are so intense that they preclude the possibility of a relation between the two phenomenologies that have "nothing to do with" one another. It is, then, a certain non-relation that we are dealing with, as Husserl

¹ Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 327.

² Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 28/40.

confirmed in a handwritten note on the margins of his copy of *Being and Time*. In the sole remark penned in the section of the book on Hegel's conception of time, he confessed, "I am able to learn nothing here, and seriously, is there anything here to learn at all?"¹

Having come to the conclusion that he has nothing to learn from Hegel, from Heidegger's treatment of Hegel, or—most likely—from both, Husserl has disengaged his own thinking from that other phenomenology, excusing and absolving himself from a dialogue with it. That no dialogue will articulate the two phenomenologies is partly attributable to the fact that they speak different conceptual languages, even when the same words (e.g., intention) comprise their vocabularies. But, more importantly, it is due to the incompatible claims each lays on the *logos* (or the being) of *phenomena*, as well as on the becoming-phenomenal of *logos* as such and as a whole. Instead of producing a split within *logos*, the two phenomenologies conjure up irreconcilable *logoi* unable to hear, let alone to understand or to learn from, each other, for instance through a Gadamerian "merging of horizons." We should harbor no hopes for a philosophical meta-language capable of gathering together the two *logoi* that fall on the hither side of the dialectic of the one and the many. Their grafting onto Heidegger's ontico-ontological difference forecloses, precisely, such gathering-together. Insofar as the relation between the two phenomenologies is conceivable, it will be a "relation without relation," similar to the ethical bond of the I and the other in the philosophy of Levinas, where at least one of the terms—the other who stands in for the absolutizing or absolute—is absolved from the bonds of relationality. An infinity stretches between the two—the infinity to be thought.

II. The Being of Consciousness

As Heidegger clandestinely stages it, the relation or the non-relation between the projects of Husserl and Hegel is an apposition of the relative phenomenology of beings and the absolute phenomenology of being: the philosophy of beings without being, on the one hand, and of being without beings, on the other. A mere glance at this apposition will suffice to realize that it is far

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931)*. Edmund Husserl's *Collected Works*, Vol. VI. Trans. and Eds. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer, 1997), 421.

from a simple contrast or a neat alignment. Although Hegel, too, presents his readers with the phenomenology of “relative” consciousness, this relativity is, for Heidegger, already reconstructed from the standpoint of the absolute. The phenomenology of spirit envelops and includes that of consciousness, assuming, as Heidegger does, that Hegel begins absolutely with the absolute, which “is other and so is *not absolute*, but relative. The not-absolute *is not yet absolute*.”¹ Consciousness yields the most relative kind of knowledge,² one where the absolute is at the furthest from itself and where it subsists in a negative modality of the “not-absolute,” while remaining itself. But, at the same time, consciousness, albeit purified by means of phenomenological reduction, is the horizon—the absolute horizon, perhaps—of Husserl’s phenomenology. Its being is the site where the relation without relation of Husserl and Hegel will unfold.

Before considering the two phenomenological ontologies of consciousness, a word on the absolutizing tendencies of Husserlian phenomenology is in order. All such tendencies point toward the practice of phenomenological reduction, through which Husserl hopes to reach the field of pure consciousness as that which is irreducible, that which survives the operations of bracketing, parenthesizing, setting aside. The outcome of reduction is absolute, in the sense that it is absolutely irreducible. Reduction is the absolvent movement of separation from the world of the natural attitude, from everything transcendent and given through adumbrations; it suspends natural consciousness that, equivalent to a limited ontic perspective, “finds everywhere and always only beings, only phenomena, and judges all that meets it in accordance with the results of its findings.”³ This judgment is a deficient critique, so far as Heidegger is concerned, which is why it requires ontological criticism, thanks to which phenomenology would finally come into its own. Taking the place of reduction, *Destruktion* could conceivably play this role, provided that we grasped *Destruktion* in terms of “a critique of all ontology hitherto, with its roots in Greek philosophy, especially in Aristotle, whose ontology...lives as strongly in Kant and Hegel as in any

1 Heidegger, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 33. This assumption was not in the background of Heidegger’s thought ten years before the course of Hegel, in the 1923 seminar, titled *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity*. There, Heidegger took the side of Husserlian phenomenology, accusing dialectics of a reactive work on readymade materials and, hence, of a reliance—uncharacteristic of the absolute—on the ontic world. [Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Trans. John van Buren (Indiannapolis & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 36]

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 34.

³ Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 118.

medieval scholastic.”¹ Hardly reliant on the absolute, this critique remains phenomenological, in that it seeks to gain access to “the thematic problems of the Greeks from the motives and the attitude of their way of access to the world,”² through a repetition of their historical experience at the closure of metaphysics.

The absolutizing tendencies of reduction, in turn, are rather truncated. As soon as it chooses sides, eidetically looking only in the direction of non-adumbrated reality, Husserlian *epochē* falls short of the absolute that does not stand on one side or, indeed, on any side whatsoever: “Yet what is an absolute that stands on one side? What kind of absolute stands on any side at all? Whatever it is it is not absolute.”³ Husserl effects little more than an inversion of the natural attitude; having arrived at the non-phenomenal, non-adumbrated being of consciousness, he takes the side of this being, looks to one side, methodically and methodologically ignoring the relation between the intended as intended (noema) and beings *simpliciter*. To be sure, the bracketing of adumbrated reality dispenses with what is given relatively and incompletely, from one perspective or another, in favor of the absolute givenness of pure consciousness. But, in so doing, it takes the side of what has no sides, foregoes the difficulties of mediation, aborts the “dialogue between natural and real knowledge” and the critical “comparison between ontic/pre-ontological knowledge and ontological knowledge” that, in Heidegger’s reading of Hegel, constitutes consciousness *qua* consciousness.⁴ Ontically absolute, the field of pure consciousness is ontologically relative because of its very “purity,” the purified one-sidedness, distilled and separated from the world of the natural attitude.

The being of consciousness in the aftermath of phenomenological reduction is intentionality, the directedness of consciousness toward something, its being, in each case, *of* something. Intentional consciousness is relative knowledge (and, hence, relative being) *par excellence*. Inherently relational, it is circumscribed by that of which it is conscious and, thus, hinges on the intended, even though it has been cut off from adumbrated reality as such. In this respect, it diverges from absolute knowledge that is no longer or not yet *of* something: “Is not knowledge as such a knowledge of

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter to Karl Jaspers, Freiburg, June 27, 1922” in *The Heidegger—Jaspers Correspondence (1920-1963)*. Eds. Walter Biemel and Hans Saner (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 34.

² Heidegger, “Letter to Karl Jaspers,” 34.

³ Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 101.

⁴ Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 138.

something? This is precisely what Hegel denies and must deny when he claims that there is a knowledge which is qualitatively *not* relative, but absolute.”¹ Still prior to its fulfillment in intuition, where noetic acts and their noematic targets belong together in strict *correlations*, intentionality is essentially a *relatum*. The ontic orientation of intentionality lies in its directedness toward the perceived, the remembered, the anticipated, and so forth, as opposed to the ontological trajectory of absolute knowledge that “must not remain bound but must liberate and ab-solve itself [*sich losmacht, sich ab-löst*] from what it knows and yet as so ab-solved, as absolute, [*als ab-gelöstes—absolute*] still be a knowledge.”² The absolution of absolute knowledge from the known explodes noetic-nomatic correlations, freeing us, finally, from the “correspondence theory of truth”—truth as *adequatio*, not of *rei et intellectus* but of the intuiting and the intuited—which casts a long shadow over the entire field of pure consciousness. The true is not the fulfillment of empty intentionality in intuition or in the ontic presence of the intended; it is, rather, the whole, i.e., being or absolute knowledge itself. It is, more precisely, the whole capable of determining and delimiting itself, rather than externally circumscribed by its other.

Still, the dialectical self-determining whole poses difficulties of its own. The complaint Heidegger raised only several years before his first sustained engagement with Hegel against purely ontological, absolute knowledge was that such knowledge dissolved the beings themselves and ignored “the original belonging together of comportment toward beings and understanding of being.”³ Implicitly, Heidegger extends the same rebuke to Husserl, who, in contrast to Hegel, privileged the intentional comportment toward beings over the understanding of being. Whereas relative *phenomenology* is dedicated to the appearing of phenomena in a knowing bound to the known (the name of this bond is intentionality, “consciousness of...”), absolute *phenomenology* is concerned with the phenomenal appearance of *logos* itself that gives itself form by negating and sublating its other. In this sense, “phenomenology is the *absolute self-presentation of reason* (*ratio-Lóγος*), whose essence and actuality Hegel finds in *absolute spirit*.”⁴ Only in the difference between, rather than in the synthesis of, the two phenomenologies, where at least as much disappears as appears, will we glimpse the

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 14.

² Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 15/21.

³ Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 327.

⁴ Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 30.

“original belonging together” of the ontic and the ontological, of the phenomena and of *logos*.

Now, does the charge leveled against Hegel’s forgetting of beings hold, above all, in Heidegger’s own reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*? In the reconstructive construction of the world from the standpoint of absolute knowledge, we—those who know absolutely—care for the truth of being and for the truth of beings, for knowing itself and for that which is known: “...we have in our knowledge *two* objects, or one object twice. This is the case necessarily and throughout the entire *Phenomenology*, because *for us* the object is basically and always *knowing*, which in itself and according to its formal essence already in its turn has its object, which it brings along with it.”¹ So long as absolute knowledge, viewed from the vantage point of the absolute, is still more or less other to itself—so long as it is conditioned by the known—its intentionality is split, the noematic target doubled into the knowing and the object of this knowing. Our attention is, in turn, divided between the two objects or, alternatively, fissured in striving toward a double, spectral object (“one object twice”). In its **critical** circumscription by two objects, in this hyper-delimitation, absolute knowing is de-limited, released from purely objective and subjective limits alike.

Let us already call these two objects or the double object, the one counted twice, by their names: the ontological and the ontic, the being of beings cast in terms of self-consciousness or, in the later text on Hegel, “experience,”² and the known, experienced beings as they are known and experienced. The absolute is only absolute if it embraces these two modalities without necessarily reconciling them, if, that is, it holds them together in a tension approximating the intensity of ontico-ontological difference. Touched by the absolute, the object becomes excessive, turns into more than itself, overflows the limits of its identity, splits into two *or* becomes one and the same...twice (the dialectical and the ontological inflections of this “or” should be distinctly audible). And being? Isn’t it, too, more *or* less than itself, because we gain access to it through ontico-ontological difference, in which alone it appears and from which it withdraws (as nothing *in* being)? In light of this analogy—the *ana-logos* where redoubling (*an-*) abounds—we can appreciate the remark Dominique Janicaud made in passing in a text on the Hegel-Heidegger dialogue: “...the

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 48.

² Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 139.

most secret proximity [of Heidegger] to Hegel...perhaps lies hidden in the friction with regard to phenomenology.”¹

The dialectical splitting of the object of knowledge into the knowing and that which is known in it goes to the heart of what, for Hegel, constitutes the being of consciousness. As opposed to the Husserlian ontology of consciousness, encapsulated in the statement, “The being of consciousness is intentionality,” Hegel’s speculative definition proclaims, “The being of consciousness is self-consciousness.” What, in Husserl’s phenomenology, would have been the height of impoverished theoreticism, of a reflection on reflection that treats noetic acts as new noematic objects, is, in Hegel’s dialectics, the figure of richness and concreteness marking absolute knowledge that fleshes itself out by determining itself. The ontic orientation of consciousness toward phenomena is, from the standpoint of this knowledge, inseparable from its ontological directedness toward itself, in a movement of re-flection that does not come about as an after-thought, already uncoupled from lived actuality, but accompanies the reconstructive construction of experience from its absolute beginning. Hence, to know absolutely means “not to be absorbed in what is known, but to transmit it *as such*, as *what is known* to where it belongs as known and from where it stems.”² It means, *contra* Husserl, that the life of consciousness does not have to be extinguished in the presence of the intuited and that the living intentionality, the *dunamis* of striving toward..., does not need to reach its end in the actuality of that toward which it strives.³ In the scenario where intentionality attains fulfillment, quelling the unrest of consciousness, the being of Dasein is patently conflated with the being of its intended targets, when in the operations of consciousness “knowing...forgets *itself* and is lost exclusively in the object.”⁴ The self-forgetting of knowing results in the automatic self-comprehension of Dasein as something present-at-hand, while its being “lost exclusively in the object” nullifies ontico-ontological difference. The relativity of relative phenomenology signifies the determination of existence

¹ Dominique Janicaud, “Heidegger-Hegel: An Impossible ‘Dialogue’?” in *Endings: Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger*. Eds. Rebecca Comay and John McCumber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 41.

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 47.

³ Emmanuel Levinas launches a parallel critique of Husserl, writing that “it is a question of descending from the entity illuminated in self-evidence toward the subject that is extinguished rather than announced in it.” [*Discovering Existence with Husserl*. Trans. R. Cohen and M. B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 156]

⁴ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 129.

on the basis of and with reference to the ontology of the present-at-hand. The absoluteness of absolute phenomenology entails, on the contrary, the positive possibility of being lost in the object—the possibility of consciousness being lost in itself as its own object and, therefore, of re-finding itself in itself.

In defense of Husserl's phenomenology, reduction has shown that consciousness itself does not appear and that, moreover, what defines the being-conscious of consciousness is its non-appearance, the non-adumbrated givenness, which sets it apart from transcendent reality and, therefore, from everything that is not-Dasein. Evidently, the ontology of pure consciousness is distinct from that of the present-at-hand. Conversely, in dialectics, the "appearing of phenomenal knowledge is the truth of knowledge,"¹ not at all insulated from adumbrated reality. Much depends, however, on the modes of objectivation or phenomenalization distinguishing the two phenomenologies. When *logos* itself appears in relative knowledge, it does so as the sheer alienation and deadening of the subject, whose psychic life comes to an objective end in self-evidence. But when it arrives on the scene and makes its phenomenal appearance in the realm of the absolute, *logos* comes into its own and gains a new lease on life. The consciousness of consciousness and the intentionality of intentionality bear no trace of the derivative and abstract character Husserl's phenomenology has ascribed to them; they comprise the being of the absolute, which, in its separation or absolvent absolution from everything relative, is absolutely inseparable (inalienable) from us: "the absolute is from the start in and for itself with us and intends to be with us. This being-with-us (Παρουσία) is in itself already the mode in which the light of truth, the absolute itself beams [*anstrahlt*] upon us. To know the absolute is to stand in the ray [*Strahl*] of light, to give it back, to radiate [*strahlt*] it back, and thus to be itself in its essence the ray, not a mere medium through which the ray must first find its way."²

The being-with-us of the absolute is *its* becoming-phenomenal, the becoming that is as superfluous as it is necessary in that it happens after the absolute has already become everything it is, from the very beginning. The shining of the absolute upon us does not illuminate us from the outside, setting itself up as an object over and against us. It radiates from within, with reflected or refracted light ("to give it back, to radiate it back"), with the ontological luminosity of consciousness as self-consciousness and, finally, as absolute spirit. Of course, our being-with the absolute deserves a patient deconstructive analysis. If the absolute is one *with* us, then it loses its identity

¹ Heidegger, "Hegel's Concept of Experience," 108.

² Heidegger, "Hegel's Concept of Experience," 98.

as the absolute and is no longer one, because it is minimally separated from us, as much as from itself as a simple unity, by the nearness—the absolute nearness—of its presence. The separation of the absolute from itself is nothing but the expression of ontico-ontological difference allegedly forgotten in Hegel’s phenomenology.

The intentional ray of the transcendental ego in Husserl’s phenomenology does not shine from within but emits subjective light that shines upon its objects’ noematic surfaces. When it is with us, this ray is already outside of us, orchestrating the self-transcendence of consciousness as the consciousness of.... Its trajectory is unidirectional: consciousness intends something other, though not absolutely other, the transcendent. But the absolute, as Heidegger puts it, “intends to be with us” and therefore *intends us*, whenever we ourselves intend anything whatsoever. The loss of this other intentionality drastically impoverishes the phenomenological idea of constitution. It would be a gross exaggeration to claim that Husserl’s constitutive subjectivity is purely active, for, besides the passive synthesis of temporality, it draws its specific sense from what it constitutes in the hylomorphic production of meaning. But, whereas, in the relative phenomenology of consciousness, the constituting is, to a certain extent, ontically constituted by the constituted, in the absolute phenomenology of spirit, the constituting is ontologically constituted by the absolute that intends it. In much of his own thought, Heidegger will elaborate on the inversion of intentionality, detectable in Hegel’s dialectics and imbued with ontological connotations. The “call of being” in *Being and Time* and, in a different sense, in “The Letter on Humanism,” as well as the call of thinking that flips around the question “What is called thinking?” are but two prominent examples of this ontological inversion that turns us into the objects of its critique.¹

The ontological reversibility of intentionality is the reason why, in a rare explicit criticism of “current phenomenology,” contrasted to the phenomenology of spirit, Heidegger writes: “...it is crucial that once again we determine correctly what the genitive means in the expression ‘phenomenology of spirit.’ The genitive must not be interpreted as a *genitivus objectivus*. Easily misled by current phenomenology, one might take this genitive to be object-related, as though here we are dealing with phenomenological

¹ On “being called by Being,” see Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 245. On “what is called thinking—and what does call for it?” see Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York & Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1968), 21.

investigation of spirit that is somehow distinguished from a phenomenology of nature or that of economics.”¹ Spirit is not (at least, not exclusively) the object of phenomenology but also its subject; “phenomenology is...*the* manner in which spirit itself exists. The phenomenology of spirit is the genuine and total coming-out of spirit.”² There is, in other words, no semantic equivalence between the seemingly parallel expressions—“phenomenology of consciousness” and “phenomenology of spirit”—unless we understand the former as a mode of appearance of the latter. In the contemporary phenomenology of consciousness, *logos* fades into the “study” of phenomena, even and especially when it seeks its method from the things themselves. This phenomenology is not *of* consciousness, in the sense of the subjective genitive, because consciousness itself does not appear or is not allowed to appear in it; phenomenology is *not* the manner whereby consciousness itself exists. So much so that, to extrapolate from Heidegger’s conclusions, consciousness, as the object of phenomenological study, ceases to exist, loses its existential determinations, and becomes indistinguishable from the domains of nature or economics. The razor-thin line of critical demarcation, traversing the genitive in “phenomenology of...,” is charged with the task of maintaining ontico-ontological difference, leveled down in Husserl’s thought. Of phenomenology, there is more than one in the one, not the least because the genitive form in “phenomenology of...” is necessarily equivocal.

III. The Being of Experience and Truth

The transcendental objectification of consciousness in Husserlian phenomenology, as the phenomenology *of* consciousness but not one *proper to* consciousness, shapes the concepts of experience and truth. The ontic truth of experience is the veracity of the present-at-hand, the fulfillment and the confirmation of empty intentionality in intuition.³ The most crucial function of consciousness is verifying the appropriateness of the fit and the soundness of the relation between the experiencing and the experienced. In other words, its function pivots almost entirely on judging the accuracy and measuring the degrees of proximity between the “merely” intended and the “really” intuited, in the sort of pre- or non-predicative judgment and critique inherent in the

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 23-4.

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 24.

³ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 20.

acts of perception and undergirding all so-called abstract judgments.¹ Experience, for Husserl, *is* judgment or—this amounts roughly to the same thing here—ontic critique. While consciousness feels the ontic unrest of shuttling between the two poles of comparison, it is bereft of the ontological restlessness one experiences when one dwells without abiding in the split between the ontic and the ontological, in the spacing of the ontico-ontological difference. Any residual unrest is subject to immediate pacification through a more stringent and exacting, though not necessarily exact, application of the acts of comparing, weighing, and judging. What is thus absent from the relative (or naïve) phenomenology of consciousness is the experience of experience that has nothing in common with theoretical consciousness, the being of experience that “means *being* this distinction” (“between the ontically true and the ontological truth”).² And what is lost in every correlation established by consciousness, however precisely one has judged the belonging-together of its two elements, is the absolute ontological-existential truth of experience.

When in the seminars of the 1930s and 1940s Heidegger mines Hegel’s texts, he is searching for this very truth, so conspicuously lacking in Husserlian phenomenology. Truth as the truth of the absolute, if not the absolute truth, is neither pure objectivity nor subjectivity but experience in the ontological-existential signification of the term: “The will of the absolute to be with us, i.e., to appear for us as phenomena, prevails as experience.”³ In truth, the will of the absolute, which wills “to be with us,” absolute knowers, accomplishes the reversal of intentionality I have already invoked, so that we are not only the experiencing subjects but also the experienced objects of this will. From this dimensionless perspective of the absolute, the ontic experience of given phenomena, indeed of phenomenal givenness interpreted as the self-giving of the absolute, presents itself in a new light. Experience is not a dispassionate judging comparison of the fit between intentionality and intuition, but the *pathos* of undergoing with..., consciousness’s being-transformed with the experienced, with itself, and with the absolute. As a result, Heidegger suggests that we interpret “experience as denoting, both negatively and positively, *undergoing an experience with* something.”⁴ The

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*. Trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 64.

² Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 133.

³ Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 143.

⁴ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 21.

“with” of experience accommodates the most subtle inflections of existentiality: the being-with, *Mitdasein*, of consciousness comes to refer to the facticity of its unfolding alongside its objects, to its reflexive return to itself as self-consciousness, and to its being in absolute proximity (Παρουσία) to the absolute. This small preposition “with” draws together the positive and the negative, the ontic and the ontological, the existential and the categorial, so that ontico-ontological difference could finally take its non-place. The first of the three meanings of “experience with” is the only one still resonating in the phenomenology of relative consciousness, which dilutes the rich existentiality of the “with” in the judged appropriateness and the co-belonging of the experiencing and the experienced, wherein intentionality is fulfilled and extinguished.

To experience with... is to suffer with... and to be mutually transfigured by that with which one experiences or suffers. The truth of the absolute and the absoluteness of the absolute do not preclude, but—perhaps paradoxically—necessitate dialectical alteration. Speculative verification, shuttling between the experiencing consciousness and the experienced content verifies and authenticates the truth of both in and through their becoming otherwise than they were: on the side of the experiencing, “[c]onsciousness *verifies* to itself what it really is,” so that “[i]n this verification,” it “loses its initial truth, what it at first thought of itself,”¹ and, on the side of the experienced, “*something is verified...as not being what it first seemed to be, but being truly otherwise [sondern in Wahrheit anders].*”² Verification does not only take time to be accomplished; it also takes time into account and, to a certain extent, it *is* time. Experiencing with... and suffering with... ultimately boil down to suffering the loss of the initial self-identity of consciousness that has changed along with that of which it was conscious—something that remains unthinkable in the static determination of noetic acts (the intentional aiming at... that either hits or misses its target). In Husserl’s terms, this loss will have been explained with reference to a deficit of phenomenological critique, a lapse of judgment, including a lacuna within experience itself that has not yet succeeded in bringing the experienced firmly into its grasp. This is because the phenomenological idea of time, insofar as it pertains to the structure of noetic-noematic correlations, signifies a provisional emptiness of intentionality not yet or already not fulfilled and, therefore, a temporary deferral of the thing’s presence to intuition. Nothing fundamentally changes either in the intending or in the intended once the

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 22.

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 21/30.

directedness-toward of consciousness finds actualization in that toward which it has been oriented *ab initio*.

Much different is the dialectical truth of experience germinating in the alteration of consciousness and of its double object. The beginning is already absolute, but, in this beginning, the absolute, standing or falling furthest from itself, is other to itself, with its otherness denoting the relativity of consciousness. In order to touch upon the truth of the absolute, verification must render this otherness truly other, *in Wahrheit anders*, without thereby negating the truth of the beginning and without repeating the mistake of ontic judgments that, in a gesture of facile criticism, dismiss the erroneousness of “what...first seemed to be.” Although, just as he has done in *Being and Time*, Heidegger accuses Hegel of contributing to the metaphysical neglect of the temporality of time—“...*the pure concept annuls time*. Hegelian philosophy expresses this disappearance of time by conceiving philosophy as *the science* or as absolute knowledge”¹—and aligns this feature of dialectics with Husserl’s own insistence on the scientificity of phenomenology,² the temporal character of truth in the phenomenology of the absolute contests these conclusions of the 1930-1 lecture course. In its broad outlines, the critique Heidegger launches against Hegelian temporality is well known: the time of the dialectic passes over and covers over the ecstatic-existential temporality of Dasein, especially when it comes to the mediated “fall” of spirit into time.³ And yet, the thesis regarding truth as an alteration, mutually undergone by the experiencing and the experienced, makes it difficult to argue that Hegel has excluded temporality from his thinking of being. If “experience” is the name for “the being of beings,”⁴ then the essence of the being of beings is time, the time of experience and the experience of time. The crucible of experience is the crossing of the ontic and the ontological right in the midst of the phenomenology of spirit. *Logos* is time itself, which means that the phenomena that “dissolve” in it disappear into their innermost ontological matrix.

Following my double working hypothesis on the shadow of Husserl that looms over and is, at the same time, conjured away in Heidegger’s readings of Hegel, the truth of sense-certainty and of perception—hence, of what has not yet been ontologically verified and, in being verified, altered—betokens the only truth contemporary phenomenology is familiar with. In

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 12.

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 11.

³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 486.

⁴ Heidegger, “Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” 135.

sense-*certainty*, conceptual weight bears down upon “certainty,” which “means the entirety of the relation, in knowing, of a knower to what is known,”¹ at the expense of sense and its data, so decisive for the practitioners of twentieth-century phenomenology.² The certainty of sense-certainty is a moment of repose, when consciousness delights in the ostensible positivity of experience, when it no longer or not yet questions, with a dose of skepticism, what is known, its relation to what is known, and itself. The ostensible richness of sense-certainty is a symptom of the overstimulation and oversaturation of consciousness, overpowered by the infinite but empty variety of what appears before it and satisfied with not thinking through the mode, the *how*, of knowing that ties it to the known. We should habituate ourselves to hearing the echoes of this oversaturation and satisfaction in the phenomenological notion of truth as the fulfillment of empty intentionality in the presence—in flesh and blood—of that toward which it has tended.

But, if we limit ourselves to the ontic-existential level, where the manifold of sense-certainty predominates, is the fulfillment of intentionality really possible? Sense-certainty breaks down due to its non-fulfillment: “When we generally intend the thing, we find that “this” *sends* our intention away [*von sich wegschickt*]. It sends our intention away, not generally, but rather in a definite direction of something which has the character of *a* being *this*.”³ The internal breakdown of sense-certainty is another instant of the pulverization of intentionality, reflected by (not absorbed into) the intended, its branching-off in multiple directions. It is easy to recognize in this branching off Heidegger’s rethinking of the intentional comportment in terms of the practical and concerned dispersion of Dasein, the dispersion that expresses the definite modes of its being-in-the-world. Our intention is not fulfilled in the “this,” only referred to another “this” connected to it by webs of signification, from which our world is woven. This infinite deferral of fulfillment in the presence of the intuited, the elusiveness of that which we intend, frustrates some of the most basic tenets of Husserlian philosophy.

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 54.

² “We do not learn anything about visual and auditory sensations, about the data of smell and touch (the very least that today’s phenomenologies would demand).” [Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 54]

³ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58/82.

Aside from “hyletic phenomenology,” which, at the limits of sense, considers sense data before the hylomorphic production of meaning,¹ Husserl’s project is focused not so much on the pure “this,” as on the perceived as perceived, the remembered as remembered, or, more generally, on noematic unities, wherein sense data are already synthesized. Among noematic objects, Husserl singles out and absolutizes the perceived, given that the present of perception is the ground from which experience, memory, expectation arise and in which they are ultimately confirmed and consummated. All ontic critique of consciousness is to be undertaken from the vantage point of the experiential present, determining both past and future horizons. What Husserl forgets, however, is that the place of perception is in the middle and that, as Heidegger reminds us, “[t]hrough the mediation of perception, sense-certainty first reaches understanding and therein gets to its own ground as the true mode of consciousness.”² Perception is not the absolute but the path toward the absolute. Conflating it with the final destination, Husserl’s phenomenology foregoes mediations, erases the middle term, and paints a black-and-white, either/or, canvass of psychic life: either intentionality is empty, when it merely intends and represents the intended for itself, or it is full, when representations get their corroboration in the present of perception. That perceiving is an implicit hermeneutical act, whereby the perceiver non-thematically interprets (or else, non-predicatively criticizes) the perceived X as X—that it is the act of pre-understanding on its way to an explicit interpretation—is a conclusion of *Being and Time* indebted, in the first place, to the Hegelian placement of perception in the middle, in the transitional form of consciousness, as opposed to its exaltation to the status of the ground and the end of psychic life in Husserl. Between the two phenomenologies, there are no mediations and no middle ground, if holding them together requires, for example, mediating the same object (and, for Husserl, perception itself is *not* an object) as, at the same time, the middle and the end.

The middle place of perception matches the speculative concept of appearance that “must be grasped *as* appearance, as a middle” between appearing and disappearing. “It is important to remember again,” Heidegger

¹ Cf. Paragraph 85 of *Ideas I* [Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book. Trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht, Boston & London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983)], as well as Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*. Trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 7.

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 83.

notes, “that Hegel does not take the essence of appearing only as self-showing, as becoming manifest, as manifestation. Rather, appearing also means a *mere*-showing and vanishing. There is in appearance a moment of negativity...”¹ It is this moment of negativity and, therefore an immanent critique of appearance, that is absent from Husserl’s phenomenology of perception, where phenomenal presence is tantamount to pure positivity. Admittedly, adumbrated givenness means that in the appearing of phenomena something, including the appearing itself, does not appear, that several dimensions of the thing remain occluded, however temporarily, behind those that give themselves sight. Yet, the givenness of the noema, of the perceived as perceived, is complete and absolute, to the point of being translucent before the act of perceiving. There are no traces of “vanishing” in the appearing noema and, thus, there is no need to resort to the operations of signification, so as to “fill in the blanks” by interposing the sign in the place of the absent thing or parts of a thing. While, for Hegel, “to appear” or “to be a phenomenon” is “to become other in remaining self-identical [*sich-anderswerden in der Selbstgleichheit*],”² for Husserl, to appear is to establish a positive identity between the perceiving and the perceived in the present of intuition. But Hegel, too, is not beyond reproach: in the absoluteness of the absolute, in the identity of knowledge and will, in the becoming-rational of the actual and the becoming-actual of the rational, the otherness of phenomena is subsumed, as appearance and essence become one and the same. It is the role of the phenomenology of the in-between, the phenomenology of ontico-ontological difference, to maintain alive the promise of appearances that give themselves, even as something withdraws from their givenness. Heidegger’s own concept of truth as *aletheia*, or the giving withdrawal of being, will be best understood in the context of this phenomenology of the in-between.

A close and often quite sympathetic reconstruction of Hegel’s thinking in Heidegger’s texts and seminars of the 1930s and 1940s³ nevertheless leaves us with the conclusion that, taken separately, the two phenomenologies are inadequate when it comes to the entwined questions of beings and

¹ Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 109, 117.

² Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 75/107.

³ In addition to the two treated here, consult texts on negativity from 1938-9 and 1941-2, gathered in Volume 68 of the Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe*, selections from *Being and Truth*, courses on Hegel’s *Logic* and on logic in Aristotle and Hegel, as well as the recently published engagement with Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* in volume 86 of *Gesamtausgabe*.

of being. This rather symmetrical accusation is, of course, at odds with the conclusions of the 1923 course on ontology and hermeneutics, where Heidegger identified the saving grace of Husserl's philosophy with the kind of critique that is capable of cutting through the "sophistries" of the dialectic play with the form/content, finitude/infinity, and other distinctions. "It is," Heidegger observed then, "what the critical stance of phenomenology ultimately struggles against."¹ A decade later, the "critical stance" migrates to the region between the thought of Husserl and that of Hegel. Neither is fully adequate to the critical mission it claimed for itself: phenomenology of spirit makes phenomena dissipate in *logos*, while phenomenology of consciousness causes *logos* to melt into phenomena. Hegel is indicted for betraying the question of beings, *die Frage nach dem Seienden*, for triggering its sublation (*Aufhebung*),² not to mention the sublation of the beings themselves in being. Husserl stands accused of neglecting the question of being, bracketed or set aside in the course of phenomenological reduction that disengages pure consciousness from everything transcendent, all the while ontically relativizing the being of this consciousness. Phenomenology as an ontological (that is to say, an ontico-ontological) enterprise—in the role Heidegger allotted to it in *Being and Time*—does not come about in the exclusive privileging of phenomena or of *logos*. When *logos* is absolutized, "[t]here is no introduction to phenomenology, because there can be no introduction to phenomenology"³; when phenomena are prioritized, there is nothing but an introduction to phenomenology, a "preliminary conception" or a *Vor begriff*. Only in the suspended middle between the two (but are there only two?), in the space or spacing between the absence of introduction and relentless introduction, between *logos* and phenomena, between the one and the others, will the most basic question of ontology germinate.

¹ Heidegger, *Ontology*, 37.

² Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 41/60.

³ Heidegger, "Hegel's Concept of Experience," 154.