

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313556425>

The phenomenological reduction: from natural life to philosophical thought

Article · December 2016

DOI: 10.19079/metodo.4.2.311

CITATIONS

10

READS

2,501

1 author:



Rudolf Bernet

KU Leuven

149 PUBLICATIONS 891 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

The phenomenological reduction: from natural life to philosophical thought

Rudolf Bernet

Husserl Archives - KU Leuven*

rudolf.bernet@kuleuven.be

ABSTRACT. Phenomenologists continually discuss the nature of a phenomenological reduction that must continuously be performed anew. Before one can elucidate how a phenomenological epoché or reduction relates to an eidetic or transcendental reduction, one must clarify how philosophical thinking (in general) relates to natural life. The author claims that the relation between philosophical questions and questions belonging to natural life involves both continuity and a radical rupture. The phenomenological reduction concerns this rupture in both its negative and positive aspects: it liberates the philosopher from the constraints of a natural way of thinking and gives her new freedom to think speculatively (and not just describe) phenomenological phenomena. This freedom entails a new kind of responsibility that concerns both rigorous philosophical thinking and its relevance for natural life. When accounting for how phenomenological philosophy can possibly change natural life, one should keep in mind how the phenomenological reduction marks their difference.

* *Correspondence:* Rudolf Bernet – Husserl-Archives: Centre for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy, KU-Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Kardinaal Mercierplein 2 - box 3200, Belgium

‘What are you saying in your confession?’

‘What I said before: that I cannot afford to believe. That in my line of work one has to suspend belief. That belief is an indulgence, a luxury.

That it gets in the way.’

‘Really. Some of us would say the luxury we cannot afford is unbelief... [...] Unbelief – entertaining all possibilities, floating between opposites – is the mark of a leisurely existence [...].’

J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

1. Introduction

Why does the nature and meaning of the phenomenological reduction still raise so many discussions among phenomenologists? Is it because the reduction is a matter of personal experience or practice more than a true method? Is it because the theory of the phenomenological reduction belongs to a reflection that follows (different sorts of) practice rather than instituting and guiding it? Is it because phenomenologists fail to distinguish clearly between epoché, phenomenological reduction, eidetic reduction, and transcendental reduction? With these questions come other, more general questions: How does philosophical thought relate to natural life? Is philosophical thinking itself a (higher) form of life?

The very term “reduction” may be partially responsible for the disagreement on the essence of a phenomenological reduction. Although a philosophical reflection on the nature and meaning of natural life may require a suspension of its natural course, it seems that it cannot reasonably pursue the goal of reducing natural life to philosophy. Philosophical thought and natural life are different, and philosophy cannot abolish this difference. But it remains true that philosophers, after having ‘leaped’ out of natural life, most often desire to return to it with the wish of changing or reforming it. If

philosophical thought were to completely absorb natural life, then there would be nothing left for it to reform. There would also be no natural life left to protest against an abusive account of its meaning by philosophical speculation. Some phenomenologists have tried to get around the problem by limiting phenomenological philosophy to the task of just describing natural life as it shows itself, as a 'phenomenon'. However, this seems to be too little and not specific enough. Are not psychology, sociology, and especially literature, much better equipped for such a description than a phenomenological philosophy?

Other phenomenologists have claimed that it is precisely the task of the phenomenological reduction to first posit or originally institute the difference between philosophical thought and natural life as a (dialectical) difference. But does philosophical thought really originate in the decision to differ from natural life? Shouldn't one rather say that philosophical questions are already present in natural life? On the latter view, the task of phenomenology would then consist in pursuing the philosophical questioning of natural life in a more consequent and systematic way. The phenomenological reduction would then be a method designed to do just this. Again, one wonders whether this is not too little and whether it is specific enough. What becomes of the fundamental difference between philosophy and natural life when the phenomenological reduction is said to simply modify pre-given natural philosophical interests instead of raising new questions that are completely foreign to natural life?

The difference between *natural life* and philosophy is only half of what is at stake in the phenomenological reduction. One needs also to account for how the phenomenological reduction relates to *philosophy*. Does the phenomenological reduction already contain within itself the philosophical thoughts it allows for? If this is not the case and if the phenomenological reduction allows for different modes and styles of philosophical thought, then there may be as much difference between the act of a phenomenological reduction and philosophical thinking as there is between the phenomenological reduction and natural life. One should then say that, instead of being at the *origin* of a

phenomenological way of philosophical thinking, and instead of fully determining its *goal*, the phenomenological reduction opens a field that is situated *between* the beginning and the end of philosophy. On this view, the phenomenological reduction makes a new beginning for a philosophical questioning that has preceded it, and this new beginning does not fully prescribe the modes of philosophical thinking it allows for. To make a new beginning is both an exciting and a weighty task. On the one hand, the phenomenological reduction liberates the philosopher from the constraints of natural life and natural thinking; it gives him the new freedom of an open-ended problematic thinking. On the other hand, this new freedom burdens the philosopher with a heavy responsibility.

This is the view I defend in this article. I want to show that the phenomenological reduction establishes the rule and not the content of a new mode of philosophical thinking. Its rule requires the philosopher to think by herself and to think on the basis of her own experience of the way in which a phenomenological reduction allows new phenomena to show themselves from themselves. Making such a new beginning for philosophical thinking is neither a matter of pure activity nor pure passivity. Instead, the phenomenological reduction is the accomplishment of an act that responds to former interrogations, but in doing so, opens the way to new phenomena that it could not have foreseen. It is an act in which philosophical thought affirms its own freedom without claiming to be in complete possession of its *arché* or its *telos*. As such an act of freedom, the phenomenological reduction can never be fully *motivated* by what precedes it and by what may follow from it. To make a new beginning in philosophical thought without knowing in advance where it will lead, is an act of freedom that only a thinker's pronounced concern for integrity and responsibility can sufficiently motivate. It remains to be examined what allows a philosopher, eager to affirm the freedom of her thinking, to also bear the heavy responsibility that comes with it.

2. Questions in natural life and philosophical questions

Among the countless questions arising in natural life, which are those that lend themselves most readily to a philosophical reformulation and elaboration? One usually says that these are the questions concerning the meaning of what one experiences and of how one experiences it: What is the meaning of this thing, of such a human behavior, of the world we live in? Generally, these kinds of questions are prompted by the experience of a lack of meaning rather than of mere nonsense. As long as one doesn't face the uncertain or contradictory meaning of something, one has little reason to bother oneself with questions. This is to say that natural life, where most things go without saying and where meanings are normally taken for granted, generally asks few questions. The experience of a want of meaning and the ensuing activity of questioning *interrupt* the otherwise smooth stream of natural life. However, not all interruptions or hesitations are caused by a missing meaning. The surprise created by the appearance of an unexpected meaning or the marvel caused by an excess of meaning that one is unable to fully grasp, do the same. Yet, in all these natural experiences the questions are about meaning. One is thus inclined to conclude that the philosophical questioning, insofar as it has its origin in the experiences of natural life, must always concern meaning. The task of philosophy would then be to make explicit or criticize natural meanings and to provide for meanings that natural life cannot give itself.

What are the meanings that can potentially become problematic within natural life? Obviously, they pertain to the nature of things, but they pertain no less to the causes of things. They are also about events as much as about things. The question "why does this happen?" is at least as common as the question "what is this?" One wonders about the motive of an action or the cause of social, economic, or historical situations. One also wonders about the cause of natural phenomena—especially when they have a direct impact on daily life. Questions

about motives and causes still relate to meaning: theoretical and practical meaning. The little awareness natural life has of this distinction suggests that in natural life even theoretical questions commonly come up in practical circumstances. But are all questions in natural life of equal philosophical relevance? Only philosophy can tell, and it tells so on the basis of how it understands its own nature and procedures. We were thus right to suspect that the problem of how philosophical questions come out of natural questions may make us move in a circle. It is thus never just naturally and straightforwardly that natural life gives birth to philosophical thought.

How should we then understand the relation between a specifically *phenomenological* form of philosophy and natural life? Does phenomenology have a greater affinity with natural life than other philosophies? Paradoxically, those who make this claim are often those who want to exclude from phenomenology all questions concerning natural causes. For them, all questions raised by natural life about the causes of events belong to the sole competence of science. This hardly seems acceptable. Not only do these phenomenologists presuppose that questions concerning causes and questions concerning meanings are of an entirely different kind, but their concern for the purity of phenomenology also leads them to turn their back to all debates concerning causes (and effects). This would preclude any phenomenological investigation touching the crisis of European sciences, the causes (and effects) of violence and war, the causes (and effects) of the deterioration of our environment and climate change. It seems more reasonable to claim that there are different approaches to causality. Rather than handing all questions concerning causality over to the natural and human sciences, phenomenologists treat them differently. Provided phenomenology can make this difference in treatment clear, there would remain no natural questions that, in principle, fall outside of its competence. Phenomenologists would remain free to give priority to phenomena involving theoretical or practical meaning, but they would not be obliged to disregard all phenomena involving causal connections.

Our meditations on the relation between phenomenological philosophy and natural life leave us with more questions than answers. In addition to being circular or dialectical, their relation now also appears ambiguous and even contradictory. On the one hand, phenomenology is supposed to continue the questions of natural life and of the sciences. On the other hand, its treatment of these questions must be radically different. At least, we now understand better why the nature of the phenomenological reduction is and remains a question phenomenologists continue to discuss. This the more as the relation between phenomenology and natural life or science is itself subject to change. Natural life and its questions, the postulates of scientific research, cultural life and even philosophical thinking have changed over time and continue to change.

3. The phenomenological reduction as an act of destruction and the phenomenologist as an eternal beginner, burdened with an overwhelming responsibility

Let us summarize. On the one hand, a phenomenological philosophy is built on a threefold rupture: the interruptions in the continuous course of natural life which raise questions, the departure of phenomenology from the way natural life deals with these questions, and the distance phenomenology takes from the answers to these questions provided by the sciences. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that between natural life, the sciences and phenomenology there exists a relation of continuity and prolongation. Consequently, the *negative* task of the phenomenological reduction, which consists in a destruction of all natural certainties, is inseparable from the *positive* task, which consists in the construction of a better understanding of natural life and the sciences. Phenomenology criticizes the presuppositions of natural life and the sciences with the intention of reforming and transforming them. What phenomenology takes away

from natural life and the sciences with one hand is given back to them under a new form with the other hand. The work of the phenomenologist never benefits phenomenological philosophy alone.

What is it then that the phenomenological reduction takes away from the questions arising in natural life, and what does it add to them? A first phenomenologist will say that the phenomenological reduction suspends the natural belief in the existence of the world, that it changes worldly things and the world itself into phenomena for an intentional consciousness, and that it presents the meaning of these phenomena as the result of their constitution by a transcendental subject that has previously been purified from all empirical apperceptions. Another phenomenologist will say that the phenomenological reduction turns human beings away from their daily business with mundane things and persons and makes them examine their mode of being from the perspective of a care for the meaning of their own existence and its imbeddedness in the world.

One cannot discuss the value of these answers before having clarified the mode of questioning inaugurated by the phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological questioning differs from the questions of natural life, first, by its systematic and methodical character. While in natural life questions arise punctually at the occasion of an interruption of its normal course, the questioning of the phenomenologist is permanent. A second difference relates to the fact that in natural life questioning contains the expectation of an answer that would restore a lost continuity. The questioning of a phenomenological philosopher nourishes no such hope. Instead of seeking to restore an interrupted continuity and to overcome a lack of meaning, she endlessly raises new questions. Her questions also concern natural life in its entirety and the presuppositions of all sciences. The phenomenological philosopher destroys natural prejudices and beliefs without any intention of restoring them.

It is true that the destructions involved in the operation of a phenomenological reduction bear positive results and allow new phenomena to make their appearance. But it is no less true that the

accomplishment of a phenomenological reduction remains an unnatural and difficult task. To keep questioning, again and again anew, allows for no true continuity in the endeavor of the phenomenologist. Such a repetition without underlying or ensuing identity is the opposite not only of natural life but of all life *tout court*. Even a phenomenology that presents itself as a philosophy of life doesn't provide the phenomenologist with a continuous new mode of living. A phenomenologist who, at each instant, needs to accomplish anew the act of a phenomenological reduction, remains, as Husserl said, an eternal beginner. Can one say that this lack of continuity in her life is compensated by the continuity of her philosophical thought? Can there be a progressive development of thought where the inaugural gesture of an interrogative thinking needs to be accomplished anew at every instant? Husserl was well aware of this difficulty and one must understand his conception of phenomenology as rigorous science as an attempt to surmount it. Phenomenological science would thus save phenomenological thinking from the danger of falling apart in an infinite repetition of its inaugural act of the phenomenological reduction.

Does Husserl's idea of a *phenomenological science* succeed in turning all impossibilities that weigh on a phenomenological mode of thinking into manageable possibilities? We need to know more about the nature of this phenomenological science before we can decide. It is already clear, however, that this science cannot ease the *difficulties* inherent in the effectuation of a phenomenological reduction. To begin anew, again and again, remains difficult and requires courage. Every phenomenologist needs to do so for herself and in absolute solitude—despite the fact that her solitary act of a phenomenological reduction involves a *responsibility* for all human beings. Phenomenologists can share the results of the reduction, but not its implementation. The phenomenological reduction is an act of absolute personal freedom and liberation from the constraints and prejudices of our common natural and social life. The personal responsibility that comes with this absolute freedom is just as absolute. We all like freedom better than

the responsibility that follows from it, and one can well understand that phenomenologists have often sought to reduce the overwhelming weight of their absolute personal responsibility. Unfortunately, phenomenology as a rigorous science is of no help for this. Nobody knew this better than Husserl who accepted during his entire career, with admirable courage and occasional despair, the absolute responsibility of a phenomenological philosopher for the future of mankind.

Where can one turn one's head when one is less courageous or more reluctant to become a sort of Fichtean phenomenologist? Clearly, in order to avoid unlimited responsibility one needs to reconsider the nature of the phenomenological reduction as an act of absolute personal freedom. One can try to do so by looking into the motives on which the free act of a phenomenological reduction depends. Unfortunately, we have, so far, been unable to find a true external motivation for the accomplishment of a phenomenological reduction. Quite to the contrary! We have become convinced that the questions of natural life can at best serve as an *occasion* for the performance of a phenomenological reduction but never as a compelling motivation. Such a motivation would be in contradiction with our understanding of the phenomenological reduction as an act of radical rupture. For the same reason, one can also not claim that an act of a phenomenological reduction can be sufficiently motivated by a preceding, similar act. Because each act of a phenomenological reduction is totally new, different and original, it cannot be the mere consequence or continuation of a former act of reduction.

There remains, however, the possibility to conceive the freedom of the act of a phenomenological reduction and the ensuing responsibility of the phenomenologist *as a response to an insistent external appeal*. Where can such an insistent appeal come from? Does it come from other, more advanced phenomenologists? But what legitimacy can their appeal have besides that which is provided by the phenomena themselves? However, these can only be phenomenological phenomena, namely phenomena that have been

allowed to show forth through an act of a phenomenological reduction. Does this not mean that the appeal to perform a phenomenological reduction presupposes that it has already taken place? Not necessarily! The phenomena disclosed by a phenomenological reduction can announce themselves before they are actually given. One must then try to understand how the appeal of phenomenological phenomena can be heard before they become present and before one knows how to approach them. The appeal to an act of phenomenological reduction would then present itself in the form of a sign, a token or a promise of a future gift. To put it otherwise, the act of the phenomenological reduction must be preceded by a formal indication of its future results. In both formulations, the phenomenological reduction becomes a responsive act in which the phenomenologist listens to an appeal that comes from where she is invited or called to go. Both formulations remind us of Heidegger and of his particular sensitivity to circular paths of thinking. Circularity is Heidegger's alternative to Hegelian dialectics. Unlike the circularity we have encountered in the relation between natural life and phenomenological thinking, this new circularity leads us into the very heart of all philosophical endeavors. It is not about what comes before but what lies beyond philosophical thought. The free act of a phenomenological reduction and the ensuing responsibility of the phenomenologist cannot be absolute because they depend on a condition of possibility that is not a ground to stand on but an abyss.

4. The phenomenological reduction as an act of construction: empirical, eidetic, transcendental and existential phenomenology

Our reflections have led us to understand the phenomenological reduction as an act of personal freedom and responsive responsibility that breaks with the course of natural life. The result of this radical

rupture is both negative and positive. On the one hand, phenomenology questions all the convictions that support natural life—even in its interrogations. It does so at each instant anew and differently. On the other hand, the phenomenological reduction makes everything in natural life look differently. It does so not once and for all, but progressively, step by step. The discontinuity in the accomplishment of the acts of a phenomenological reduction doesn't prevent the phenomenologist from making progress in his exploration of the essence of the new phenomena disclosed by these acts. He also makes progress in his understanding of particular phenomenological phenomena and of what makes them possible. Finally, he makes progress in his forming new concepts that match the different phenomenological phenomena and their conditions of possibility. In doing so, he practices and investigates a new kind of experience that is related to a new kind of phenomena. Natural life has no idea of this mode of experience and of these phenomenological phenomena.

Is this sufficient to affirm, as some phenomenologists have done, that phenomenology tries to think nothing else than what, inside of natural life, has remained unthought? Such a view seems to be in contradiction with what we said about the phenomenological reduction as operating through a radical rupture with natural life. It seems also to involve a confusion between natural and phenomenological phenomena as well as between their respective conditions of possibility. Phenomenological philosophy cannot be restricted to the task of making explicit the implicit conditions of possibility of natural life. Its ambitions stretch beyond the explication of natural life. Phenomenological philosophy introduces a new mode of experience of a new kind of phenomena, and a new mode of thinking of their conditions of possibility. A presentation of the phenomenological reduction in its negative and positive aspect must remain attentive to this.

Negatively, the phenomenological reduction questions, and in its questioning suspends the validity of the very basis of all natural life. For Husserl, natural life presupposes that the world in which we live

exists in itself, independently of all human experience. Natural life also has the tendency to understand human beings and their experience of worldly things as worldly entities or events and as naturally caused facts. Whether natural life understands this experience in terms of conscious mental facts or not, is of lesser importance. Instead of understanding natural life in terms of beliefs, representations or other mental events, one can also understand it with Heidegger in the more practical terms of a busy concern with daily tasks. In his view, what the phenomenological reduction destructs, then becomes the way in which natural life understands things and the human involvement with them on the basis of its busy concerns. The assumptions of natural life being always already determined by all kinds of theories, the destructive work of the phenomenological reduction also applies to these naïve theories.

Positively, what is then the result of the phenomenological reduction? Husserl claims that in the phenomenological reduction nothing is lost and that everything remains—but differently, with a ‘change of sign’, with a new meaning. The phenomenological reduction strips all *things* of the garment of our prejudices and theories and allows them to show themselves as they truly are in themselves. It also allows them to appear to *us* without loading this ‘we’ with the weight of our mundane, psychological or naturalistic apprehensions. For Husserl, this means that everything becomes a pure phenomenon for a pure consciousness. A pure consciousness is an intentional consciousness that the phenomenologist has reduced to its capacity to relate to pure phenomena and to take them as they are in themselves—without adding anything to them. Even if a phenomenological science and philosophy have greater ambitions than the mere description of a static correlation between pure intentional acts and their pure noematic phenomena, this remains the basis on which they are built. Heidegger objected that Husserl’s conception of this pure consciousness leaves its ontological status and its owner strangely under- or overdetermined. But the early Heidegger remained faithful to the Husserlian conception of an essential correlation between the

mode of experience and the mode of givenness of the phenomena one experiences. How things appear or show themselves depends essentially on how we approach them and comport ourselves towards them. Husserl's and Heidegger's path diverge only when they move into what one could call the constructive moment of a phenomenological philosophy.

For Husserl, the phenomenologist must grasp the phenomena and the intentional consciousness of them in their essential and necessary constituents. It is the task of an *eidetic reduction*, built on the phenomenological reduction, to reduce all the different, punctual experiences of an intentional correlation to their specific kinds. This eidetic reduction eliminates, in the descriptions of the phenomenologist, all contingent moments that relate to how an individual pure phenomenon is given in a particular momentary intentional act. But it doesn't eliminate the consideration of how a pure phenomenon can, in general, attract the attention of a pure ego that subsequently actively turns to it. Eidetic phenomenology also analyses how acts of pure consciousness have gradually become familiar with a certain kind of approach to certain types of pure phenomena. The study of the processes of an awakening of intentional acts and of their sedimentation into cognitive habits or styles of experience still belongs to the program of an eidetic phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenologist remains attentive to the *passivity* of pure consciousness and to the genesis of intentional correlations. Eidetic phenomenology can be a *genetic* phenomenology. Husserl's version of a (transcendental-) phenomenological foundation of formal logic owes a great deal to such a genetic phenomenology. But the field of a genetic phenomenology stretches well beyond the foundation of formal logic. It includes the investigation of the laws governing the awakening of intentional acts, of the dynamic interweaving between intentional acts and their horizons, of the influence of drives and interests on acts of cognition, of the sedimentation of acquired knowledge and of the formation of habitual apperceptions, etc. Genetic phenomenology allows for the study of complex mental

systems in their interaction with the open-ended complexity of the world.

This being said, nothing, in principle, forces the phenomenologist to move from the phenomenological reduction to an eidetic reduction, and from the eidetic reduction to a transcendental reduction. Husserl admits this explicitly. Large portions of his (published and especially unpublished) work are in the field of a non-transcendental eidetic phenomenological psychology or even of what he unambiguously calls a non-eidetic empirical phenomenology. If nothing forces the phenomenologist to perform an eidetic and a transcendental reduction of the pure phenomena of an intentional correlation, what then invites him to do so? For an eidetic phenomenology, the main motive seems to be a certain conception of phenomenology as science. For a transcendental reduction, the main motive seems to be a certain conception of phenomenology as philosophy.

As a *science* capable of formulating laws that necessarily apply to all or to some kinds of pure phenomena, phenomenology must deal with the essence of the acts of intentional consciousness and their noematic correlates. *Eidetic* phenomenology is thus a science that investigates, with the aim of formulating necessary general laws, the necessary constituents, the temporal emergence and decline, and the different levels of correlation between an intentional act and its intended object. Husserl has given most of his attention to an eidetic phenomenology of the mind. But besides his pure phenomenological psychology he has also worked out the program and the beginnings of a phenomenology of nature and of a practical or axiological phenomenology of ethical and religious life.

As a *philosophy, transcendental* phenomenology aims at giving the different modes of an intentional correlation between pure consciousness and its intentional objects an epistemological and ontological foundation. The question is not any longer to decide, on the basis of the general laws formulated by an eidetic phenomenology, whether a certain type of intentional correlation is meaningful or not. In transcendental phenomenology the focus shifts to the conditions of

true intentional correlations. Transcendental phenomenology transforms the question of the content or meaning of intentional acts into a question concerning the being true of the act and its intentional correlate. Intentional meaning thus becomes the meaning of being (“*Seinssinn*” in Husserl’s vocabulary)—where ‘being’ means the validity or being-true of the act’s position of the true-being of real, imaginary or ideal objects. The main task of transcendental phenomenology is to explore how such a being-true of intentional acts and true-being of their objective correlates can be obtained. For Husserl, the only possible truth-makers are the intuitive intentional experiences of a transcendental ego. In its intuitive intentional acts the transcendental ego ‘constitutes’ the true meaning of being for all kinds of objects. Through the manifold of its intuitive intentional acts or of its pure subjective phenomena, the transcendental ego constitutes the meaning of being of a same object or unitary objective phenomenon. Furthermore, while the meaning of being true depends, for all intentional objects, on a transcendently constituting consciousness, the meaning of being true depends, for this transcendental consciousness, only on itself. Consequently, only the acts of a transcendental ego can have a meaning of being that is absolute. The claim that the being-true of all other beings is relative to and depends on the absolute being of a true-making transcendental consciousness, is at the core of Husserl’s phenomenological idealism.

Phenomenology thus becomes a transcendental philosophy by transforming pure intentional consciousness into a transcendental consciousness that constitutes the meaning of being of all phenomena: things, world, ideal objects, and even transcendental consciousness itself. Transcendental phenomenology investigates the conditions of possibility of the being-true of all phenomena through an analysis of the intentional correlation between absolute and relative phenomenological phenomena. The conditions of possibility of the true being of objective phenomena are provided by other, subjective phenomena of experience. For Husserl, unlike Kant, transcendental philosophy never moves beyond the realm of (admittedly different

sorts of) phenomena of experience. Husserl also makes room, in his transcendental phenomenology, for an absolute consciousness that constitutes the meaning of being of its intentional objects by means of *passive syntheses*. Enriched by the results of a genetic phenomenology, Husserl's idealism involves the insight that transcendently constituting conscious experiences can be both absolute and relative to other experiences that have made them possible. Genetic phenomenology transforms Husserl's transcendental idealism into a non-foundational sort of idealism. In addition, only a genetic transcendental phenomenology is sufficiently equipped to deal with the problems of a philosophy of history and its transcendently meaningful facts.

It is not by mere chance that the question concerning the meaning of being of the *world* appears only when Husserl moves into transcendental phenomenology. Only with the examination of the world as phenomenon (instead of as presupposed reality), does the phenomenological analysis of the intentional correlation reach its full potential. The consideration of a vertical dependence of the meaning of being of all objective phenomena on a constituting subjective transcendental consciousness is now completed by the consideration of their horizontal dependence on the phenomenon of world—a phenomenon that is neither purely objective nor purely subjective. Husserl was rather slow to discover to what a large extent the pre-giveness of the meaning of the life-world co-determines the meaning of all objective phenomena. In the realm of a genetic transcendental phenomenology the former thought-experiment of an 'annihilation' of the world becomes totally implausible and irrelevant. Instead, a new hypothesis emerges: that the world shared by a community of transcendental subjects may have its share in the constitution of the meaning of the objective phenomenological phenomena. In such a view, the world gains a transcendental meaning, and transcendental consciousness is intimately bound to the world. It is not unprecedented that a position that was first strongly rejected by Husserl later became the subject of his most intensive and his most original meditations.

5. Against the trivialization of the phenomenological reduction: to see and to think phenomenological phenomena

We have said that nothing forces the phenomenologist to move beyond the pure phenomena disclosed by a phenomenological reduction and to consider them in the frame of an eidetic phenomenological science or a transcendental phenomenological philosophy. In the history of the phenomenological movement, one can find many examples of phenomenologists who have promoted an eidetic science and rejected *transcendental phenomenology and especially transcendental-phenomenological idealism*. There are also phenomenologists who committed themselves to transcendental phenomenology while rejecting the concept of a *constitution* of meaning by pure *consciousness*. In principle, nothing, in the nature of the phenomenological reduction, excludes the possibility of a purely eidetic phenomenology or of an empirical transcendental phenomenology.

Is this to say that there are as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenological phenomena, as many phenomenological phenomena as there are kinds of phenomenological reduction, and as many phenomenological reductions as there are sorts of phenomenologists? At this rate, anyone who radically questions the beliefs and certainties of natural life and who, on the basis of this suspension or epoché, allows new phenomena to show themselves would be a phenomenologist. Is it acceptable to call Francis Bacon a phenomenologist, just because he destroys the clichés of our natural perceptions and renders visible, in his paintings, the phenomenon of the sensations bodies have when they are exposed to external forces? Are Kandinsky's paintings phenomenological because through quasi-musical correspondences between different colors or between colors and abstract dynamic lines they disclose the invisible phenomena of affects or emotions? Does Cézanne become a (genetic) phenomenologist by suspending the use of recognizable forms and by

painting the way in which the phenomenon of a mountain rises out of juxtaposed patches of color? Some phenomenologists have not hesitated to say so.

It seems that one must carefully avoid the double danger of either trivializing or overestimating the results of a phenomenological reduction. *On the one hand*, not every suspension of the processes of natural life, even when it is total and systematic, represents an act of phenomenological reduction. To claim this would amount to a *trivialization* of the power of a phenomenological reduction. We have seen that in the phenomenological reduction the movement of suspension or destruction of natural life goes together with a tentative anticipation not only of new phenomenological phenomena but also of new modes of philosophical thinking. This is what makes the operation of a phenomenological reduction circular. Furthermore, the phenomenological phenomena disclosed by a phenomenological reduction are not only to be *seen*, they are also to be conceptually *thought* by the phenomenologist. *On the other hand*, the phenomenological phenomena disclosed by a phenomenological reduction do not prescribe or contain in themselves how they must be philosophically thought. To claim this would amount to an *overestimation* of the power of a phenomenological reduction. We have, quite to the contrary, come to the conclusion that the operation of a phenomenological reduction opens many different paths and modes of a philosophical thinking. A phenomenologist remains largely free in how she wants to think the pure phenomena produced by a phenomenological reduction. Largely free, but not entirely free. Also, the freedom and the responsibility in the accomplishment of a phenomenological reduction are not exactly the same as the freedom and the responsibility of a phenomenological thinking. Even if it is true that neither of them is absolute, the freedom in the performance of a phenomenological reduction is greater than the freedom in the thinking of phenomenological phenomena. In each case the responsibility of the phenomenologist is heavy, but in each case it is different. When accomplishing a phenomenological reduction the

phenomenologist takes responsibility vis-à-vis the natural life of mankind, when philosophically thinking the phenomenologist takes responsibility vis-à-vis phenomenological phenomena and other phenomenologists. In both cases, the responsibility has a responsive character, but in the latter case the response submits itself to the further obligation to remain truly faithful to the phenomena.

We have argued that to philosophically think the phenomenological phenomena cannot mean that the phenomenological philosopher just explicates the immanent logos of the phenomena of natural life. Of course this is not to deny that the natural phenomena have a meaning of their own and that the phenomenologist must remain attentive to this meaning. We have only wanted to stress that the main work of a phenomenological philosopher consists in giving a new meaning to new phenomena and in conceptually articulating this new meaning. A philosophical thinking must also be true, and for a phenomenological thinking conceptual truth rests on the experience of the evidence of the phenomena. What kind of truth and evidence is this? The truth of a thinking that consists in remaining faithful to the evident givenness of the essence of the phenomena—as suggested by an eidetic phenomenology? The truth of a creative philosophical thinking that provides the evidently given phenomenological phenomena with a new dimension of depth—as claimed by Husserl's transcendental phenomenology? The truth of a philosophical understanding that transforms the all too evident ontic meaning of the phenomena into an ontological meaning—as suggested by the early Heidegger? The diversity of these questions and of the answers they have received throughout the history of phenomenology illustrates well that the meaning of the phenomenological concept of evidence is ambiguous. To make a claim on evidence can mean that the phenomenological thinker remains faithful to the phenomenological phenomena and to how they show themselves from themselves. It can also mean that she lets these phenomena appear in a new light and in relation with formerly invisible phenomena. Phenomenologists can think phenomena they *have already seen*, and they can think in order to bring

new meanings and new phenomena to appearance, *to make them be seen*. The more rich and ambiguous the meaning of the phenomena, the more need there is for a phenomenological truth resting on a creative mode of bringing to evidence and the less excuse for its limitation to a mere representation of a pre-given mode of evidence.

6. Conclusion: the liberation of natural life by the phenomenological reduction

How one understands the task of a phenomenological philosopher bears consequences for how one conceives of her contribution to *natural life*. If by the performance of a phenomenological reduction the phenomenologist leaps out of natural life, then her return from philosophical thinking into natural life must also be a kind of jump. The rupture between natural life and phenomenological philosophy is irreducible, and it works in both ways. Phenomenological thinking can neither be reduced to the task of making explicit the hidden meaning of natural life, nor can it directly change the conditions of natural life. The questions raised by philosophically thinking phenomenologists are not the same as the questions raised by people when they are confronted, in the normal course of their natural life, with the experience of a lack or loss of meaning. Their answers, too, differ, and the answers provided by the philosophers never directly solve the problems of people absorbed in natural life. Consequently, phenomenological thinking is unable to provide a "world-view" that tells people, disoriented by the disorders in their world and the inhuman behavior of their fellow men, how to give a new meaning to their life. *Husserl* thought that becoming a world-view would make phenomenology dependent on particular empirical circumstances and thereby jeopardize its possibility of being an absolute and rigorous *eidetic* science. *We* have good reason to believe that to become a world-view would be in contradiction with the nature of phenomenology as a mode of *philosophical thinking*.

The rupture between phenomenology and *natural science* is no less radical than the rupture of phenomenology with natural life. If the program of a “naturalization of phenomenology” amounts to an attempt to transform its mode of thinking in such a way that it can be usefully and directly integrated into scientific thinking and experimenting, then this is just as mistaken as turning phenomenology into a world-view. Both projects betray the very nature of philosophical thinking. While it belongs to the vocation of a phenomenological philosophy to have an impact on natural life and on scientific theories, it must remain what it truly is in itself. Phenomenology cannot fruitfully contribute to a change in natural life and in science by giving up all transcendental thought or all care for the meaning of being. To make a fruitful change, philosophy must also respect the inner constraints belonging to natural life and to scientific practices, i.e. what it cannot change in them. The vocation of philosophy is incompatible with the status of either servant or king to natural life. This becomes all the more clear when one turns from the impact of philosophy on natural life and science to its specific influence on *politics*. It is needless to rehearse here the long history of the political hubris and blindness of philosophers—a history that casts its shadow on philosophical thinking from Plato to Heidegger and beyond.

How can a phenomenological philosophy then remain faithful to its vocation to change natural life, science and politics without exaggerated humility or arrogance, and without betraying its own nature? How can the freedom of philosophical thinking be transmitted and contribute to a liberation of natural life and science? If philosophical thinking is and remains forever different from the thinking of natural life and science, then it can only change natural life and science *by contrast* and not by adaptation or assimilation. It is precisely because the conditions of possibility of phenomenological phenomena are different from the conditions of possibility of natural phenomena that phenomenology can let natural life appear in a new light. Phenomenology changes how things look to us in natural life; it

modifies their meaning. It mainly does so by opening, within natural life, the realm of *new possibilities*. These new possibilities phenomenology offers natural life come from philosophical thinking and concern *how natural life thinks about itself*. Thinking differently makes a big change in the way one lives one's natural life, but it doesn't transform natural life into a philosophical life. What phenomenology can teach natural life is to think of its confirmed facts and constraints in terms of *mere possibilities*. This gives natural life the new freedom to *criticize* present or former ways of leading one's life and to *imagine* alternative ways of organizing one's life—both one's personal and social life. By confronting the habitual course of natural life and its settled schematic apprehensions and clichés with new possibilities, philosophical imagination liberates natural life from the iron collar of objectivism, naturalism and the pretended necessity of empirical facts. Unlike a simple world-view, a phenomenological philosophy changes natural life in a non prescriptive or normative way. Phenomenology changes natural life by awakening its hidden resources for an imaginative and creative mode of thinking. Phenomenological philosophy does not have a monopoly on such a liberation of natural life. Arts, and especially literature, do this as well and often even better. But only philosophy can change natural life without the help of any other means than creative conceptual thinking.