

# Husserl's transcendental philosophy and the critique of naturalism

Dermot Moran

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**Abstract** Throughout his career, Husserl identifies *naturalism* as the greatest threat to both the sciences and philosophy. In this paper, I explicate Husserl's overall diagnosis and critique of naturalism and then examine the specific *transcendental* aspect of his critique. Husserl agreed with the Neo-Kantians in rejecting naturalism. He has three major critiques of naturalism: First, it (like *psychologism* and for the same reasons) is 'countersensical' in that it denies the very ideal laws that it needs for its own justification. Second, naturalism essentially misconstrues consciousness by treating it as a part of the world. Third, naturalism is the inevitable consequence of a certain rigidification of the 'natural attitude' into what Husserl calls the 'naturalistic attitude'. This naturalistic attitude 'reifies' and it 'absolutizes' the world such that it is treated as taken-for-granted and 'obvious'. Husserl's transcendental phenomenological analysis, however, discloses that the natural attitude is, despite its omnipresence in everyday life, not primary, but in fact is relative to the 'absolute' transcendental attitude. The mature Husserl's critique of naturalism is therefore based on his acceptance of the *absolute priority of the transcendental attitude*. The paradox remains that we must start from and, in a sense, return to the natural attitude, while, at the same time, restricting this attitude through the on-going transcendental vigilance of the universal *epoché*.

**Keywords** Husserl · Naturalism · Natural attitude · Transcendental philosophy · *epoché*

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D. Moran (✉)  
University College Dublin, Dublin 4, Ireland  
e-mail: dermot.moran@ucd.ie

## 1 Husserl's life-long engagement with naturalism

Throughout his career, from the *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901 (hereafter LU), where his specific target is named as ‘psychologism’)<sup>1</sup> to the *Crisis of European Sciences* (first 2 sections originally published in *Philosophia* in 1936, hereafter ‘*Crisis*’),<sup>2</sup> Husserl continually identifies *naturalism* as the greatest threat to the possibility of a genuinely grounded science and of genuine philosophy. Indeed, he believed that naturalism was not just a philosophical error but even threatened the preservation of genuine human values and the possibility of living a fully rational, communal life.

In this paper, I shall outline Husserl's overall diagnosis of naturalism and focus in particular on the transcendental aspect of Husserl's critique.<sup>3</sup> This critique has three phases. First, Husserl argues that naturalism (like *psychologism* and for the same reasons) is ‘countersensical’ (*widersinnig*), i.e. it is involved in a performative self-contradiction when it explicitly repudiates the very ideal laws that it requires for its own articulation and justification. Similarly, naturalism inevitably fails in its attempt to reduce validity to factuality. Second, Husserl proposes that naturalism essentially misconstrues and mischaracterizes the irreducibly *intentional* nature of consciousness. The project of naturalistic *objectivism* (see *Crisis* § 14) and the ‘naturalization of consciousness’ (*Naturalisierung des Bewusstseins*, see ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’, hereafter ‘PRS’)<sup>4</sup> misconstrue egoic consciousness by treating it as a residue item or ‘tag-end’ (*Endchen der Welt, Cartesian Meditations* § 10)<sup>5</sup> within the world, rather than recognising subjectivity as a transcendental condition for the possibility of objectivity and worldhood as such. As Husserl writes in the *Crisis*:

Only a radical inquiry back into subjectivity—and specifically the subjectivity which *ultimately* brings about all world-validity, with its content and in all its prescientific and scientific modes, and into the “what” and the “how” of the rational accomplishments—can make objective truth comprehensible and

<sup>1</sup> Husserl (1975b) §§ 17–51). The second volume is published in two volumes as *Husserliana* XIX/1 and XIX/2, ed. Ursula Panzer (1984), trans. John Findlay (2001). Hereafter ‘LU’ followed by the Investigation number, paragraph number and pagination of English translation (vol. 1 = **I**; vol. 2 = **II**), followed by *Husserliana* volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> The critical edition of the *Crisis* was published as Husserl (1954), trans. David Carr (1970). Hereafter ‘*Crisis*’ followed by English pagination and *Husserliana* (hereafter ‘Hua’) volume and page number.

<sup>3</sup> Earlier versions of the paper were presented to the Philosophy Colloquia at Northwestern University (27 January 06), The New School for Social Research (23 February 06), King's College London (15 March 06) and the 36th Meeting of the Husserl Circle, Wellesley College (22 June 06). I am grateful to commentators for their comments including Cristina Lafont, Tom McCarthy, Steve Crowell and Tom Nenon.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl (2002a, pp. 249–295); originally *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Kultur* 1 (1910–1911), pp. 289–341 (reprinted in *Husserliana* vol. XXV). Hereafter ‘PRS’ with Brainard pagination, followed by German pagination of original.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl (1931). The German text was not published until 1950 as *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, hrsg. Stephan Strasser, *Husserliana* I (1950), trans. D. Cairns as *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1960). Hereafter ‘CM’ followed by page number of English translation, and *Husserliana* volume and page number.

arrive at the ultimate ontic meaning (*Seinssinn*) of the world. Thus it is not the being of the world as unquestioned, taken for granted, which is primary in itself; ... rather what is primary in itself is subjectivity, understood as that which naïvely pre-gives the being of the world and then rationalizes or (what is the same thing) objectifies it. (*Crisis* § 14, p. 69; VI 70)

Husserl's third strategy involves an even more explicitly transcendental move that can only be understood within the context of his explicit adoption of *transcendental idealism* around 1907/1908. According to this view, naturalism is portrayed as an inevitable consequence of a certain rigidification of the 'natural attitude' (*die natürliche Einstellung*, *Ideas* I § 27) into what he calls the 'naturalistic attitude' (see for instance *Ideas* II § 49). Already in PRS Husserl acknowledges the hold of naturalism on our intuitions:

It is not easy for us to overcome the primeval habit of living and thinking in the naturalistic attitude and thus of naturalistically falsifying the psychical. (PRS, p. 271; 314)

The 'spell of the naturalistic attitude' and 'primeval naturalism' prevent us from grasping the psychical as such and indeed, in general, from seeing essences. Husserl's point is that 'nature' itself rather than being a brute given must rather be understood as itself the *correlate* of a specific attitude—the natural attitude. The natural attitude (called the 'empirical attitude' or the 'attitude of experience' in his 1910/1911 *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, see §§ 7, 9<sup>6</sup>), despite its indispensability in everyday human life, is essentially 'one-sided' and 'closed' (*Crisis*, p. 205; VI 209) because it fails to recognise its own nature as an *attitude* (*Einstellung*) which is much more than one psychological state among others. In fact, as Husserl's transcendental phenomenological analysis purports to disclose, the natural attitude itself is, despite its omnipresence and everydayness, *relative* to the 'absolute' transcendental attitude. The mature Husserl's critique of naturalism is therefore based on his acceptance of the *absolute priority of the transcendental attitude*. This leads Husserl into some explicitly thematized paradoxes, specifically: how human consciousness is both 'in the world' and 'for the world' as he puts it in *Crisis* § 53.

A persistent trait of twentieth-century Continental philosophy has been its resolute *anti-naturalism*. In this respect, Husserl must be credited with great prescience for—very early on—diagnosing *naturalism* as the dominant philosophical position of the twentieth century, one that demands both careful descriptive attention and also 'radical critique' (PRS, pp. 253, 293), which he interprets (as Heidegger too will do in *Being and Time*) as a 'positive critique in terms of foundations and methods'. When Husserl speaks of naturalism, he specifically has in mind late the nineteenth-century versions, espoused, for instance, by Auguste Comte and Ernst Mach, but he also traces naturalism back to the beginnings of

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<sup>6</sup> See Husserl (2006).

modern philosophy, especially Hobbes, Locke, Hume (somewhat ambiguously since Hume is also, for Husserl, a proto-transcendental philosopher),<sup>7</sup> ‘and a naturalised Kant’. Gradually he extended the term ‘naturalism’ to cover every ‘objectivistic philosophy’ (*Crisis*, § 56, p. 194; VI 197) that had sprung up in response to the extraordinary progress in the natural sciences. By 1912–1913 Husserl was explicitly criticizing naturalism from an explicitly ‘philosophical’ and indeed ‘transcendental’ point of view, in that it is seduced by the spirit of unquestioning (‘naïve’) acceptance of the world that permeates the natural attitude, leading to the ‘reification’ (*Verdinglichung*) of the world, and its ‘philosophical absolutizing’ (*Verabsolutierung*, *Ideas I*, § 55, p. 129; Hua III/1 107).<sup>8</sup> Naturalism (and ‘objectivism’) which begins from the presumption of a given ‘ready-made world’ is opposed to transcendentalism which Husserl characterizes as follows:

Transcendentalism, on the other hand, says: the ontic meaning (*der Seinssinn*) of the pre-given life-world is a subjective structure (*subjektives Gebilde*), it is the achievement (*Leistung*) of experiencing, prescientific life. (*Crisis* § 14, p. 69; VI 70)

For Husserl, naturalism came about due to the success of modern science. It embraces the view that the methods of the natural sciences provide the only road to truth; as Husserl says: ‘the naturalist ... sees nothing but nature and first and foremost physical nature’ (PRS, p. 253; 294). Interestingly, in Germany in Husserl’s day, the debate about naturalism involved also the issue of whether the methods of natural science were sufficient or whether they needed to be supplemented by the separate methodologies of the cultural sciences or *Geisteswissenschaften* (Dilthey, Rickert).<sup>9</sup> Indeed Husserl, in his ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’ (1910/1911) paper, is not satisfied merely to criticise naturalism in favour of embracing a cultural-sciences approach. In fact, he is equally vigorous in criticising historicism (Dilthey—without naming him) as itself being caught up in the same snare as naturalism, and as also leading to sceptical relativism.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Husserl speaks of Hume’s ‘naturalized sensualism, which could see only a collection of data floating in an insubstantial void’ in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* § 100; see Husserl (1974a, p. 227); trans. D. Cairns as *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1969, p. 257). Hereafter ‘FTL’ followed by the page number of the English translation and the volume and page number of the Husserliana edition. Husserl also sees Hume as a transcendental thinker (*Erste Philosophie I*, Husserl (1965), Hua VII 176) and even thinks the transcendental motif was kept alive in a strange way even in Mill, and especially in Avenarius (*Crisis*, p. 195; VI 198).

<sup>8</sup> See later Hua XXXIV 258, where Husserl (2002b) accuses anthropologism of ‘falsely absolutizing a positivistic world’.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of naturalism in the twentieth century, see Keil (2008).

<sup>10</sup> This technique of diagnosing a common failure under opposing intellectual systems is regularly exploited by Hilary Putnam—who himself is a great admirer of Husserl in this regard. Putnam is one of the most relentless critics of reductive *naturalism*, a position he formerly espoused (under the influence of Quine among others). The project of a naturalistic scientific metaphysics is *disastrous*, for Putnam, because it is in essence a reductive *scientism*, ‘one of the most dangerous contemporary tendencies’, leading ultimately to *scepticism* and the destruction of the human point of view. This is almost an exact repetition of Husserl’s views in the *Crisis* and Putnam like Husserl points to Galilean science as a major culprit. See Putnam (1983, p. 211).

Already in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl had been a critic of naturalism (in the guise of *psychologism*) without actually naming it, but, when he moved from Göttingen to Freiburg—the home of Southwest Neo-Kantianism—he joined forces with the Kantians in attacking the common enemy. Thus, for instance, in a letter dated 20 December 1915, addressed to the leading Neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert, Husserl commented that he found himself in alliance with German idealism against ‘our common enemy’ (*als unseren gemeinsamen Feind*)—the ‘naturalism of our time’.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, and somewhat earlier, the Neo-Kantian Jonas Cohn had written to Husserl in 1911, after his *Logos* article appeared, to emphasise their broad agreement concerning their ‘battle-position’ (*Kampfstellung*) against naturalism and historicism’.<sup>12</sup>

Husserl's most extensive critique of naturalism is developed within an explicitly transcendental idealist approach. Thus, in the *Crisis*, despite his former antipathy to German idealism of a speculative kind, Husserl acknowledges that transcendental idealism is the only philosophy to have successfully resisted the lure of naturalism (*Crisis*, p. 337; VI 271). True phenomenology must become a resolutely anti-naturalistic ‘pure’ or ‘transcendental’ (the terms are equivalent in *Ideas I*) science of subjectivity, focusing on the essential nature of epistemic achievements, avoiding mischaracterizing this subjectivity in ‘worldly’ or ‘mundane’ terms. Husserl insists in the Fourth Cartesian Meditation: ‘phenomenology is *eo ipso* “transcendental idealism”, though in a fundamentally and essentially new sense’ (CM § 41, p. 86; Hua I 118). And he continues:

*The proof of this idealism is therefore phenomenology itself.* Only someone who misunderstands either the deepest sense of intentional method, or that of transcendental reduction, or perhaps both, can attempt to separate phenomenology from transcendental idealism. (CM § 41, p. 86; Hua I 119)

This rigorous attempt to contain naturalism within transcendental idealism leads the late Husserl into some paradoxes we shall explore towards the end of this paper.

## 2 Naturalism in Husserl's ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’

Although he addresses the subject in his 1906/1907 lectures entitled *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge* (Husserliana XXIV), Husserl's most extensive treatment of naturalism—by far the strongest critique of it of the first half of the twentieth century—is to be found in his essay ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’, commissioned by the Freiburg Neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert for his new journal, *Logos*. On the positive side, Husserl recognised the aspiration of naturalism to establish philosophy as a truly rigorous science:

<sup>11</sup> E. Husserl, letter to Rickert, December 1915, in *Briefwechsel*, ed. K. Schuhmann in collaboration with E. Schuhmann. *Husserliana Dokumente*, 10 Volumes (1994a), vol. 5, p. 178. See also Kern (1964, p. 35).

<sup>12</sup> See Jonas Cohn's letter of 31 March 1911 to Husserl, in Husserl, *Briefwechsel*, ed. K. Schuhmann and E. Schuhmann, Vol. 5, p. 17.

From the very beginning naturalism has resolutely pursued the idea of a rigorously scientific reform of philosophy and even believed at any given time, both in its earlier and in its modern forms, that it had already realized this idea. (PRS, p. 253; 293)

As such, naturalism will always be, in Husserl's opinion, the most enduring temptation for scientists.

In this essay, broadening his critique of psychologism, Husserl diagnoses naturalism too as containing within it a 'countersense' (*Widersinn*, PRS, p. 254; 295), or a 'countersensical circle' (PRS, p. 259; 300). He repeats this assessment in the *Crisis*: naturalism is 'a countersensical circle' (*ein widersinniger Zirkel*, *Crisis*, p. 204; VI 208), assuming what it sets out to prove. 'Countersense' is a specific technical notion in Husserl (carefully distinguished from *Unsinn* or nonsense in LU I § 15), defined as an 'evident inconsistency' (PRS, p. 254; 295).<sup>13</sup> Naturalism then has essentially the same fault that he had earlier (in LU) diagnosed in psychologism, then the 'dominant' outlook in Germany (LU XVIII 261) 'in our psychologically obsessed age' (LU, *Prolog.* § 28).

In fact, in his 1910/1911 essay, Husserl refers back explicitly to the first volume of LU, *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* (1900), esp. §§ 25–29, and indeed thereafter he cited these sections as an effective philosophical refutation of naturalism and positivism.<sup>14</sup> In these sections of the *Prolegomena* Husserl mounts a defence of the a priori ideality of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC) ('the impossibility of the joint truth of contradictory propositions', LU *Prolog.* § 25) against 'psychologicistic empiricism' ('à la Mill', Hua XX/1 286), which, treats the principle as stating that two mental states exclude one another, or that someone cannot think both propositions at once. For Husserl, PNC is neither a generalisation from factual experience, nor a natural law, nor even a norm of thinking, but it is a pure, a priori ideal truth. To think otherwise is to betray the very essence of science by explaining acts of knowledge in terms of naturally occurring temporal events in the world (*Prolog.* § 26).

Our capacity to ideate universals in singulars, to have a 'seeing' (*schauend*) grasp of a concept in an empirical presentation, and to be assured of the identity of our conceptual intentions in repeated presentation, is presupposed by the possibility of knowledge. (LU, *Prolog.* § 29, I, p. 69; XVIII 109)

An empiricism which denied this is simply confused. Indeed, 'it is only inconsistency that keeps psychologism alive: to think it out to the end is already to have given it up ...' (LU *Prolog.* § 25, I, p. 56; Hua XVIII 88). Empiricism fails to give an adequate account of experience and chiefly our intuitive experience of the

<sup>13</sup> Hilary Putnam explicates his internal, pragmatic or commonsense realism 'with a human face' in terms of what stands counter to it, namely, metaphysical or scientific realism, on the one hand, and various forms of conceptual relativism which involve a loss of world, on the other. Putnam's emphasis is on safeguarding our common-sense intuitions about the world, while resisting any move towards absolute metaphysics, and while rejecting all forms of dualism, especially the dualism of the *world in itself* and the *world as it appears*, and the dualism of facts and values. He does this by showing that each side of his contrast pair is caught in a countersensical set of claims, see Moran (2000, pp. 65–104).

<sup>14</sup> Husserl refers to LU in PRS, pp. 254, 295, and again in *Ideas* I, § 20, pp. 37–38; Hua III/I 37–38.

ideal (e.g. universals, mathematical entities, essences, categorial objectivities, and so on). Empiricism fails to account adequately for the universals and ideal entities it necessarily employs.

All forms of naturalism (or 'naturalistic objectivism') harbour an inbuilt 'countersense' (*Widersinn*):

What characterizes all forms of extreme and consistent naturalism, from popular materialism on down to the most recent sensation-monism and energeticism, is, on the one hand, the *naturalization of consciousness*, including all intentionally immanent givens of consciousness, and, on the other hand, the *naturalization of ideas*, and thus of all absolute ideals and norms. (PRS, p. 254; 294–295)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, the 'sensation-monism' here is a reference to Mach's phenomenalist theory in his *Analysis of Sensations* (Mach, 1914, revised and expanded 1913). Bertrand Russell would later acknowledge in his *My Philosophical Development* (1995, p. 134) that his 'neutral monism' was inspired by Mach's book and the view developed by William James (2003) in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Mach's sensationalism is summed up in the following passage of his *Analysis of Sensations*:

We see an object having a point S. If we touch S, that is, bring it into connexion with our body, we receive a prick. We can see S, without feeling the prick. But as soon as we feel the prick we find S on the skin. The visible point, therefore, is a permanent nucleus, to which the prick is annexed, according to circumstances, as something accidental. From the frequency of analogous occurrences we ultimately accustom ourselves to regard all properties of bodies as 'effects' proceeding from permanent nuclei and conveyed to the ego through the medium of the body; which effects we call sensations. By this operation, however, these nuclei are deprived of their entire sensory content, and converted into mere mental symbols. The assertion, then, is correct that the world consists only of our sensations. In which case we have knowledge *only* of sensations, and the assumption of the nuclei referred to, or of a reciprocal action between them, from which sensations proceed, turns out to be quite idle and superfluous. Such a view can only suit with a half-hearted realism or a half-hearted philosophical criticism.

Mach is advocating a kind of neutral monism of sensations. Mach is responsible for the term 'sensation complexes' that appears in Husserl. Mach writes in the *Analysis of Sensations*:

Let us consider, first, the reciprocal relations of the elements of the complex A B C..., without regarding K L M ... (our body). All physical investigations are of this sort. A white ball falls upon a bell; a sound is heard. The ball turns yellow before a sodium lamp, red before a lithium lamp. Here the elements (A B C...) appear to be connected only with one another and to be independent of our body (K L M...). But if we take santonin, the ball again turns yellow. If we press one eye to the side, we see two balls. If we close our eyes entirely, there is no ball there at all. If we sever the auditory nerve, no sound is heard. The elements = A B C..., therefore, are not only connected with one another, but also with K L M; To this extent, and to this extent *only*, do we call A B C... sensations, and regard A B C as belonging to the ego. In what follows, wherever the reader finds the terms "Sensation," "Sensation-complex," used alongside of or instead of the expressions "element," "complex of elements," it must be borne in mind that it is only in the connexion and relation in question, only in their functional dependence, that the elements are sensations. In another functional relation they are at the same time physical objects. We only use the additional term "sensations" to describe the elements, because most people are much more familiar with the elements in question as sensations (colours, sounds, pressures, spaces, times, etc.), while according to the popular conception it is particles of mass that are considered as physical elements, to which the elements, in the sense here used, are attached as "properties" or "effects."

Mach concludes:

Thus the great gulf between physical and psychological research persists only when we acquiesce in our habitual stereotyped conceptions. A colour is a physical object as soon as we consider its dependence, for instance, upon its luminous source, upon other colours, upon temperatures, upon spaces, and so forth. When we consider, however, its dependence upon the retina (the elements K L M ...), it is a psychological object, a sensation. Not the subject matter, but the direction of our investigation, is different in the two domains. (Mach, 1914, see also Chap. II., pp. 43, 44).

In fact, there is only one specific area where Husserl acknowledges naturalism has got it right, namely, in recognizing that body and soul form an experiential unity (see *Ideas II* § 46, p. 176; Hua IV 168).<sup>16</sup>

It is noteworthy that, in the ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’ essay (as often elsewhere), Husserl slips, without signalling it, from talking about the *natural attitude* to the *naturalistic attitude*, something he also does in *Ideas II* § 49, written in draft the following year (1912). In fact, Husserl seems to have a rather complex view of the relation between the ‘natural attitude’, the ‘naturalistic attitude’ and indeed what he occasionally refers to as the ‘nature attitude’ (*die naturale Einstellung*) something we need to address later in this paper. In *Ideas II*, however, it appears that the ‘nature attitude’ (Hua IV 179) is precisely the attitude that correlates with things understood as belonging within the causal nexus of ‘nature’.

### 3 The transcendental critique of naturalism

Now, while Husserl in LU had already established the central moves of his critique of a cluster of related notions then labelled ‘psychologism’, ‘extreme empiricism’, ‘empirio-criticism’, and ‘positivism’, it was another half-decade before he expanded his critique to *naturalism*. More notably, this mature critique of naturalism went hand-in-hand with his explicit adoption of transcendental idealism (from around 1908). This deeper analysis of naturalism now sees it as almost an inevitable consequence of our natural way of living in the world. Under the influence of Richard Avenarius (see *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* § 10), he now presents naturalism as a philosophical reification of the experience of the world ‘in the natural attitude’.<sup>17</sup> The natural lived world is in fact the correlate or objectified outcome of the ‘natural attitude’ and naturalism is the outcome of the ‘naturalistic attitude’ (referred to in PRS, *Ideas II* § 49, and in FTL § 100, p. 262).

The natural attitude tends to treat everything as ‘given’ and hence as ‘real’ in the same way; hence it treats consciousness as a fact of nature, as a piece of the world:

A univocal determination of spirit through merely natural dependencies is unthinkable, i.e. as reduction to something like physical nature ... Subjects cannot be dissolved into nature, for in that case what gives nature its sense would be missing. (*Ideas II* § 64, p. 311; Hua IV 297)

Husserl will argue this collapse of constituting subjectivity into a mere fact of nature involves a ‘countersense’.

<sup>16</sup> See Husserl (1952a); trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer as *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, Husserl Collected Works III (1989). Hereafter ‘*Ideas II*’.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of Husserl’s relation to Avenarius and other positivists, see Summer (1985).

#### 4 Husserlian and Kantian claims on the priority of consciousness

The claim that consciousness cannot simply be treated as part of the constituted objective world but is a necessary condition for the possibility of objective knowledge has, of course, a distinctly Kantian ring. Yet, already, in *Prolegomena* (1900) to LU, Husserl had criticised Kant and (at least some of) the Neo-Kantians—specifically Christoph Sigwart (1830–1904), professor at Tübingen, and Benno Erdmann (1851–1922), professor at Berlin—for interpreting the ‘conditions for the possibility of knowledge’ as located in the nature of human consciousness:

[Sigwart] always talks of *our* thought and its *functions*, when he is trying to characterise logical necessity. (LU *Prol.* § 39 I, p. 84; XVIII 133)

Husserl himself distinguishes between subjective conditions which are ‘real conditions (*reale Bedingungen*) rooted in the individual judging subject, or in the various species of judging beings’ from ‘ideal conditions that lie in the form of subjectivity as such’, which he prefers to call ‘noetic conditions’ (LU *Prol.* § 32, I pp. 75–76; Hua XVIII 119). In one sense, both in LU and later, Husserl acknowledges that it is an obvious truism to insist that knowledge consists of a relation to a knower (see *Erste Philosophie* II, Hua VIII 38). On the other hand, this claim conceals a host of transcendental confusions.

One error is called ‘specific relativism’ or ‘anthropologism’. Husserl calls treating the logical laws as describing the thinking processes of human beings a kind of ‘species relativism’ (*der spezifische Relativismus*) or ‘anthropologism’ (*Anthropologismus*, LU *Prol.* § 36). Anthropologism maintains that truth is relative to the human species and, hence without humans, there would be no truth:

On Sigwart’s view, it would be a fiction to speak of truths that hold in themselves unknown to anyone, e.g. such truths as transcend men’s capacity for knowledge. (LU *Prol.* § 39 I, p. 85; Hua XVIII 134)

On such an anti-realist view of truth, Husserl says, Newton’s law of gravitation would not have been ‘true’ *before* Newton (*Prol.* § 39 I, p. 85; XVIII 134), but Husserl regards this as countersensical because implicit in the assertion of Newton’s law is what he terms ‘the unrestricted validity for all times’ (*die unbedingte Geltung für alle Zeit*, Hua XVIII 134). Husserl at this point does consider that Kant’s account of knowledge was guilty of this kind of anthropologism, since it deduces laws.

... in more or less a mythic fashion, from certain ‘original forms’ or ‘modes of functioning’ of the (human) understanding, from consciousness as such, conceived as generic human reason, from the psycho-physical constitution of man .... (LU *Prol.* § 38 I, p. 83; Hua XVIII 130)

Husserl accuses Kant (and at least his then current generation of Neo-Kantians) of misunderstanding the subjective domain as if it were something natural or ‘real’, and hence of construing the a priori as if it were an essential part of the human species (LU *Prol.* § 38). This is still absurd if it attempts to deduce logical and formal necessity from certain facts about human experience. In later years, Husserl will continue to repeat this critique of Kant whom he thinks was overly dependent

on naturalistic Lockean psychology (see FTL § 100, p. 257; Hua XVII 264; and *Crisis* § 58).

In contrast, at least in LU, Husserl maintained a robustly *realist* view of truth:

What is true is absolutely, intrinsically true: truth is one and the same, whether men or not-men, angels or gods apprehend and judge it. (LU *Prolog.* § 36, I, p. 79; Hua XVIII 125)

That certain facts are true independently of human beings' consciousness of them is not, for Husserl, even at this stage, ruling out that certain 'noetic' conditions still have to be acknowledged in the constitution of objectivity. But there is undoubtedly a tension to be felt in these formulations in the *Prolegomena*. In later formulations Husserl will distinguish between *real* and *ideal* possibility, and between truths that are correlated only to a possible mind thinking them and those correlated to actual minds.

In LU, Husserl defends a typically Platonic realist view about truth and about the nature of ideal, of logical entities under the influence of Hermann Lotze.<sup>18</sup> Lotze's reading of Bolzano had inspired Husserl's embrace of the timeless and unique objectivity of ideal formations against the empiricist tradition ('blind to the peculiar objectivity of all ideal formations', see *Formal and Transcendental Logic* § 56, p. 151; Hua XVII 159). Indeed, in his Draft Preface to the 1913 revision of LU, he says he regarded Bolzano's truths in themselves as 'metaphysical absurdities' until he read Lotze.<sup>19</sup> Lotze's interpretation of Platonic Ideas had helped him to understand Bolzano's 'propositions in themselves' (*Sätze an sich*) as the 'senses of statements' (Hua XXII 156)<sup>20</sup> and not as mysterious kinds of things, occupying some *topos ouranios*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In his letter of December 1915 to Rickert, Husserl says that even 'in his naturalistic beginnings' his soul 'was filled with a secret nostalgia (*Sehnsucht*) for the old Romantic land of German Idealism' (*Briefwechsel*, vol. 5, p. 178, my trans.). Rickert inspired this longing as Windelband, 'not a genuinely creative thinker' (*ibid.*, p. 177) did not. Husserl likewise speaks of phenomenology as the secret nostalgia of modern philosophy in *Ideas I* § 62, p. 142; Hua III/1 118.

<sup>19</sup> Husserl also thought there was an unresolved 'extreme empiricism in Bolzano' which he criticizes in his *Draft Preface* to the 1913 Revision of LU. See Husserl (1975a). See also Von Duhn (2003, pp. 21–33).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Textor has indicated to me that that is actually a misrepresentation of Bolzano's propositions in themselves since some of them can never be instantiated or thought and hence cannot be exactly equivalent to senses. According to Textor's *Bolzanos Propositionalism* (1996), Husserl misread Bolzano on this point. Husserl turns Bolzano's *Sätze an sich* into species or types of assertoric or judgemental contents. This may be a good idea, but it is not what Bolzano intended. For Bolzano, the *Satz an sich* is one of his basic concepts, not reducible to anything like a 'type' or 'species' of assertoric content, rather the *Satz* figures in the analyses of many (if not all) concepts. For example, Bolzano will argue that a *Satz an sich* cannot be a judgemental content, for some *Sätze an sich* cannot be judged. No one cannot judge  $1 = 2$ , it is manifestly incoherent. Perhaps one can say that a *Satz an sich* can be the content of a judgement or its negation can be judged. But then there may contents which cannot be judged at all: there will never be evidence that can determine our judgement. This is no conclusive argument against Husserl, but makes the difficulties of reducing *Satz an sich* to something we already know and accept clear.

<sup>21</sup> Husserl, however, was unsatisfied with a certain 'psychologising of the universal' he detected in Lotze (1888) *Logic* (1874) § 316. See Husserl (1994b, p. 1); Hua XXII 156. For his critique of Lotze, see LU II §10 I 322, No. 5; Hua XIX/1 138.

## 5 An explanation of Lotze's position

In his *Logic* Book Three Chapter Two (§§ 313–321), Lotze attempts a clarification of the meaning of the Platonic 'world of Ideas' by arguing they are the predicates of things in this world considered as general concepts bound together in a whole in such a way as to 'constitute an unchangeable system of thought' (§ 314) and which determine the limits of all possible experience (§ 315). Plato recognises that in the Heraclitean world of change, black things become white, etc., but *blackness* does not change, even if a thing only has a momentary participation in it. Even when a momentarily appearing sound or colour is immediately replaced by another different sound or colour, it still is the case that these two items stand in definite relations of contrast with one another. These relations and indeed the intelligible contents of real things and events may be said to have 'validity' (*Geltung*, § 316). According to Lotze, the ascription to Plato of an absurd doctrine of the *existence* of Ideas alongside the existence of things is due to the fact that the Greek language did not have the capacity to express this validity but referred to them only as *ousia*. They are ideal 'unities' (*henades, monades*). Plato is not trying to hypostasise the ideas by saying they are not in space, rather he simply wants to say they are not anywhere at all (§ 318). Plato's Ideas have been misunderstood as having 'existence' (*Dasein*) separate from things whereas, according to Lotze, in fact Plato intended only to ascribe 'validity' (*Geltung*) to them.<sup>22</sup>

## 6 The first objection to naturalist empiricism: Husserl's defence of idealities

Husserl regularly defends ideality (and not just logical ideality) in terms of trans-temporal 'identity' and re-instantiability across repeated thoughts. Husserl also had a notion of *eidetic singularities*: there is only one Kreuzer sonata, only one Pythagorean Theorem ('Origin of Geometry', *Crisis*, p. 357; VI 368), only one word 'lion' in the English language (*Crisis*, p. 357; VI 368), only one *number 4*, and so on (see *Ideas* I § 12). The empiricists who place such an emphasis on sense data assign to them a role they cannot play in terms of guaranteeing the 'intertemporal and intersubjective harmony of experiences' as Husserl's student Felix Kaufmann put it.<sup>23</sup> In other words, empiricism has no way of guaranteeing fixed identities across the flux of sense data. Empiricism simply misses the intuitive givennesses of the universal and the eidetic. Indeed, in *Ideas* I (1913) Husserl portrays his phenomenology as an explicit attempt to overcome the empiricistic 'psychologizing of the eidetic'.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> A similar transcendental account of Platonic Ideas (as laws governing thoughts and not things) is to be found in Paul Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre* (1903, revised edition 1922), trans. Politis (2004). See also Politis (2001, pp. 47–62).

<sup>23</sup> See Kaufmann (1940, pp. 124–142).

<sup>24</sup> Husserl (1977a, § 61, p. 116); trans. Kersten (1983, p. 139). Hereafter '*Ideas* I'.

## 7 Recognizing intentionality is not enough to overcome naturalism

Recognition of the intentionality of consciousness in itself does not avoid naturalism. Great minds such as Brentano still managed a naturalistic misconstrual of consciousness in his radical reform of psychology. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, for instance, and elsewhere, Husserl criticizes Brentano for failing to exploit the true potential of intentional analysis (CM § 20), as he remained imprisoned in ‘naturalistic prejudices’ that prevented him from understanding the roles of synthesis and constitution.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, in the most essential matters he remained bound to the prejudices of the naturalistic tradition (*in den Vorurteilen der naturalistischen Tradition*); these prejudices have not yet been overcome if the data of the soul (*die seelischen Daten*), rather than being understood as sensible (whether of outer or inner “sense”), are [simply] understood as data having the remarkable character of intentionality; in other words, if dualism, psychophysical causality, is still accepted as valid. (*Crisis*, § 68, p. 234; Hua VI 236)

Husserl makes more or less the same claim concerning Brentano’s naturalism in a number of works e.g. the 1928 Amsterdam Lectures.<sup>26</sup> In the Fourth Cartesian Meditation (CM § 40) also Husserl refers to Brentanian-style intentional psychology as missing the meaning of genuine transcendental phenomenology (since it assumes that intentional acts issue from an empirical I). Similarly, Husserl claims that Brentano failed to recognize the role of *synthesis* in consciousness. He was too atomistic and sensualistic in his construal of the nature of experience:

... Brentano’s discovery of intentionality never led to seeing in it a complex of performances, which are included as *sedimented history* in the currently constituted intentional unity and its current manners of givenness—a history *that one can always uncover following a strict method*. (FTL § 97, p. 245; Hua XVII 252)

The point, for Husserl, is that consciousness rightly understood (as an interconnected complex and streaming temporal unity) stands as the great stumbling block to a naturalistic construal of the world and of knowledge.

## 8 The danger of transcendental psychologism

Even having recognized the role of constituting consciousness in the formation of all objectivities real and ideal, actual and possible, there is still the danger of falling back into a new error—one which again naturalizes constituting consciousness and treats it as ‘a little tag-end of the world’ (*ein kleines Endchen der Welt*, CM § 10; FTL § 93), as Descartes did with the *ego cogito* in his own *Meditations*. The danger

<sup>25</sup> See Husserl’s draft *Encyclopedia Britannica* article, *Trans. Phen.*, p. 95; Hua IX 247. Husserl repeats this criticism of Brentano in *Crisis* § 68 and elsewhere.

<sup>26</sup> Husserl’s Amsterdam Lectures are translated in Husserl (1997, see especially, p. 219); Hua IX 310.

is that all this synthesising and anticipating, projecting, and recollecting function of consciousness with all its horizonality, which produces 'world as such', will be interpreted merely psychologically as 'what humans do'. Rather consciousness has to be explored not just as a fact but in terms of its essential possibilities and its 'absoluteness'.

Naturalism is thus an ever-present danger even as we enter the transcendental domain of pure consciousness. Already in his 1906/1907 lectures on *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*<sup>27</sup> Husserl refers to naturalism (and psychologism) as the 'original sin' (Hua XXIV 176), the 'sin against the Holy Spirit of philosophy' (Hua XXIV 177). It is the original fall from grace to misconstrue consciousness. In the 1928 Amsterdam lectures, Husserl diagnoses this 'prevailing naturalization of the mental' as an enduring prejudice which has its origins in Descartes, Hobbes and Locke, and which continued to haunt even Brentano's attempts at descriptive psychology.<sup>28</sup> In his posthumous *Experience and Judgement* (1938) Husserl acknowledges that the 'naturalization of the spirit' is not an invention of philosophers but is a totally expected outcome of our first outgoing experience which encounters objects as part of the world.<sup>29</sup> Naturalism (viewed transcendently) is the natural product of the 'natural attitude', construed as the 'naturalistic attitude'.

## 9 The discovery of the natural attitude as the breakthrough to the transcendental

In his mature works, Husserl articulates in some detail the meaning of mundane life in the 'natural attitude' (a term he uses from at least as early as 1906–1907) which involves all aspects of human engagement with others and with the world as a whole, the very experience of 'being-in-the-world' that Heidegger later explicitly thematizes in *Being and Time* § 14 (1927). Indeed, the natural attitude has to count as one of Husserl's greatest and perhaps most misunderstood phenomenological contributions.<sup>30</sup> It features prominently in his *Idea of Phenomenology* (1907)—under the title 'the natural mode of reflection', in his 1910/1911 lectures *Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology* (Hua XIII 118) and, in 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science', where it is explicitly linked with naturalism as its accompanying outlook. It is first thematized in an admittedly sketchy form in *Ideas I* (1913) §§ 27–30, and continues as a major theme into his late analysis of 'worldly life' and the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*).<sup>31</sup> Husserl's insight (inspired in part by Avenarius' (2005) discussion of non-dualistic experiential life in *Der menschliche Weltbegriff*) is that the ordinary, natural world that surrounds us on all sides, in which we live and move and have our being, is actually itself the *correlate* of a very powerful yet also quite specific and particular

<sup>27</sup> Husserl (1985), trans. Claire Ortiz Hill, Husserl (2008).

<sup>28</sup> Husserl (1997, p. 219); Hua IX 309–310 (hereafter: *Trans. Phen.*).

<sup>29</sup> Husserl (1973b, § 8, p. 34).

<sup>30</sup> On the natural attitude, see Luft (2002a, pp. 114–119) and idem, 'Husserl's Phenomenological Discovery of the Natural Attitude', in 1998, pp. 153–170; see also Bermes (2004).

<sup>31</sup> See the texts in Husserliana Vol. XXXIV, and Luft (2002b, pp. 35).

attitude: the *natural attitude*.<sup>32</sup> In his 1935 *Vienna Lecture* Husserl defines an attitude as ‘a habitually fixed style of willing life (*Stil des Willenlebens*) comprising directions of the will or interests that are prescribed by this style, comprising the ultimate ends, the cultural accomplishments whose total style is thereby determined’ (*Crisis*, p. 280; Hua VI 326). In the First Cartesian Meditation, too, Husserl sets it down as a condition for an absolutely grounded science that it does not simply take the being of the world in naïve acceptance but that it treats it merely as ‘acceptance phenomenon’ (CM § 7, p. 18; Hua I 58).

The natural attitude is ‘the attitude of experience’ (Hua XIII 120).<sup>33</sup> It has the character of ‘pregiveness’ or ‘pre-found’ (*vorgefunden*).<sup>34</sup> It is always ‘on’ in the background (*Ideas* I § 31) as the primary attitude ‘of natural human existence’ (*Einstellung des natürlichen menschlichen Daseins*, *Crisis* VI 154). It belongs to the ‘region of origin’ (*Ursprungsgebiet*). All activities of consciousness, including all scientific activity, indeed all knowledge, initially take place within the natural attitude (Hua XIII 112). Other attitudes, such as the objectivist, scientific attitude and the formal mathematical attitude are one-sided *abstractions* from the natural attitude and presuppose it. The natural attitude is as old as human history. As Husserl writes in his 1924 lecture ‘Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy,’ in *Erste Philosophie*:

The natural attitude is the form in which the total life of humanity is realized in running its natural, practical course. It was the only form from millennium to millennium, until out of science and philosophy there developed unique motivations for a revolution.<sup>35</sup>

The natural attitude is, furthermore, what makes us human; it is *the human* attitude. Husserl’s close collaborator Eugen Fink writes:

The natural attitude is the attitude that belongs essentially to human nature, that makes up human being itself, the setting up of man (*das Eingestelltsein des Menschen*) as a being in the whole of the world, or ... the attitude of

<sup>32</sup> An *attitude*, for Husserl, has a very broad range, it aims not just at individual things but at a whole context or world or ‘field’ of things and puts them in perspective in a particular light. It may be passively in the background or actively adopted. The concept of ‘attitude’ is already to be found in both the empirical psychology of Husserl’s day and in the Brentanian school. See the article ‘Einstellung,’ in J. Ritter et al. (eds) *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* Bd II, (Ritter, 1971), pp. 417ff.

<sup>33</sup> Husserl has a broad range of terms for the *natural attitude* (*die natürliche Einstellung*) including the ‘pre-scientific’ (VI 121, 152, 156) or ‘extra-scientific attitude’, the ‘natural theoretical attitude’ (*Ideas* I § 50, p. 113; Hua III/1 94), the ‘natural-naïve attitude’ (V 148) and with the correlative discovery of the notion of ‘world’ (*die Welt*), initially understood as ‘my natural surrounding world’ (*meine natürliche Umwelt*, *Ideas* I § 28), the world in which I find myself all the time and which supplies the necessary background for all intentional acts, and for all other worlds which it is possible to inhabit (e.g., the world of science, the world of mathematics, the world of religious belief, and so on), my ‘natural worldly life’ (*natürliches Weltleben*, *Crisis* VI 121, 152, 156), the ‘pregiven life of experience’ (*die vorgegebene Erfahrungswelt*, *Crisis* VI 1).

<sup>34</sup> See XIII 196–199 where Husserl discusses the influence of Avenarius’ conception of *das Vorgefundene*. Husserl was also influenced by Mach (1903); English translation Mach (1914).

<sup>35</sup> Husserl (1974b, pp. 9–56); *Erste Philosophie* (1923/1924). Erster Teil: *Kritische Ideengeschichte*. Hrsg. R. Boehm, Hua VII (1965, pp. 230–287). The reference here is to p. 20 of the English translation and Hua VII 244.

mundanized subjectivity: the natural being of man in and to the world in all his modes (*in und zur Welt in allen seinen Modis*).<sup>36</sup>

Inherent in the natural attitude is a certain conception of reality, truth and validity. The natural attitude has its own forms of verification, reliability and confirmation.<sup>37</sup> In it we experience the world as simply *there*, 'on hand' (*vorhanden*), occurrent. The driving force of the natural attitude is what Husserl called the 'general thesis' (*Generalthesis*, *Ideas* I § 30), a general belief, *doxa*, acceptance, involving the universal 'positing' of the world and everything in it as objectively there. Normal questioning, doubting and other attitudes never abrogate from this 'general thesis':

No doubt about or rejection of data belonging to the natural world alters in any respect the *general positing which characterizes the natural standpoint*. (*Ideas* I § 30 p. 57; III/1 53)

Every society begins within the natural attitude or some version of a primordial attitude rooted in the natural attitude:

We speak in this connection of the natural primordial attitude (*von der natürlichen, urwüchsigen Einstellung*), of the attitude of original natural life, of the first originally natural form of cultures, whether higher or lower, whether developed uninhibitedly or stagnating. All other attitudes are accordingly related back to this natural attitude as reorientations [of it]. (*Crisis*, p. 281; Hua VI 326–7)

Husserl sometimes uses the natural attitude to focus only on nature and the manner spatio-temporal 'natural' things are given in our immediate intuitive experience (see XIII 196, for example).

Other attitudes may arise—if specifically motivated—only *within* or *founded on* this natural attitude. The natural attitude then is not just the sum of all other attitudes, but the context that allows and enables the specific attitudes to be adopted. It is the base operating system as it were, the 'default' position (as Robert Sokolowski calls it). It is the 'always already' attitude, *die Geradehin-Einstellung*, as Fink calls it.<sup>38</sup> It cannot as such be completely unplugged, although it can be highlighted, foregrounded, thematized, through a special reflexive act of attention that Husserl first describes in print as the 'radical alteration' (*radikale Änderung*, *Ideas* I § 31) of the natural attitude.

The 'correlate' (*Korrelat*)—a concept Husserl never explicitly thematized—of the natural attitude is what Husserl calls the *world* (*Ideas* I § 50). The 'world' in

<sup>36</sup> Fink (1966c, § 4, p. 11) (my translation).

<sup>37</sup> Husserl greatly resented the Heideggerian accusation that his phenomenology was oriented to the theoretical and ignored or undervalued the practical nature of our being-in-the-world. In fact, Husserl lays great stress on the non-theoretical nature of the natural attitude. It is, however, only when we come to recognise the natural attitude for what it is, that we break with it and adopt the philosophical, theoretical attitude which, as Husserl says in *Vienna Lecture* (1935), is still a form of *praxis*, 'theoretical *praxis*' (see *Crisis*, p. 111; VI 113).

<sup>38</sup> Fink, Z-XIII, 1934, 2a (cited in Luft, op. cit., p. 90 n. 23).

Husserlian terms is the ‘horizon of horizons’, the permanently present yet always receding background for all consciousness, the ‘infinity (*Unendlichkeit*) of what is taken for granted, what is indispensable for all objective sciences’ (*Crisis* § 58, p. 204; VI 208). In our natural experience, we live naively in this world, swimming with the flow of its givens, that have the character of being ‘on hand’ (*vorhanden*) and ‘actual’ (*wirklich*, *Ideas* I § 50). The natural world has the character of actuality and presence. It is simply there. This world is not just individual things or the horizoning ‘world of things’ (*Dingwelt*, Hua XIII 27n1), but also living organisms, bodies like ours, which we encounter as *persons* (see Hua XIII § 4 115) in the surrounding world (*Umwelt*):

“Surrounding world” is a term with personal signification.<sup>39</sup>

Human life is always ‘worldly life’ (*Weltleben*, XXXIV 394–395). We are ‘world-children’ (*Weltkinder*). The world is always there as my ‘thematic ground’ (XXXIV 391) and included in it are my ‘co-subjects’ with whom I interact to form joint projects and realise joint intentions.

Husserl himself speaks, especially in his later writings, of the peculiar hold the natural attitude has over us; we are ‘infatuated’ (*verschossen*, lit. ‘shot at’, *Crisis* § 52, p. 176; VI 179), captivated or seduced by it. In his 1934 essay, ‘What Does the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl Want to Accomplish?’,<sup>40</sup> Husserl’s assistant Eugen Fink employs the term *Befangenheit* (which can mean ‘shyness’ or ‘prejudice’ or ‘bias’, but is best translated as ‘captivation’ by the world, *Weltbefangenheit*).<sup>41</sup> Of course this is very close to Heidegger’s conception of *Verfallen* in *Being and Time* § 38, which too is a ‘falling for’ or ‘being seduced by’ the world. In his 1934 essay, Fink makes use of Plato’s parable of the chained prisoners in the cave watching shadows to illustrate this sense of captivity by the world.

The natural life of humans in the world is a mystery because of its ‘obviousness’ or ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (*Selbstverständlichkeit*), its stability, its ‘always already there’ character that yet allows for novelty. It belongs to the essence of the natural attitude not to interrogate or even recognise itself as such. Transcendental insight is impossible for ‘common sense’ (Husserl uses the English term *Crisis*, p. 200; VI 203).<sup>42</sup> This world is ‘constituted achievement’ (*konstituierte Leistung*, VI 208) but, in the natural attitude, we are oblivious to that. We live in the natural world ‘blind’ (*Crisis* VI 209) to its nature, with ‘blinders’ or ‘blinkers’ (*Scheuklappen*) on. The natural attitude for all its richness is, therefore for Husserl, ‘one-sided’ and ‘closed’ (*die einseitig verschlossene natürliche Einstellung*, *Crisis* VI 209).

<sup>39</sup> Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, hrsg. W. Biemel, Hua IX (1968), trans. J. Scanlon as *Phenomenological Psychology. Lectures, Summer Semester 1925* (1977b). Hereafter ‘*Phen. Psych.*’ followed by section number, page number of the English and then the Husserliana volume and page number. The reference here is *Phen. Psych.* § 44, p. 168; Hua IX 2.

<sup>40</sup> Fink (1966b, pp. 157–178); trans. Arthur Grugan (1972, pp. 5–28), see esp. p. 9 [German, p. 159].

<sup>41</sup> See Bruzina (2004, p. 186).

<sup>42</sup> The inability of the natural attitude to gain a critical stance on itself has echoes in similar to Heidegger’s claim that common sense is the enemy of philosophy.

## 10 The transcendental turn

Transcendental phenomenology aims to break with this captivation with the world by taking on the wholly 'unnatural' attitude of the *epoché*. This break is described by both Husserl and Fink as a kind of 'dehumanising' (*Entmenschung*) of the accomplishment of cognition: in an 'unnatural' manner we have excluded human beings, even ourselves (*Ideas* I § 50). Indeed, in Hegelian fashion, even to *recognise* and identify the natural attitude as such is already to have moved beyond it. Husserl speaks of performing a 'Copernican 180-degree turn' (Amsterdam Lectures, *Trans. Phen.*, p. 235; Hua IX 327) which brackets the assumption of a pre-given world.

To systematically reflect on the nature of the natural attitude itself requires a kind of 'bracketing' (which Husserl calls the 'universal' *epoché* or 'transcendental reduction') of all our commitments to the factual domain. We have to suspend all commitments 'in one blow' (*Crisis* § 40, p. 150; VI 153). We can change its 'index'. This serves to 'interrupt' (*unterbrechen*, *Crisis* VI 154) the natural attitude: 'all natural interests are put out of play' (*Crisis* VI 155). This leads inevitably to a kind of 'splitting of the ego' (*Ichspaltung*). The meditating self leads a double life. On the one hand, I continue to live naturally and yet, at the same time, I become aware of the functioning of world-creating subjectivity within that natural life:

First the transcendental *epoché* and reduction releases transcendental subjectivity from its self-concealment (*Selbstverborgenheit*) and raises it up to a new position, that of transcendental self-consciousness. (Hua XXXIV 399, my translation)

Husserl constantly emphasises the difficulty of the 'transposition' *Umstellung* (VI 153), 'reversal' or 'inversion' (*Umkehrung*, VI 204), 'transformation' (*Umwandlung*), that is required to turn our perspective around:

The transcendental problem arises from a general turning around of the natural focus of consciousness.... (Amsterdam Lectures § 11, *Trans. Phen.*, p. 238; Hua IX 331)

The phenomenological aim is to uproot from ourselves and from our 'prejudices', which now means from all that is distinctively human in our way of being plugged-in to the world.

An attitude is arrived at which is *above* (*über*) the givenness of the validity of the world, *above* the infinite complex (*Ineinander*) whereby, in concealment, the world's validities are always founded on other validities, above the whole manifold but synthetically unified flow in which the world has and forever attains anew its content of meaning and its validity of being (*Sinngehalt und Seinsgeltung*). In other words, we have an attitude *above* the universal conscious life (both individual subjective and intersubjective) through which the world is "there" for those naively absorbed (*für die naiv Dahinlebenden*) in ongoing life, as unquestionably present, as the universe of what is there (*als Universum der Vorhandenheiten*, *Crisis* § 40, p. 150; VI 153)

According to Husserl, taking up this transcendental stance is by no means a temporary action but requires a ‘habitual attitude’ (*eine habituelle Einstellung*, VI 153) that we resolve to adopt once and for all. This of course is the ‘attitude of the non-participating spectator’ (which Heidegger criticises as non-primordial). Husserl, however, sees it as a first-person attitude that has arrived at ‘clarity’ about its own nature. Furthermore, for Husserl, the initiation of the reduction from within the natural attitude is a matter of complete freedom of the will (akin to his understanding of the initiation of Cartesian doubt). Transcendental reduction requires an ‘act of will’ (*Trans. Phen.*, p. 247; Hua IX 341).

The philosopher is situated ‘above his natural being and above the natural world’ (*Crisis* § 41). As Husserl puts it over and over, the world has become *phenomenon*. It is not a mere ‘grasp’ (*Auffassung*) or ‘interpretation’ (*Crisis* VI 155) since those are based on the world; it is a wholly new attitude and, although it had its ‘primal founding’ (*Urstiftung*) in history with Descartes, it now becomes a permanent acquisition of humankind. The new philosophical attitude reveals the ‘universal, absolutely self-enclosed and absolutely self-sufficient (*eigenständig*) correlation between the world itself and world-consciousness’ (*Crisis* § 41, p. 151; VI 154).

Husserl always speaks of the transcendental attitude as ‘primary’ and ‘absolute’, as opposed to the ‘relative’ nature of the natural attitude. Rather than seeing human consciousness as rooted in the world, we must now see the world itself as ‘rooted’ in transcendental subjectivity:

Natural being is a realm whose ‘being-validity’ is secondary; it continually presupposes the realm of transcendental being. (CM § 8, p. 21; Hua I 61).

Husserl even speaks in his *Cartesian Meditations* of ‘the essential rootedness (*Verwurzelung*) of any Objective world in transcendental subjectivity’ (CM § 59, p. 137; Hua I 164).

Transcendental philosophy brings to awareness that

...conscious life is through and through an intentionally accomplishing life (*intentional leistendes Leben*) through which the life world, with all its changing representational contents (*Vorstellungsgelalten*), in part attains anew (*teils neu gewinnt*) and in part has already attained (*immer schon gewonnen hat*) its meaning and validity. All real mundane objectivity is constituted accomplishment in this sense, including that of men and animals and thus also that of ‘souls’. (*Crisis* §58, p. 204; VI 208)

For Husserl:

Every sort of existent itself, real or ideal, becomes understandable as a “product” of transcendental subjectivity, a product constituted in just that performance. (CM § 41, Cairns, p. 85; Hua I 118)

Or as he writes in the *Amsterdam Lectures*:

Surely it is as something intended by us, and not from any other source, that the world has acquired and always acquires its meaning and its validity. (*Trans. Phen.*, p. 240; Hua IX 334)

Of course, this transcendental attitude is very difficult to maintain and there is always the danger of relapse into naturalism. Conversely, from the natural point of view, the transcendental attitude can only ever be understood in psychological terms. This is inevitable. Husserl writes:

The complete inversion of the natural stance of life, thus into an 'unnatural' one, places the greatest conceivable demands upon philosophical resolve...Natural human understanding and the objectivism rooted in it will view every transcendental philosophy as a flighty eccentricity, its wisdom as useless foolishness, or it will interpret it as a psychology which seeks to convince itself that it is not psychology. (*Crisis* § 57, p. 200; VI 204)

Husserl's key insight—later stressed also by Eugen Fink—is that the natural attitude *itself* is the product, the 'constituted result' of a particular kind of transcendental constitution.<sup>43</sup> It is, as Fink puts it in overtly Hegelian terms, an internal moment of transcendental life itself.<sup>44</sup> Although in one sense the natural attitude is the 'base' attitude, and we ascend from it to the transcendental attitude, our aim is to return and understand the natural attitude for what it really is, namely, a *constituted* attitude of the more primordial transcendental attitude. As Fink puts it, Husserl 'relativizes' the natural attitude,<sup>45</sup> or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), the natural attitude has to be 'reinstated in the transcendental flow of a universal constitution in which all the world' obscurities are elucidated'.<sup>46</sup>

To appreciate this properly, we need to see that several directions of thinking are involved at the same time. Naturalism treats human being as just one more natural entity in a natural world. For Husserl, this is of course, true ('empirical man ... belongs to the constituted world' *Crisis*, p. 201; VI 205). I am 'I-this man-in-the-world-experiencing' (*Ich-dieser-Mensch-in-der-Welt-erfahre*, V 147). It is true in the natural attitude that we are 'beings in the world'. The problem is—and which naturalism ignores—is that human subjects are also subjects '*for the world*' (*Crisis* § 57). I am a transcendental ego who constitutes the world and a human being who lives in the constituted world. In Husserl's full blown idealism only this transcendental I is 'absolute' and a 'being in and for itself' prior to worldly being (*als absolut in sich und für sich seiendes 'vor' allem weltlichen Sein*, Hua V 146). But, if we stay with a more modest statement of transcendental idealism, we need simply retain the a priori correlation between being and pure ego-centred consciousness.

Fink and Merleau-Ponty represent two further responses going in two different directions. On the one hand, Fink moves Husserl in the direction of the Hegelian

<sup>43</sup> Fink (1966a, p. 14).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Fink, 'What Does the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl Want to Accomplish?' *Research in Phenomenology*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1945), trans. C. Smith as *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). Henceforth 'PP' followed by page number of English translation; then, pagination of French edition. The reference here is to p. 419n; 365n.

march of absolute spirit, with its moments of self-alienation and overcoming of self-alienation to arrive at self-recognition. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty argues that we can never escape the ‘upsurge’ (*le jaillissement*) or intrusion of *world*. Partly inspired by Fink and by Husserl’s emphasis on the *Urboden* of the life-world, Merleau-Ponty denies the possibility of a complete reduction:

There is probably no question over which Husserl has spent more time - or to which he has more often returned, since the ‘problematic of reduction’ occupies an important place in his unpublished work. For a long time, and even in recent texts, the reduction is presented as the return to a transcendental consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely transparent, quickened through and through by a series of apperceptions which it is the philosopher’s task to reconstitute on the basis of their outcome. (PP xi; v).

In a sense, this is the Cartesian conception of the reduction to the transcendental ego, the one that Husserl admitted got us there too quickly (‘in one leap’, as he says in *Crisis* § 43). Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl on the importance of unmasking the natural attitude. As he puts it in his late essay, ‘The Metaphysical in Man’, the aim of his philosophy is ‘to rediscover, along with structure and the understanding of structure, a dimension of being and a type of knowledge which man forgets in his natural attitude’,<sup>47</sup> and in the *Phenomenology of Perception* he writes that ‘to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break (*il faut rompre*) with our familiar acceptance of it’, but he goes on to conclude that ‘from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world’ (*le jaillissement immotivé du monde*, PP xiv; viii). For this reason Merleau-Ponty adds

The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of the complete reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem’ (PP xiv; viii).

In other words, the turn to the transcendental reveals nothing more than the inescapable pull of the world on consciousness and its constant irruption into consciousness (over against which consciousness is inevitably to be conceived, in Sartrean terms, as a kind of *nothing*). We are witnessing not the constituting power of the transcendental ego, but rather the pull of the world. Merleau-Ponty therefore sees Husserl’s analysis of the life-world leading to a dilemma:

...either the constitution makes the world transparent, in which case it is not obvious why reflection needs to pass through the lifeworld, or else it retains something of that world and never rids it of its opacity. (PP 365n1; 419n1).

Merleau-Ponty’s own answer is to seize on the notion of ‘ambiguous life’ itself. This leads him back in the direction of a kind of transcendental ‘naturalism’. The world is the way it is because human embodiment is the way it is. But that is, of course, is to raise the spectre of *relativism*, something Merleau-Ponty explicitly

<sup>47</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1966), trans. as ‘The Metaphysical in Man,’ by Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, *Sense and Nonsense* (1964, p. 92).

embraces in his later essays (there is only the 'absolute for us' as he says in *Praise of Philosophy*).

We should not accept either Merleau-Ponty or Fink as giving us the definitive word on the Husserlian project. In fact, we can think of Husserl as attempting to steer a middle course between the options represented by Fink and Merleau-Ponty. With Fink, he wants to celebrate phenomenology in quasi-Hegelian terms as that which has made 'spirit' visible in a scientific manner for the first time. Thus, in the *Vienna Lecture*, he can write:

It is my conviction that intentional phenomenology has made of the spirit *qua* spirit for the first time a field of systematic experience and science and has thus brought about the total reorientation (*Umstellung*) of the task of knowledge. The universality of the absolute spirit surrounds everything that exists with an absolute historicity, to which nature as a spiritual structure is subordinated. Intentional phenomenology, and specifically transcendental phenomenology, was first to see the light through its point of departure and its methods. Only through it do we understand, and from the most profound reasons, what naturalistic objectivism (*der naturalistische Objektivismus*) is and understand in particular that psychology, because of its naturalism, has to miss entirely the accomplishment, the radical and genuine problem of the life of the spirit. (*Crisis*, p. 298–299; Hua VI 346–347)

Naturalism completely misses spirit; transcendental phenomenology tracks it, but now in these later works, Husserl also recognises its intrinsic historicity (something missing from *Ideas* I and earlier accounts) and facticity. The recognition of embodiment, historicity and the correlation between consciousness and being, brings Husserl closer to Merleau-Ponty. But Husserl never wants to surrender the kind of self-consciousness and self-meditation (*Selbstbesinnung*) and self-reflection (*Reflexion*) that will continue to insist that the unity of the world requires unity of self and 'self' has to be understood always as 'egoic' life. Hence Husserl defends transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity as an interlacing of personal, egoic, I-centred 'monads' to use Husserl's word for whole persons taken in their full unified concreteness, including their histories and interrelations with others).<sup>48</sup> How can my ego also belong to transcendental intersubjectivity? This is the new problem:

The consciousness of intersubjectivity, then, must become a transcendental problem. (*Crisis* § 57, p. 202; VI 206)

Husserl's transcendental idealism is more restrained than Fink's. He never wants to deny the validity of our world-acceptances and our natural engagements. Rather he wants to gain a stance which illuminates all other stances. We gain a new stance from which humans can come to view themselves from a different perspective—akin to the way a person can review an action from the moral perspective. Our own inner reflective life, the real meaning of the Brentanian 'inner perception', is a clue

<sup>48</sup> See Zahavi (2001) for an exploration of the meaning of Husserl's transcendental intersubjectivity as an open field between personal subjects.

to the fact that all higher consciousness is self-consciousness and self-involved. Transcendental life is still 'egoic' life. We do not abandon the human but, by attending to the ineliminably subjective and intersubjective, gain a 'higher humanity'. According to the *Amsterdam Lectures*, for Husserl, the transcendental ego is not a second ego sitting alongside the first natural ego (*Trans. Phen.*, p. 247; Hua IX 342), rather it is attained by an 'alteration of focus' (IX 342). It cannot be considered to have the same existential status as the natural worldly ego (since this would be to judge it in terms of the categories appropriate only for worldly life); nevertheless it is the source of meaning and validity of our natural lives and therein lies the puzzle.

Husserl tries to negotiate a way between the natural attitude and the transcendental attitude but part of the problem is that the language and categories of the natural attitude are the only ones available. Furthermore we always start from the natural attitude and it remains 'on' in the background. Husserl finds within the natural reflection of everyday life a springboard from which transcendental reflection can spring. The historical breakthrough to the transcendental attitude has an origin in a specific time and place and hence is mundane. But the newly discovered theoretical attitude and then the self-reflective attitude of the non-participating spectator allow the full meaning of the natural attitude to manifest itself. From the standpoint of the transcendental attitude, the natural attitude is one of its accomplishments; the transcendental attitude immanentizes itself in the world, as Fink would put it (not wholly at variance with Husserl's own language). Husserl believes that the transcendental ego constitutes itself as the mundane ego or *Ich-Mensch* in the natural attitude. The essence of the transcendental attitude is its relentless self-reflective transparency. As he puts it in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, transcendental subjectivity is my 'absolute self' (FTL § 103, p. 273; XVII 279). The transcendental life of reflection does not, Husserl says, annul ordinary natural life, rather it allows it to be understood (FTL § 104). Ordinary life runs its course untroubled by all of that. Yet, paradoxically, the 'breakthrough' (*Durchbruch*) to 'free reason' (as in *Crisis* § 3), suggests that humanity has taken permanent possession of the transcendental attitude and with that has made a new universal humanity possible. It seems impossible for Husserl to negotiate the twin demands of the resolute persistence both of our worldly life and our commitment to transcendental *theoria*.

To conclude, Husserl begins his wide-ranging critique of naturalism by showing it to be 'countersensical'. The attempted 'naturalization of consciousness' misses the essential nature of consciousness itself. Finally, the transcendental phenomenological standpoint diagnoses naturalism as an ever-present tendency within the self-effacing natural attitude itself. Only the self-critical vigilance of the transcendental philosopher can keep the natural attitude from exercising its hold over even our transcendental constructions such that we fall back into 'transcendental naturalism' and 'transcendental anthropologism'. I believe post-Husserlian phenomenology (and indeed also the work of Karl-Otto Apel in particular) can be seen as responding to this ambiguity concerning the all-encompassing reach of the life-world and the natural attitude that correlates with it.

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