

Introduction

Variations of Intuition and Understanding

Phenomenology and Hermeneutics at the Limits

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The first document of the phenomenological movement, Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), inaugurated what seemed to many to be an entirely new way of reflecting on questions concerning meaning, truth, and knowledge. Husserl's *Korrelationsforschung* appeared in fact to have burst all at once the dogmatism of an immanent consciousness filled with “representations” and that of an external reality which had to be “ascertained” in order to be known. On the contrary, consciousness is *intentional*, which means that we are always *in* the matter (we might be allowed to say “bei den Sachen”) and not simply enclosed in ourselves. Thus Husserl was attacking the traditional theory of knowledge at its roots. The theoretical “constructions” that vowed to make the relationship between consciousness and world intelligible were therefore to give way to a renewed focus on the *living link* of subject to world.

The thematization of such a “link” took many different shapes in the development of the phenomenological movement in the 20th century, with corresponding variations in the conception of knowledge, reality and experience. This complex history of variations on the philosophical *motive* inaugurated by Husserl's program can be told in many different ways depending on the current historical or thematic interest. Due to its obvious crucial place in the history of the phenomenological movement, a vast literature has developed around the relationship between Husserl and Martin Heidegger's own appropriation of phenomenological concepts and methodology.¹ No less important for an understanding of the variations on the phenomenological idea is Eugen Fink's collaboration with Husserl in his last Freiburg years.²

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1. Concerning the Husserl–Heidegger relationship, a good survey is still: *Fenomenologia. Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger* (Milano: Unicopli, 1999).

2. An exceptionally detailed and comprehensive account of the Husserl–Fink collaboration is found in Ronald Bruzina's work: *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink. Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology. 1928–1938* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2004).

What these two examples have in common is that both emerged from a living conversation with Husserl (I am limiting myself to mention perhaps the two most eminent cases, which are by no means the only ones of course). Yet, even after the death of the “Master,” the tragedy of National–Socialism and the Second World War, at a time when phenomenology in Germany was practically extinguished, critical or renewed approaches to Husserl’s venture multiplied and flourished in his “shadow,” as Merleau–Ponty put it, complicating considerably the panorama of the “effective history” of variations on phenomenological motives.

The tradition of hermeneutic philosophy represents a crucial point of reference in this history. This tradition entered into a productive confrontation with Husserl and his program in the wake of Heidegger’s inspired approach to the factual and historical dimension of human life. The way Husserl set out to articulate the living experiential correlation of subject and world by means of a Cartesian return to a pure consciousness, in spite of Husserl’s own qualifications of such “return,” opened itself to Heidegger’s criticism in particular as it separated the “concrete” or “empirical I” from the “pure” or “transcendental I.” By following the clues within the transitive direction of the experiential correlation, Husserl’s overall characterization of the living link of subject–world resorted to traditional schemata (the schema of subject–object epistemological correlation, the schema of act–intentionality in constitution, the schema of egoity in the analysis of the living temporal presence, and the schema of personal identity for transcendental subjectivity).³ In so doing, Husserl’s descriptions tended towards an inversion of the *ordo essendi* with the *ordo cognoscendi* resulting in the determination of the overall antecedency of subject with respect to validity.⁴ Heidegger’s radicalization of the notion of “understanding” (*Verstehen*) following the tradition of hermeneutics was meant to represent a radical remedy to the tendencies of Husserlian egology, his theory of intuition, and the demand of a presuppositionless stance, by emphasizing the presence of a non–thematic understanding operative at the onset of every dealing with reality.

The present issue of TROPOS intends to focus on the hermeneutic variation of, and original contribution to, the phenomenological motive following the specific thematic thread offered by the concepts of “intuition” and “understanding.” These concepts appear in fact to be qualifying terms in the context of the general confrontation between the traditions of phenomenology and contemporary hermeneutic philosophy. The task that the present issue sets itself is therefore that of exploring the semantic possibilities of “intuition” and “understanding” within and between the con-

3. See BRUZINA, *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink*, p. 370.

4. BRUZINA *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink*, p. 328.

frontation/collaboration of various authors coming from the two influential philosophical traditions of the last century.

The interrogation is inaugurated by Erwin Sonderegger's comprehensive essay on *non-empirical foundations of knowledge and understanding* (*Nichtempirische Begründungen von Wissen und Verstehen*). This contribution tackles the notion of *understanding* by offering a clear survey of historical positions about the question of the *beginning* of understanding as *access* to reality. With reference to Husserl's "transcendental ego" and to the hermeneutic notion of "totality" (*das Ganze*), Sonderegger presents both phenomenology and hermeneutics as *non-empirical* theories of understanding, i.e., as theories that overcome the empirical assumption of understanding as result of a "chain" of events, and that instead elaborate a notion of understanding as "background" (*Hintergrund*) or "ground" (*Boden*). In a compelling series of remarks, Sonderegger stresses, however, the radical *mundane* situation of any beginning understanding. This is done by elaborating an original theory of *Meinungswelten* that seems to constitute an effective bridge between the phenomenological idea of the primordial intuition of a world (*Urdoxa*) and the hermeneutical conception of the effectivity of prejudices in understanding (Sonderegger's *Meinungen*). This approach might prove especially helpful in order to rethink the Western notion of "rationalism" and its upshots (e.g., the universal constituting subject or the community of rational minds) in a historical perspective. The question of the basic features involved in the origin of knowledge is further thematized in a historical perspective by Maja Soboleva (*Plato, Hermeneutics, and Knowledge*) and Jan-Ivar Lindén (*Apperception and Experience. Some Ontological Perspectives*). Soboleva provides evidence for locating the origin of the contemporary hermeneutic notion of understanding in Plato's notion of *doxazein*, as articulated obliquely in the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue which many have (wrongly, as the author persuasively shows) described as *aporetic*. The notion of "intellectual perception" (*doxazein*) as "a meaningful reference to phenomena that precedes the judgment and enables it" (Soboleva) is thus argued to establish the historical antecedent of the rehabilitation of practical philosophy in the tradition of contemporary hermeneutics. Soboleva's interpretation of Plato's *doxazein* not as "judgment" but as a form of direct contact with reality however appears to offer the insight for a valuable integration of the sense of the living "seeing-as" that philosophical hermeneutics attempts to articulate. This approach appears to be particularly effective as it shows the possibility, on conceptual grounds, to detach the hermeneutic conception of *Verstehen* as *vor-urteilhaft* from its almost exclusive reference to the *logos* and the *linguistic* sense, as this seems to be the tendency of Gadamer's conception of the "understanding." Jan-Ivar Lindén effectively situates an incisive interrogation of the role played by apperception in experience and understanding in

the context of historical debates surrounding key epistemological categories, such as sensation, perception, imagination, and apperception. With recourse to Aristotle's psychology and its putative influence on the Leibnizian notion of "small perceptions" (*les petites perceptions*), Lindén shows the possibility to elaborate a conception of conditions of possibility that is based on the distinction between "perception" and "apperception," thereby opening up the possibility of a "transcendental" philosophy outside of the Cartesian tradition of a philosophy of consciousness. The essays by Justin L. Harmon (*Interpretation from the Ground Up: Luigi Pareyson's Hermeneutics of Inexhaustibility and its Implications for Moral Ontology*), W. Clark Wolf (*Analogy as a Mode of Intuitive Understanding in Ricoeur*), and M.A.C. Jennings (*De-fusing the Horizons? Content Analysis and Hermeneutics*) explore possibilities of integration of the features of "intuition" and "understanding" through the lens of the major representatives of philosophical hermeneutics in Europe: Luigi Pareyson, Paul Ricoeur, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Harmon develops a detailed account of an *object-oriented* hermeneutics with reference to the work of Luigi Pareyson. Harmon's contribution presents Pareyson's "hermeneutic of inexhaustibility" as a particularly effective way "to preserve the difficulty of relationality," most notably over against anti-correlationist and new realist positions. With reference to what Harmon calls "the unfathomable infinity of the object," he shows how Pareyson develops an ontology with ethical underpinnings that, however, is different from Hans-Georg Gadamer's rehabilitation of practical philosophy in that it does not reduce all "experience" (*Erfahrung*) as an experience of the "Thou" to a moral phenomenon that is totally mediated through language. Instead Pareyson's aesthetic theory, by focusing on the "sensuous *voice* of the matter" (Harmon) and by returning the intuitional dimension of the senses, which are especially highlighted in the experience of artistic performance, elaborates an ontological conception of interpretation as "originary opening to reality" in which not only the effectuality of *historical* aspects but where also *geographical* aspects (embodiment in place) are in play. Pareyson's notion of "natural intentionality" emerges thus as particularly rich for establishing lines of dialogue with the phenomenological tradition. Wolf presents Paul Ricoeur's unique contribution to the debates surrounding the respective roles of intuition and discursivity in hermeneutic philosophy. Ricoeur's theory of "analogy" and his conception of "metaphor" are the means by which Wolf illustrates the possibility of overcoming the Kantian opposition between intuitive and discursive understanding. By reference to the hermeneutical "seeing as," Wolf points to the way in which Ricoeur's analogical hermeneutics elaborates the notion of "discursive intuition" or "intuitive understanding," i.e., a form of intuition arising out of a discursive and constructive process. By tracing the genealogy of the notion of "intuitive understanding" back

to Kant's critical philosophy and then focusing on Goethe's elaboration of the notion of an "intuitive perception," Wolf sheds light on the historical antecedents constituting the conceptual framework for Ricoeur's recasting of the idea of intuitive understanding. This seems especially important in order to make sense of Ricoeur's account of "metaphor." Goethe's notion of an "eye of the mind" and Kant's "productive imagination" are set here in a productive dialogue that is useful for a clarification of the relationship between verbal meaning and articulation and perceptual sense in Ricoeur's thought. Jennings' contribution then opens a confrontation with the theory of "content analysis" that proves particularly relevant in the growing context of practices of digitalization. Jennings refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Max Weber to disclose the ineluctable hermeneutic basis of any "content analysis," however deductive or use-oriented the method may be. What emerges from Jennings' account is that "content analysis" represents a form of "technization" of the meaning of a text in that it reduces any textual meaning to its "context of use" or the discourse with which one attempts to approach a text (such as research questions, methodology, etc.), thereby operating a "de-fusion of horizons" between the horizon of the reader and that of the text. Emmanuel Alloa ("*Laddove c'è prova, non c'è testimonianza*". *Le aporie del testimone secondo Jacques Derrida*) and Alessio Rotundo (*The Cogito in Nature and History: Phenomenological and Hermeneutical Aspects*) address the question of "intuition" and "understanding" from the standpoint of the phenomenological tradition with special reference to Derrida's and Merleau-Ponty's variations on the phenomenological motive of "intuition." In Alloa's essay, the figure of the "witness" and the "grammar of the witness" developed by Jacques Derrida open up the possibility to rethink the phenomenological primacy of the notion of "evidence." The paradoxical figure of the witness in fact calls into question the Husserlian paradigm of linguistic expression as founded upon perceptual evidence (e.g., *Ideas I*, § 66), since with the witness we are forced to realize a gap between linguistic presence and the absence of a direct perceptual experience. By means of the medial structure articulated by Derrida's notion of *remediation*, Alloa highlights the final aporetic nature of any witnessing experience. The witness in fact in virtue of her *mediating* role with respect to a direct living experience aims at annulling such mediacy in order to let emerge the sensible *immediacy* of an absent event. Rotundo's contribution shows the development within the phenomenological tradition of the attempt to recover the *natural* aspect of pre-reflective life as a recovery of the identity between "sensible" and "sensing" of Aristotelian descent, and as a way to regain an understanding of the "intuition" involved in this identity and of its "immediate" character. This is what Merleau-Ponty sets out to do in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. The study of the "lived" or "perceived

world” in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in spite of Merleau-Ponty’s later critical qualifications regarding its success, are presented as being already an explicit working back from reflective explicit self-consciousness through a phenomenology of *living corporeality* that focuses on the primacy of *sense* as the grounding mode of appearance and as a gestaltic whole whereby appearance is ultimately integrative as the sensing of a sensible in perceptual experience.

These contributions should be considered a type of thematic map of orientation around the key-themes of “intuition” and “understanding” within the conceptual frameworks opened by phenomenology and hermeneutics. The lines of focus presented in this volume should serve therefore as the point of departure for a further *Selbstbesinnung* about the scope of “intuition” and “understanding” *beyond* their respective role *in* phenomenology or *in* hermeneutics, or even *in* a complementing “coupling” of them in order to make up for their respective deficiencies when taken in isolation from each other that would solve all residual issues. Instead the further elaboration of the phenomenological and hermeneutical features of “intuition” and “understanding” for articulating the level of pre-reflective experience should “work back” on questioning the methodological demands on the level of final philosophical explication that is the striving of both traditions as enterprises that push philosophy to its limits.