

A Question Containing Itself Metaphysics of Genesis and Emergentism

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ABSTRACT: In Husserl, traditional metaphysics doubles the naturalistic oppositions between form and matter, subject and object, nature and mind etc., at the grounding layer of reality. This way it never gains an authentically transcendental standpoint. Phenomenology discovers that description is always an intrinsic part of what it describes: in reducing the world the ego makes it possible according to eidetic laws. Therefore, a “phenomenological metaphysics” should give genetically reason of this movement, which makes reference to the corporeal rootedness of consciousness. Apparently, enactive emergentism seems to respond to this issue in a naturalizing way. In a sense, it pursues the task of genetic phenomenology, shedding light on the temporal dynamics of self-constitution and the metastable balance of consciousness; but the ambition of genetic phenomenology — as every transcendentalism — is also to take into account the not-individually-lived, that is the *Lebenswelt*, the already-constituted significations which are neither merely biological nor environmental, rather logical, technical, and historical.

A phenomenological metaphysics, therefore, should answer for an inclusion and a self-inclusion: the inclusion of all experiences in the “multilayered” temporal display, and the inclusion of itself in itself, for itself contributes, while describing, to that temporal display.

KEYWORDS: transcendental phenomenology — naturalization — temporal constitution — self-inclusion.

In Husserl, natural attitude and traditional metaphysics have in common the disacquaintance of the *epoché*, that is of the a priori and immanent correlation between *Erscheinen* and *Erscheinenden*, constitution and constituted. Metaphysics, as the study of Being and last foundation, is a dualistic thought

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pretending to occupy the neutral perspective of totality. It doubles the naturalistic oppositions between form and matter, subject and object, nature and mind etc., at the grounding layer of reality. This way it never gains an authentically transcendental standpoint: so, classical metaphysics shows that running parallel to the natural naïveté there can be a transcendental one. Naïve metaphysics is the history of the abstention from a radical question about the origin, and empirism and rationalism have been accomplices in this abstention. Actually, even if in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl puts himself in defense of the neutrality of phenomenology with regard to metaphysical claims, he will increasingly clarify his view and in § 64 of his *Cartesian Meditations*, for example, he states definitely that phenomenology does not disqualify all, but only “naïve” metaphysics:

To prevent from misunderstandings, I would like to point out the fact that phenomenology rules out only naive metaphysics, dealing with the absurd things in themselves, but not metaphysics in general. (Hua I: 182)

Phenomenology is the science of the very beginnings (*rizomata panteon*). It discovers, through the concept of immanence, that truth and method, so to speak, genetically overlap each other: description is always an intrinsic part of what it describes and, in reducing the world, the ego makes it possible according to eidetic laws. Properly speaking there is no world before reduction. The phenomenological concern with consciousness and intentionality can easily be interpreted as in the service of his metaphysical interest in objectivity in general. From this point of view the critique, made against Husserl, of idealism and “loss of the world” seems to be scarcely pithy. A “phenomenological metaphysics” — whose development arising from a theory of constitution Husserl does not exclude — should give genetically reason of this overlapping movement between active and passive, egological and mundane, sides of constitution, which makes eventually reference to the corporeal rootedness of consciousness, that is to its sensitive, practical and pre-predicative level. This is the hidden and operative fold of constitution. In a word, phenomenological metaphysics should substitute the primacy of substance with that of relation (or correlation). At the origin of the world, among the conditions of possibility for objectivity in general and for the appearing — the *phenomenon* — of the world in general, there is the non-reality (both in the sense of *reell* and *real*) of the *noema*, which does not belong to the consciousness nor to the world, which is not in the consciousness nor in the world. Naïve metaphysics could not account for this very riddle since it does not operate in the regime of reduction, whereas the *epoché* allows the breakthrough of substantialism. Metaphysics classically deals with transcendence while phenomenology is a discipline confined by

reduction to the region of pure immanence (cf. Landgrebe 1949: 156–58). Moreover, and coherently, naïve metaphysics sections constitution transversally, as it were, instead of considering it in its “longitudinal” becoming, that is instead of considering its genesis.

An absolute consideration of the world, a “metaphysics”, can only first be carried out, and the possibility of a world can only first be understood through the genetic consideration of individuation. (Hua XI: 343)

In philosophy of mind, emergentism is the name for those theoretical positions regarding the mind as an “emerging phenomenon”, that is regarding mental phenomena as emerging properties of the brain.

The main thesis pursued by emergentists are:

- a) the existence of emergence as a legitimate category apt to explain the reality;
- b) the refusal of every form of ontological dualism;
- c) the refusal of reductionism, or at least of some of its acceptations;
- d) the possibility to apply the concept of emergence to a manifold of phenomena such life, mind, and social phenomena in general.

Moreover, emergentists often share a theory of natural evolution and the so-called hierarchic theory of the real.

Historically, emergentism was born from the attempt to find a middle way between epistemological approaches opposing each other: mechanism and vitalism, materialistic monism and Cartesian dualism, reductionism and holism, scientific objectivism and humanistic subjectivism. The conviction that emergentism could sort out such age-old oppositions was based on the fact that the concept of “emergence” seems to be able to clarify scientifically the ancient saying “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”. The emergentists agree on stating that the surplus making the totality be more than the sum of its parts is exactly what “emerges” from it. Thus, there are: the parts, their sum, and the emerging *quid*. According to the emergentists, the reductionists of every time do not see anything but parts or, at the most, their sum; they deny or disregard the emerging *quid*. Vitalists, Cartesian dualists, and spiritualists in general, on the other hand, mistake the emergence for an ontologically independent substance and, as such, for a supernatural substance. So, in the opinion of emergentism, the stagnant dispute between extremist and misleading epistemologies finds a solution in two moves: 1) recognizing the existence and the importance of the emerging *quid* and 2) preventing it from acquiring the ontological autonomy and the substantial statute. All the emerging phenomena, mind included, are spontaneous and not deterministically generated phenomena.

They have a processual feature and develop without necessity outcropping and distinguishing inch by inch from the web of interactions among the parts of the whole.

On these grounds, it is possible to elaborate a “neuro–psycho–(evolutionary)–phenomenology” (Varela 1996) which has the merit of trying to avoid the risk of reductionism and the static absolutizations of classical metaphysics. It presents the mental as a network of neurons that interact locally with each other, and therefore engendering a global cognitive state whose own intrinsic properties are not reducible to the local properties of the neurons. So, it claims to describe the laws of the emergence of the global from the local, that is the dynamic laws through which consciousness is engendered. This way, it differentiates distinct levels of phenomena and tries to regard how they are internally regulated, strictly excluding finalism.

On account of this, apparently, enactive emergentism seems to respond to the issue of a generative metaphysics as aimed by Husserl. It conceives the living organisms and the world as spontaneously co–emerging and evolving along a performative path marked by passivity. According to what Husserl claims in the *Cartesian Meditations*,

anything built by activity necessarily presupposes, as the lowest level, a passivity that gives something beforehand; and, when we trace anything built actively, we run into constitution by passive generation. (Hua I: 78)

The neuronal behavior would find its linchpin in an individual situated in a given environment which, in turn, reacts back upon her and leads her to put into effect an incessant process of adaptation resulting from an assumed passivity rather than from willed actions.

Ultimately, we arrive at the “obscure”, “hidden”, representations and representational complexes. Insofar as attention plays a role in this constitution of transcendent unities and multiplicities, we have there implicitly an Ego that is accomplishing some kind of comportment. The ultimate, however, is a background that is prior to all comportment and is instead presupposed by all comportment. (Hua III/2: 291)

Already in the *Ideas*, even if Husserl had not yet elaborated a passive phenomenology, which strictly dates at the 1920s, he had clearly distinguished between a static constitution, that is active, and a blind one, that is passive.

The specifically spiritual Ego, the subject of spiritual acts, the person, finds itself dependent on an *obscure underlying basis* of traits of character, original and latent dispositions, and thereby dependent on nature. [. . .] In the sphere of the senses, in the sphere of the basis, grasped as extensively as possible, we have associations, perceverances, determining tendencies, etc. These “make” the constitution of nature, but they even extend further, *since* this constitution is also there for spirits:

all life of the spirit is permeated by the “blind” operation of associations, drives, feelings which are stimuli for drives and determining grounds for drives, tendencies which emerge in obscurity, etc., all of which determine the subsequent course of consciousness according to “blind” rules. (Ivi: 288–289)

A naturalization of phenomenology would be possible only on condition of its “de–reductionism”. In a way, this kind of emergentism (which might be called *incarnate* emergentism) claims to pursue the task of the genetic phenomenology, shedding new light on the temporal dynamics of self–constitution and the metastable balance of consciousness; but only in a certain way, for the ambition of genetic phenomenology — as every transcendentalism, I would say — is to take into account the not–individually–lived, that is the *Lebenswelt*, the already–constituted significations which are neither merely biological nor environmental, rather cultural, logical, and even techno–logical. To put it differently, if emergentism is a theory for ontogenesis, it still lacks a phylogenetic integration, which is instead contained in the Husserlian concept of *Stiftung* and in the idea of a communal world of the spirit. We could even suggest that it lacks an “epiphilogenetic” investigation (Stiegler 1998), that is an investigation into the reciprocal constitution between organic and inorganic (namely the technical prosthesis).

Hence, the different versions of emergentism debate about the existence of a “Principle of Causal Inheritance” (Kim 1999) and of latent properties (Shoemaker 2002): the former asserts that the causal powers of the emerging properties (higher level) are identical to those of the basic properties (lower–level); the latter claims that the elements of an emerging totality have some properties which cannot be deduced from their manifest properties and whose effect can only be observed *a posteriori*. If such notions aim to protect emergentism from dualism, nonetheless they pose again the question of reductionism (to an ontological causal monism) since they keep emergentism bound within the domain of *physical* realizers. We do not have the means (neither linguistic nor conceptual) to collect in a unique nomological macro–connection the myriad of micro–connections between the physical realizers tracing the rizoma of their emergence (so that we are not facing a generalized reductionism). Yet, if we assume the standpoint of causal inheritance we have to suppose that such a network exists in principle, to the detriment of the idea that new causal power can emerge. This way, emergentism can combine with an ontological causal monism and at the same time with an epistemological causal pluralism.

For this reason, a “strong” emergentism rejects the Principle of Causal Inheritance in the name of original and irreducible forms of causal interaction which put at stake new entities and need different explicative styles from the ones of the basic layer. These new causal relations are the effect of some

properties that do not present themselves at the first-order level. So, strong emergentism claims for the necessity of changing the explicative style as it happens, for example, when we pass from the sub-personal level to the personal one in order to explain actions and behaviors. From an ontological standpoint, this leads to a pluralistic view of the world. A plurality of entities is exhibited, which is sometimes constituted by basic elements, but which is not exhausted by them, as far as higher-degree entities have different conditions of identity and different causal powers. An interesting — and even fairly disturbing from the naturalistic point of view — aspect of this perspective is that it seems to reverse the relationship of ontological ground with respect to the Principle of Causal Inheritance: only inasmuch as they are part of a wider totality the lower constituents of an emergent system have (also) latent causal properties, whose presence is not traceable as far as one sticks at the basic layer.

In this respect, the authentic phenomenological method is close to a strong emergentism as far as it does not consider the mental properties as physical properties. In particular, phenomenology is more articulated, and moves in two directions at once, toward a denaturalization of nature and a despiritualization of spirit. So, genetic phenomenology is able to combine a double horizon, originally biological and historical-communitarian, whereas emergentism lies to the individual and his ontogenetic development. Bringing to light the dynamic by which our acts are engendered requires evidently a special consideration for the temporal and associative synthesis. But that is the point: are time and its synthesis a “mere” effect of neuronal interactions? Does emergentism completely exhaust the investigation of the “transductive” system (in Husserlian terms, the “transcendence in immanence”) coupling the living organism and the world? Briefly, the stake of a metaphysical underpinning of phenomenology is time, including its perceptive, technological, intersubjective and historical unfolding. All these facets are genetically, or better still generatively, coentailed, so that one cannot give itself without the others. Landgrebe (*op. cit.*) is on the right track when he states that at least two conditions must be filled for a phenomenological metaphysics to become possible: we first need the intentionality thesis, which allows to preserve a “world for me”, a world as pure phenomenon, in the reductive immanence itself; second, we also need the phenomenological theory of intersubjectivity, which makes possible an intentional analysis of the world as being an objective world.

The principle of all possible contribution of phenomenology to metaphysics must be the notion of intersubjectivity, and the phenomenological reduction itself can be fully achieved only as a “reduction to intersubjectivity”. Emergentism, as every kind of naturalism, accounts only for some of the mentioned levels and deals with them analytically, while the different

ways of givenness are always intertwined and stem from a unique process of constitution which progressively complexifies (consciousness is « eine nie abbrechende Geschichte » [Hua XI: 270]). This process, however, is spurious *ab origine*, indeed it reveals the lack of origin to be the origin as lack, and so it radically avoids every reductionism. The novelty of second-order property, as the novelty of each temporal “now”, is its opacity.

Phenomenology has understood that consciousness fails in anticipating itself in its development and in being totally transparent to itself, that is in fulfilling itself at every phase of its temporalization. Time ruins the linearity of genesis so that all original presentation is characterized by facticity and contingency. Two consequences are entailed: firstly, the consciousness always throws a shadow upon its origin “missing itself out” and hiding its own constitutional performance; an origin can only and always be reactivated and recovered since it is never constituted as a beginning from the beginning. Secondly, the self-shadowing of consciousness as origin occurs as the possibility itself of reiteration and recovery. Such undecidedness is the opacity of the absolute time-consciousness in its self-differentiation and complexification through which it comes to encounter itself (Husserl would call this phenomenon *Entgegenleben*). Reality is inherently plural in its ontological structure, and not only: as far as reality is the place of all the causally effective properties, it follows that the emerging totalities are endowed with a bigger degree of reality (in the sense of effectuality or, to put it in Hegelian terms, of *Wirklichkeit*, which is another way to render the Aristotelian idea of a discord between the whole and the sum of its parts).

The mistake of naturalism consists in tending to isolate nature from the more complex spectrum of the conditions of possibility. Naturalism absolutizes nature, it takes it for granted: even avoiding reductionism, as in the case of emergentism, is not enough. Anti-reductionism is only the first step towards a satisfying understanding of reality. Excluding reductionism should not entail excluding reduction in the phenomenological sense: we cannot start from nature, nature must be reduced. Starting from nature means starting from an unquestioned and unjustified presupposition. The problem of naturalism (but one could say the same a propos of realism and idealism) is that it takes step from a dogmatic standpoint. Nature is neither a row fact nor an ultimate fact since it always already involves consciousness in their reciprocal and correlative constitution. Consciousness, in turn, is not a *primum* but involves the synthetic givenness of the world. Taking nature for an absolute fact means to suppose a knowledge that we cannot in anyway justify and wherein we never find ourselves. This is the skeptical argument, for which in effect no remedy exists unless one takes up the phenomenological attitude, that is unless one performs the reduction to the transcendental immanence.

In all of modern psychology, there has never been an intentional analysis which has fully carried through. Obstacle: naturalizing of consciousness. Naturalism over-powered intentionality. (Hua IX: 219–220)

The immanentism of the genesis of consciousness is *transcendental*; on the contrary, the emergence cannot go beyond an *empirical* immanentism. Whereas naturalism is often contaminated by a metaphysics of presence, in the form of a blind realism, phenomenology — and Husserl first, in spite of Derrida — leads it to its inescapable rupture through repetition and redoubling. Thereby, as Merleau-Ponty claims, « if philosophy wishes to be absolute, it contains itself » (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 167): a phenomenological metaphysics should answer for an inclusion and a self-inclusion (similar to what Fink calls *Selbstbezogenheit* [Fink 1988: 16]): the inclusion of all experiences in the “multilayered” temporal display and the inclusion of itself in itself, for itself contributes, while describing, to that temporal display.

Metaphysics is certainly the promise of beginning, but that is not enough: it must be remembered that the recovered beginning is not the one from where we just started.

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