

PHILOSOPHY AS A RIGOROUS SCIENCE: TOWARDS THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF A REALISTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL
METHOD – IN CRITICAL DIALOGUE WITH EDMUND
HUSSERL’S IDEAS CONCERNING PHILOSOPHY AS A
RIGOROUS SCIENCE

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I. Husserl’s Ideal of Philosophy as a Rigorous Science and its Critical
Reformulation

Ten years after writing the *Logical Investigations*, Edmund Husserl, in his famous and sole *Logos* essay,¹ defended the thesis that philosophy ought to be a ‘rigorous science’ and described this goal of philosophy as an “ideal” that ‘has never been completely abandoned,’ but also as an ideal that has never been even roughly or partially realized. Husserl considers it as evidently tragic that up until now philosophy has never lived up to this claim.² In this regard, Husserl asserts it is not only philosophy, which is not, yet a perfect or complete science. He rightly emphasizes this is also true for all the so-called exact sciences, since they are

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¹This first essay (which was disregarded by some reviews and a short encyclopedic contribution) that Edmund Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological movement, had published after the drafting of the *Logical Investigations* (1900/01), was called “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science” and appeared in 1911 in the first volume (H 3) of *Logos* (*Logos I*, 1911, S. 289-341), in whose publication Husserl was involved as Henrich Rickert had promised. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911-1921)*, Editors Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* Volume XXV (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: M. Hijhoff, 1987), p. 3-62. The essay was drafted between December 1910 and January 1911, revised in February and appeared in March 1911. Husserl considered it as a general exposition of his views in a popular style.

²*Ibid.*, p. 4: So philosophy in its historical disregard for the highest and most rigorous of sciences, which supports the inevitable claim of mankind to a pure and absolute knowledge ... does not manage to form a real science.

also imperfect and incomplete. Rather, he wants to claim that philosophy has never even begun to be a science such that it would follow no dogmatic system in which ‘all things and each thing in particular are controversial’, and is nothing more than the product of mere individual prejudices and perspectives.³ Now Husserl claims that philosophy, for the very first time, ought to fulfill this ideal and become a rigorous science.

In looking at Husserl’s analysis and considering the reasons behind his devastatingly harsh judgement of the entire history of philosophy (excluding his apparently less than modest claim that for the first time in the whole history of philosophy someone has wanted to make philosophy a strict science) one thing in particular stands out. It is that several of Husserl’s fundamental claims are sometimes acknowledged as presuppositions, while at other times they are more implicitly assumed. Some could be defended while others could not be expressly put forward let alone defended, and as well, others could be easily confused with one another. Let us consider, in detail, the theses Husserl presupposes and asserts. In the first place, Husserl openly presupposes that a scientific philosophy must be preferred over any system, that it not be controversial, and that it possess a broad, virtually universal consensus, as is the case in physics or mathematics. Secondly, he emphasizes that it cannot be any kind of ‘*Weltanschauung Philosophie*’, by which term he understands at least two radically different things. On the one hand, a scientific philosophy, which he sharply contrasts with a ‘*Weltanschauung Philosophie*’, may not attempt to answer the important questions of metaphysics; above all it may not claim that it has access to those things that exist in themselves as they are in themselves or, in particular, to the really existing world.⁴ Every transcendent act of cognition that grasps an essence that rules over

³*Ibid.*, p. 5 also Cf. *ibid.*, p. 53, 55 Cf. the similar explanation of Husserl in “Pure Phenomenology, its Field of Research and its Methods (Introductory Talk in Freiburg)”, in: Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911-1921)*, Editors Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* Volume XXV (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: M. Nijhoff, 1987), p. 68-81, p. 69.

⁴Husserl speaks in a similar sense in “Phenomenology and Psychology”, in: Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911-1921)*, Editors Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* Volume XXV (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: M. Nijhoff, 1987), p. 82-124, especially p. 83, where the bracketing of “the naïve belief in the world” and of “the real existence of the given things” is required from philosophy.

the existing world, as well as every cognition of the real world, lies beyond the reach of scientific philosophical knowledge. As a result, a rigorously scientific philosophy must remain expressly within the realm of consciousness, its intentional acts and its corresponding purely intentional objects, in order for it to be a rigorous science.⁵ In addition, a scientific philosophy ought not to entertain any of the most fundamental and deepest problems, as every metaphysical question is supposed to lie beyond its competency.⁶ On the other hand, philosophy ought not to find its origin in a mere *Weltanschauung* or in a religious faith. This is the case with every kind of fideistic philosophy, which attempts to answer the most fundamental questions, and in so doing takes as its basis the personal opinion of a *Weltanschauung philosophen*. The results in answers, which

⁵So writes Husserl in the essay “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science”, in: Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911-1921)*, Editors Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* Volume XXV (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: M. Nijhoff, 1987), p. 3-62, p.15: Whenever a theory of knowledge would nonetheless like to investigate the relation between consciousness and being, then it can only have being as the correlate of consciousness as a consciously conditioned “meaning”: as perceptions, remembrances, expectations, pictured images ... etc. Cf. also the clear capturing of this position in “Pure Phenomenology, its Field of Research and its Methods (Introductory Talk in Freiburg)”, in: Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911-1921)*, Editors Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* Volume XXV (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: M. Nijhoff, 1987)p. 68-81, p. 72-75, where phenomenology is characterized as a “science of consciousness as such” and above all where all objects that are foreign to consciousness (transcendent) objects are excluded from the domain of phenomenological philosophy. On this cf. also, Josef Seifert, “Critique of Relativism and Immanentism in E. Husserl’s Cartesian Meditations. The Equivocation in the Expression ‘Transcendental Ego’ as the Basis of Every Transcendental Idealism.” – “Kritik am Relativismus und Immanentismus in E. Husserls Cartesian Meditations. Die Aequivokationen im Ausdruck, transcendentales Ego’ an der Basis jedes transzendentalen Idealismus.” *Salzburger Jahrbuch für Philosophie XIV*, 1970.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 59, where Husserl demands: “...that philosophy takes on the form and language of a genuine science and recognizes as incompleteness that which in it is often praised and is quite imitated – depth. Depth is a sign of Chaos, that genuine science wants to transform in a cosmos, in a simple, fully clear, dissolved order. Genuine science knows, as far as its real doctrines reach, no depth ... depth belongs to essence...”

only have appeal for this or that particular personality. Such a *Weltanschauung Philosophie* ought never – in spite of its undisputed value according to Husserl – to confuse people by appearing to be a science.⁷ Genuine science and a rigorously scientific philosophy must especially not assume anything as a given, must not validate anything handed down as a starting point, and must not allow us to be blinded by influential authorities.⁸ Behind this stands the unspoken, but in itself the most important thought of Husserl concerning philosophy as a rigorous science. In other words, philosophy can only be a science if it does not concern itself with mere personal opinions. Instead, it should deal with the objective knowledge of truth and the attainment of the appropriate evidence, as well as if it seeks a systematic construction based on principles and an inner, logical order of knowledge. Philosophy in the strict sense must be a “science from its very beginnings, from the origin” “of all things (pantón rhematón)”.⁹

Husserl rightly ascertained to achieve this goal (that is in order to arrive at an objective, evident and from the beginning progressive knowledge) philosophy must first fight against the kind of naturalism and psychologism, which led him in his *Logical Investigations* to the castigation of that relativism and reductionism, that completely falsify the object and knowledge of philosophy. Since necessarily, a scientific philosophy is only possible through a return to the ‘Things Themselves’, it must further overcome Dilthey’s historicism, which makes it particularly impossible to return to the things and problems themselves by insisting one be held captive by historical understandings and feel oneself into past epochs. We are in such perfect agreement concerning this last and third point, namely that a strict scientific philosophy can be differentiated from theology and from every system which springs from some *Weltanschauungs* belief, that we cannot fail to credit Husserl with being right with respect to the first two theses. For this reason, I would like to turn towards the establishment of a new foundation, which will partially constitute a sharp critique of Husserl’s view. In so doing, I ought to present him as Socrates says in the *Phaedo* with a veiled face. Although I do not consider Husserl to be a god, before whom a Socrates must veil

⁷Edmund Husserl, “Philosophie als Strenge Wissenschaft”, in Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911-1921)*, Editors Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Husserliana* Volume XXV (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: M. Nijhoff, 1987), p. 3-62, *ibid.*, p. 58ff.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 61.

his face,¹⁰ I am so indebted to him (as is philosophy) that the sharp critique, which I think necessary, makes me feel ashamed. Nevertheless, for the sake of truth, I feel a duty to develop such a critique. I present the following claims to evidence:

1) The first of the four named presuppositions, namely that philosophy has not yet begun to be a strict science, because “all things and each thing in it is controversial”,¹¹ is highly doubtful. It springs from a thoughtless application of the conditions of natural science to those of philosophy, an application that is taken by Husserl to be self-evident but is in truth an untenable position. Not only, therefore, must we refuse to give our assent to Husserl’s first thesis, as it is obviously illusionary to assume the perfection of a philosophy should always be judged by whether or not it can secure the universal consensus of all philosophers. Rather, we hold that each consensus that in the natural sciences leads unavoidably to objective scientific knowledge can, in philosophy, since it requires a particular talent and philosophical vision, as well as countless further presuppositions in order to achieve evident knowledge. In whose way obstacles such as sophisms of all kinds as well as sins against the spirit stand, in no way be interpreted as a necessary consequence of evident knowledge. It is, therefore, by no means true that in philosophy a greater or almost universal consensus is a condition of its scientific character. How is it that Husserl’s own lucid refutation of psychologism and of that more fundamental relativism and skepticism in the *Prolegomena* of the *Logical Investigations* be considered unscientific? Is it only because not all of his colleagues shared Husserl’s results? And while one may want to find a partial ground in a certain incompleteness of Husserl’s analysis for the lack of such a consensus, the objection is nonetheless valid: even the evident and most lucid examples of scientific philosophical knowledge has not once produced in philosophical logic, let alone in ethics, a universal consensus. In fact, even if an all-knowing and divine version of philosophical science—in its pure and evident ideal structures—were lucidly explained, it too, without a doubt, would be produce all kinds of controversies. The claimed and at first glance certainly peculiarly appearing unrealisability of universal consensus in philosophy has very plausible grounds that Husserl not once raises let alone refutes. Of course will we, we who

¹⁰Socrates veiled himself before the god Eros, when he relates a speech that another had written against love.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

claim that a “pure philosophical science” does not require universal consensus, have to find a new foundation and be able to explain how an evident and systematically built up scientific knowledge is possible without being able to have a universal or even a broad consensus¹². We will return to this point later.

2) Husserl’s second thesis condemns his own objective position that he held in the *Prolegomena* to his *Logical Investigations*. There he had described the logical objects of cognition as being equally valid for men, angels, and gods. With the diametrically opposed claim that a scientific philosophy may only deal with the *noemata* of consciousness, Husserl rejects his former objectivism and turns toward transcendental phenomenology. Accordingly, a rigorously scientific philosophy may not deal with the existing world, but rather, may only handle pure essences, and not their being or validity in themselves. Consideration is given to the *noemata* of intentional acts as pure and immanent objects of consciousness. We will hope to show that this position proves itself false for a number of reasons, and even as the very dissolution of the specifically scientific character of philosophy. Scientific philosophy can and must reach both the existing world as well as the recognition of those fully transcendent and for each being decisively important necessary essences in order to be a rigorous science.

3) The third Husserlian presupposition is in itself unclear and is only in one of its meanings justified, namely that philosophy may accept no presuppositions based on faith; in this respect I am in complete agreement. Although I cannot develop this further in the present context, it neither follows, as Husserl was later to hold, that all faith-claims are incapable of being rationally grounded. Additionally, there can be no rigorous science, in a theological sense, which would take its starting point in rational faith, which could then be systematically developed and grounded by reason.

4) The fourth thesis, which Husserl defends, is that philosophy must attain to an evident knowledge that is free of preconceived notions and that it must reject

¹²Cf. my extensive defense of this point of view in: Josef Seifert, “Zur Begründung ethischer Normen. Einwände auf Edgar Morschers Position. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag”; also cf. “Und dennoch: Ethik ist Episteme, nicht blosse Doxa. Ueber die wissenschaftliche Begründbarkeit und Ueberprüfbarkeit ethischer Sätze und Normen. Erwiderung auf Edgar Morscher’s Antwort” in: *Vom Wahren und vom Guten, Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Balduin Schwarz*. (Salzburg: St. Peter Verlag, 1983), Editors, Edgar Morscher, Josef Seifert and Fritz Wenisch.

every historicism and psychological naturalism; this thesis will also be defended by us. Husserl, through his critique of psychologism and historicism, has undoubtedly contributed in a very essential way to the fulfillment of philosophy as a science in this sense. So impressive and correct is the ideal of an evident, critical, analytical and preconception-free knowledge which Husserl places before us, and yet in terms of his own explanation and grounding of this claim concerning philosophy as a rigorous science, it becomes impossible to really make or to show how philosophy can be a “pure science.” This is rather only possible through a renewed extraction and continuation of many classical and preceding insights (including those of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*). It is the task of realistic phenomenology to provide a new foundation and to enlarge this classical philosophy. By means of this new foundation for the rigorously scientific character of genuine philosophy, realistic phenomenology managed to free it from Husserl’s basic errors concerning philosophical methodology. Freed, in particular, from his immanentism and his pure essentialism,¹³ which betray his own principle of a ‘conditionless’ return to the things themselves.

I. Essential Aspects of Philosophy as a Rigorous A Priori Science. The
Rehabilitation and Critique of Kant’s and Husserl’s Views Concerning
Philosophy as a “Rigorous Science”

Before Husserl, Kant was also occupied with the question of the scientific character of philosophy. He formulated an additional thesis as a condition of this ‘scientific-ness’: that philosophy or metaphysics can only appear as a science when it is capable of grounding synthetic a priori propositions. Philosophy and logic, as well as mathematics, pure physics, etc., as *a priori* sciences, were contrasted by both Husserl and Kant with the empirical and experimental sciences. The kind of knowledge, which we are calling ‘a priori’, allows itself to be characterized in general by two marks: strict necessity and apodictic certainty¹⁴.

¹³On this cf. Edmund Husserl, “Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft”, cit., p. 26, p. 36, where Husserl says that as a science a pure phenomenology can only be “of essential research and not existential research at all”; cf. also *ibid.*, 41, where the a priori character is emphasized, as on p. 62.

¹⁴Under apodictic certainty I understand here an indubitable “absolute” certainty, that Bonaventure – in an objective and adequate description – also calls ‘infallible certainty’,

Neither of these marks is present in the essential features of a lion, the knowledge of such facts having to be obtained by biology through observation. With Kant (and with Husserl), we must add another note to the two marks of philosophical *a priori* knowledge: necessity and apodictic certainty. Instead of the probability of the general forms of empirical knowledge – namely, the note that it has a content that goes beyond what is contained in mere definitions or tautological formulas such as “all old men are old”, or “every cause produces an effect”. For the necessary truth ‘All triangles are triangular’, or ‘All old men are old’ is surely characterized as well by the two aforementioned marks, but their predicates follow solely because of the principles of identity and contradiction, simply out of the definition of the subjects. These truths are most certainly necessary, but empty. They tell us nothing new in that only general and formal ontological and logical basic principles, such as that everything is itself (the principle of identity) and nothing can both be itself and not be itself (the principle of contradiction). Additionally, the logical laws, which follow from this with respect to the truth and falsehood of propositions, as applied in a particular case, or better put, the predicate only claims what was already contained *per definitionem* in the concept of the subject.¹⁵

Since Kant, these propositions are seen as analytical judgements. The proposition “Every effect has a cause” tells us nothing new in its predicate: for “effect” is already defined as a definite result of a cause. Quite different is the case of those informative propositions, which express something new and are characterized by necessity and apodictic certainty: “Every change and every non-necessary being requires an effective cause.” This so-called principle of causality is in no way tautological or analytic. The predicate of this proposition adds something new to the subject ‘Every change and every contingent being’. Kant refers to such a proposition therefore, as synthetic. All of those judgements, the truths of which are only knowable through empirical observation, are synthetic. We only need then experience and perception in order to achieve knowledge of them. Whenever I say something such as that lions in contrast to hyenas first kill their prey before consuming it, the proposition is synthetic.

and which justifies the positing of the absolutely maintained apodictic judgement in the logical sense.

¹⁵Cf. for a deeper discussion of this question and for the justification of the fact that this formulation is not sufficiently precise, Fritz Wenisch, (1988) and J. Seifert (1976, II. Teil).

While there are many propositions of this type, that is, propositions which can be verified or falsified only through experiments or single observations; in the same way there are also other amazing propositions, which are synthetic. They are neither justified through empirical observations, nor do they lack absolute necessity and apodictic certainty. There appears to be such legitimate and by no means arbitrary apodictic claims concerning axioms, principles, and other general states of affairs. Only if such propositions exist can philosophy be grounded as the rigorous science that Kant emphasized. In keeping with Kant, the question concerning the rigorously scientific character of philosophy can first be identified with the question concerning the possibility of synthetic *a priori* propositions. How can we know, for example, that every change requires a cause? If philosophy is supposed to be both possible and justifiable, this kind of proposition, which can be found in both mathematics and philosophy, must be capable of being grounded. The problem of the so-called synthetic *a priori* knowledge, with whose help we understand for example the Pythagorean theorem, has belonged since Plato's dialogue *Meno*, where the problem of the possibility of *a priori* knowledge is first to be formulated, to the most fascinating of all philosophical problems. How can we explain general knowledge claims that tell us something new, and which are not dependent on empirical experience but are rather distinguished through apodictic certainty and necessity? This fundamental question of Kant, "how are synthetic *a priori* judgements possible?" is also fundamental question of philosophy and of phenomenological realism in particular. The question is simple and yet terribly difficult to answer. How can one derive from the given temporal objects something timeless? Does it come from the experience of contingently existing objects' necessary and unchanging states of affairs, from uncertain and non-evident sensory perceptions apodictically certain and evident states of affairs, or from the experience of imperfection something perfect?

Plato had thought that such a knowledge could only be accounted for in relation to the eternal ideas, which the soul must have beheld before its birth. St. Augustine thought that such an astonishing form of knowledge could only be explained through an immediate divine illumination. This insight would permit us to have a cognitive share in the eternal and divine ideas. Descartes tried to ground the same kind of knowledge in innate ideas and Leibniz assumed as an explanation that God had established a harmony between subjectively held ideas and the objective nature of things. The first modern philosopher who wishes to do

away with such informative, necessary and experience-independent propositions is David Hume. He wishes to throw to the flames all those library books that contain neither mere definitions and tautologies nor empirical propositions.

Kant, who was educated in rationalist post-Cartesian philosophy, is awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Hume, during which time he believed, alongside the tradition, in such eternal truths as the object of philosophy. Kant rightly sees in a position such as David Hume's the radical dissolution of philosophy. This is why he tries to save the informative *a priori* but at the same time he accepts Hume's principle that only experience can validate knowledge. Kant tries, therefore, to answer the question concerning the possibility of synthetic knowledge *a priori* through transcendental forms of perception and thought that are grounded in the subject and are the conditions of the possibility of experience. There takes place here a revolution that shatters the fundamental understanding of what philosophy is and gives Kant such names as 'the all-crusher' or 'the all-destroyer'. Up until Kant, we understood this knowledge as comprising necessary truths that were grounded in an object, as genuine knowledge. Afterwards, according to Kant's famous Copernican turn, such knowledge is not to be explained through the object but rather through the subject. With Kant, then, the *a priori* is concerned with the production and establishment of principles. This led Nietzsche to speak of the despair of truth, which accompanies Kantian philosophy, one that would lead to a scepticism that would destroy everything and that would consider the so-called *a priori* as inborn errors of the human race. Admittedly, Kant himself had assumed that the *a priori* principles were binding for all men. Moreover, he had also tried, through the postulate of practical reason (through ethical postulates), to save certain objective elements, above all in ethics and through this ethical detour in metaphysics.

In post-Kantian modernity, what Kant thought were universal human cognitions in the sense of binding forms of thought has often, however, been reduced to psychological and linguistic compulsions or habits of thought, to cultural prejudices or to language games or rules made through consensus, which has led to a liquidation of philosophy through linguistic analysis¹⁶.

It is clear, that under the proposed accounts of both Kantian and many post-Kantian philosophies, a genuine *a priori* knowledge is not possible. Rather,

¹⁶Rudolf Lütke, 12th of May, 1992 in Schaan (Liechtenstein).

it is according to such theories, concerned with those fundamental principles, upon which all thinking depends but which are only subjective forms of thought or language that are used to conceptualize the world and not with objective truth. A completely new view of the world, which, to be sure, is radically subjectivist and relativist, follows from such a position. Then the principle, for example, that every change has a cause is valid not because of the things themselves, because of reality itself, but rather it is valid because we must think this way or because we do so *de facto*.

At this point, we reach the answer of realist phenomenology to the question concerning how Husserl's maxim "Back to the Things Themselves" is to be interpreted. Husserl had interpreted phenomenology soon after the *Logical Investigations* in a direction that had much in common with Kant. He found, in the final analysis, it is the subject who constitutes all meaning and all being, the world and God. He even regards this as a prerequisite of a "rigorous philosophy", i.e., to limit itself exclusively to such immanent intentional objects and to make no judgement whatsoever concerning its foundational or transcendental validity. Realist phenomenology, however, which goes back to Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and has, in my opinion, been alone in remaining truly faithful to Husserl's maxim, has also in our century found a completely new answer to the question concerning the synthetic a priori, an answer which is much closer to that of Plato and Aristotle than to that of Kant¹⁷.

II. The Revolutionary Contributions of Realist Phenomenology Towards Grounding Philosophy as a Rigorous Science of Objective and Synthetic A Priori Cognitions

Firstly, the kind of necessity which characterizes the states of affairs in the Pythagorean Theorem or in the principle of causality, is not just any kind of necessity. It is rather a necessity of a very particular kind, one whose peculiarity does not allow us to reduce it to anything else. This necessity is not a mere linguistic convention, nor a mere language game; it is also not a necessity of having to think in a certain way. There is no subjective necessity that renders it impossible, for example, to think differently than in accordance with the principle

¹⁷Cf. Adolf Reinach, "Über Phänomenologie", p. 531-550. Max Scheler (1966, p. 71, 175). Cf. further Dietrich von Hildebrand (1991); Josef Seifert (1987).

of causality. We can argue for this based on the facts of experience by pointing out that there is no necessity of thought here because we can in fact deny it. The necessity which the philosopher and mathematician investigates lies rather in the things themselves, it has the character of having to be in a certain way and not being able to be in a different way. In addition, this a priori necessity is the same whether men, angels, or gods think about them, as Husserl said. This insight, which was obtained particularly through Husserl, Reinach, Scheler, and Hildebrand, that a priori knowledge does not distinguish itself by means of a mere necessity of thought, as Kant and psychologism held, but rather through an objective necessity of the things themselves, is perhaps the central contribution of realist phenomenology. Thus, philosophy discovers again the nature and structure of the things themselves: the objective world and its structures that since Hume and Kant were believed to have been lost. In this way, realistic phenomenology, through a return to that particular necessity of the things themselves, rejects every subjectivization of the *a priori* and establishes once again classical philosophy and metaphysics.

Secondly, this necessity of the objects of philosophy is not blindly posited by realistic phenomenology but instead is knowable through insight and deduction, and is thereby linked with the highest form of knowability and intelligibility (understandability). All talk of mere innate ideas, forms of perception and of thought that lie ready made in the mind, but also any variation on Plato's teachings regarding anamnesis, cannot do justice to the inner knowability and intelligibility of essential states of affairs that must be a certain way and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, Husserl's claim concerning the nature of philosophy as a rigorous science which limits philosophy to the mere *noemata* of intentional acts shows itself as invalid, yes even absurd. For the datum of absolute necessity is in its absoluteness fully independent from every thinking consciousness, unconstitutable by God or men and therefore a limitation of the object of philosophy to *noemata* is unnecessary. When, of course, one does not see the distinction between contingent essences (with respect to which we obtain only probable knowledge concerning their reign over the existing world) and necessary ones, as is the case with Husserl, then his error is quite understandable. For then a rigorous philosophical science could only investigate essences as inhabitants of a possible world and could not know if the existing world is formed according to them.

Thirdly, this necessity is predominately accessible to us in immediate cognition through the *Wesensschau* (insight) or indirectly through syllogistic or

other forms of deductive proof. We achieve in both cases that indubitable and infallible knowledge (spoken of by Augustine and Bonaventure and from which we can only deviate and fall into error when we begin in our judgements) to bypass the evident objects of cognition. Instead of their faithful analysis to construct, to reduce, and in so doing we deviate from the light of the things themselves.

Yet, how can we know such synthetic a priori states of affairs? Are they simply innate ideas? Do we hold that a priori knowledge must be independent of all experience, as Kant thought?¹⁸ It is precisely on this question that phenomenological realism manages, as Scheler expresses it, to be more positivistic than any positivism, more empirical than Hume does, while still defending the a priori in its strictly objective interpretation. According to empiricism, only the material for ideas is supplied by experience; the linking of ideas and their association is a contribution of the subject. The general essence is not itself given in experience; above all no necessary essence is thus given. Realistic phenomenology, on the other hand, understands experience in a much more extensive way than empiricism, whereby it returns to Husserl's notion of 'categorical intuition' as the experience of the general essences of things. At the same time, it rejects every kind of mere immanentism, conceptualism, or constructivism. Obviously, we cannot recognize the law that the color purple in the order of similarity must lie between blue and red without the experience of sight – and yet the law is necessary¹⁹. In the same way the Kantian thesis that the *a priori*, because of its necessity, cannot be given in any experience is not to be blindly accepted. Rather we must make a distinction, as Hildebrand above all has done,²⁰ He posits the distinction between empirical experience, which takes its starting point in the simple observation of real existing objects and a completely different pure such-being experience. This experience of 'essence.' can have its origin in 'sense perception,' in the psychic experience of one's judgement or cognition, or in the moral experience, wherever intelligible and necessary essences are

¹⁸Plato assumed a certain experience before birth. Cf. Balduin Schwarz (1970, 33-51). Cf. also Reale (1993, chapter 6 ff.)

¹⁹Concerning this experience in which the knowledge of essence is given, Husserl wrote quite beautifully in Edmund Husserl, "Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft," cit., p. 32 f., where he says that the insight into essences is neither a mystical act nor is less of an experience than sense-perception.

²⁰Cf. above all Hildebrand (1976, chapter 4).

encountered. Even the concrete experience of an essence is connected with insights, but in any case, it is above all the purified experience of the philosopher, which concerns the intellectual grasping of necessary essences and their states of affairs. Let us consider the case where we see the color red; in this perception, we become familiar with what red is as such. In understanding the nature of this color or the continuum of infinite variations of color qualities and tones, we experience in a pure cognition the pure essence, the *eidōs*²¹.

The false alternative between empirical sciences of the real, which are supposed to investigate only non-necessary facts, and a priori sciences that are independent of any experience, shows itself to be inadequate – in spite of all the decisively important cognitions that are contained in this alternative. To de-dogmatize Hume's concept of experience, that is, to show that the concept of experience ought not to be restricted to that form of experience in which only contingent facts are given, is another fundamental contribution of realist phenomenology.

With this, I come to a third fundamental contribution of realist phenomenology regarding the nature of philosophy, namely, the clarification of the difference between empirical and *a priori* sciences. I see hints of such a clarification in Husserl's third *Logical Investigation*. It was ultimately achieved in the fullest sense by Hildebrand²². How is it that we may talk of experience in the sense of observation and the conclusions derived thereof when it comes to the science of chemical or biological relationships, or historical facts, but not when it comes to mathematics and philosophy? How can one account for the fact that the two types of sciences are based on radically different experiences? The answer lies in two radically different types of essences or such-being unities, which serve as the objects of the two kinds of knowledge. There are unities whose constitutive moments tend toward chaos, for example, objects that have been thrown about on the floor. Here we can only learn about how such unities are put together by a mere inspection from the outside, through the perception of unintelligible and brute facts.

Quite different is the case with those species that form the object of the natural sciences and in another sense those which constitute the objects of the history of art and of history by itself. Here we encounter meaningful forms, which

²¹Cf. Seifert (1977), chapter 1.

²²Cf. Hildebrand (1991, chapter 4)

possess a certain understandability, an inner meaningful structure and form, relations to a final cause, etc. These can be quite individual, like works of art or historical personalities, or they may possess the generality of a genuine type, which allows us to differentiate between individual marks and elements that are more general. In this case, understanding, methodical observations and explanations, etc., are possible. However, the unity of the marks of a lion are not necessary. For in addition to understanding, experience in the sense of the simple observation of facts that could be different, is also required. The empirical methods of cognition correspond not only to our limited knowledge but also to the objective nature of such morphic, meaningful, but non-necessary objects and natures. Mathematics and philosophy, however, have quite different objects characterized precisely by their objective essential necessity and their incomparable intelligibility. Only here, therefore, is it possible that a single experience of willing is sufficient in order to understand that *nihil volitum nisi praecogitatum* (nothing can be willed without first being thought or known)²³, that the act of promising is in need of being heard and produces a claim on the side of the addressee, etc. Only because of the potency of the inner necessity of such essences, can the strict necessity of logical laws and states of affairs, mathematical and ethical, ontological and other states of affairs, such as those that concern the nature of colors, be explained.

With this we touch on a fourth contribution of realist phenomenology – and on this point realistic phenomenology builds on Husserl's phenomenology – towards the clarification of the nature of philosophy: namely the overcoming of the impoverishment of the *a priori*. It is no longer the twelve categories alone that possess necessary essences and that are independent of empirical experience as Kant thought, not only the temporal and spatial forms of perception. Besides space and time there are numerous geometric and arithmetic objects, also the sphere of cognition and its various types, sense-perception and its types, as well as the essences of the objects of the various senses. There is an objective necessary essence to colors, tones, even smells and the qualities of taste. There are necessary laws which govern the beautiful, its kinds and its bearers, of the literary work of art, of art itself, of moral virtues and their acts, of doubting, of

²³With the truth of this proposition we do not wish of course to deny the possibility of a wishing or willing that in a certain sense is unconscious, in so far as it remains unclear to the person willing that he wills and what he wills.

questioning, of willing, of freedom, of love, of life and of death. Within all spheres of being, there is this uncreated world of such necessary essences and essential connections, such that not only mathematics but also philosophy would have to research endlessly in order to discover them all. This wealth ought not to suggest, however, that the sphere of the *a priori* is co-extensive with that of philosophy. The laws of the end game in chess, the mereological laws, the phenomenology of holes and of colors, belong to other fields such as ‘naïve physics’, mereology, mathematics and so on. Only questions concerning the fundamental nature of things like the essence of number and of mathematical objects as such, or questions concerning the centre, the core, and the focus of being involve objects that are within the domain of philosophy.

III. Insight and Argument: On the Complementarity of Immediate Philosophical Evidence and Dialectic as Moments of Philosophy as a “Rigorous Science”

It has often been said that the call to return to immediate cognition (*a priori* insight) is the most basic form of philosophical and rational cognition. As such, (a call which incidentally can be traced back to Plato as well as to the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle) for which no proof can be given or required and of which there can be no higher criterion, implies the neglect of dialectic and argument and with it rigorous scientific method. That this does not follow can be seen from the fact that every logical argument presupposes the most important logical principles. Additionally, the difference between valid and invalid forms of drawing a conclusion which themselves can only be known through insights and cannot be grounded by means of other proofs and without which all other demonstrations would be worthless. No view of rationality that does not recognize this highest form of rational knowledge that lies in the intuitive grasping of intelligible and necessary essences and states of affairs is capable of being conceptualized. This does not indicate a rational deficit, nor a repudiation of all forms of argument as ways to insight. On the contrary, there is the dialectic of the question in relation to the answer; there is the uncovering of the presuppositions of an opponent in which he is shown to presuppose himself what he is denying and so on. All forms of philosophical argumentation and platonic dialectics are, in the light of the phenomenological insight, not only permissible, but also receive from it their ultimate justification. Reinach has also shown that insight does not mean obviousness or an easy accessibility to every

man. Hard work in responding to diverse objections, in investigating essences and in making terminological distinctions is necessary in order to bring philosophical intuitions to evidence. We do so in order to show that they are not vague feelings, subjective impressions, or imprecise attempts to conceptualize necessary states of affairs or unclear expressions of them. Rather, that in doing so we are in keeping with a beautiful expression from Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, they are indeed "the experience of truth".

1. Phenomenological Realism as a new Existentialism and a Critique of Husserl's Thesis – Shared by some of the Munich - Göttingen Phenomenological Realists – that Limiting Philosophy to a Pure Essential Research is a Condition for Philosophy as a Rigorous Science.

Many philosophers, above all the so-called existentialist Thomist like Etienne Gilson and his school, have reproached western philosophy in a fashion that is quite similar to Heidegger's criticism concerning 'the forgetfulness of being.' They criticize a pure essentialism, a philosophy of pure essential research that would bracket existential questions and would lose sight of being in the sense of real existence. This reproach is also partially directed against phenomenology, even Reinach's realistic phenomenology, and is not completely unwarranted, even if realistic phenomenologists like Hildebrand have emphasized the indubitable knowledge of real existence by means of a new examination of the *cogito*, a point to which we will shortly return ²⁴. Philosophical dialogue between phenomenological realists with existential Thomists has undoubtedly contributed to the decisive turn on the part of Munich phenomenology to a philosophy of real existence, of the *esse*.²⁵ The irreducibility of existence, the grasping of that unique form of the inner actuality (which we will call real existence), and to differentiate this being from all other categories of being, represents an important task of philosophy. It was therefore insufficient to equate philosophy with the analysis of essences. The Husserlian method of bracketing the world of the natural attitude (*epoché*), of the real existence of objects is therefore only one among many philosophical methods, and the phenomenological method must be thought through anew from its very foundations in order to account for the

²⁴Cf. Hildebrand, "Das Cogito und die Erkenntnis der realen Welt. Teilveröffentlichung der Salzburger Vorlesungen Hildebrands: Wesen und Wert menschlicher Erkenntnis", *Aletheia VI*, 1994. Cf. also Seifert, *Erkenntnis objektiver Wahrheit*, II, chapters 1-2.

²⁵Cf. Josef Seifert (1977), chapters 1-2.

knowledge of existence which is different from all essences outside of the absolute being²⁶. In this respect, another important aspect of phenomenological realism can be pointed out. Philosophy has at least twice before²⁷, in Augustine and in René Descartes, taken its starting point in the subject and from the indubitable knowledge of the really existing I as the refutation of every skepticism and relativism.

St. Augustine writes in *De Trinitate*, that every radical skeptical doubt of all truth presupposes indubitable truths, such as one's own existence, life, knowledge, willing, joyfulness, and so on. On the other hand, general laws such as every doubter presupposes an object of which he doubts, a knowledge of his own not knowing, a judgement that one ought not to give assent rashly, and many others. With this St. Augustine has, together with many necessary essential laws, also proven that one's real existence and the knowledge of numerous and unique experiences and acts are the objects of an indubitable knowledge of an existent being. This dimension of the *cogito*, which Husserl was later to give a transcendental turn, is foundational for the realism within phenomenology.²⁸ This is not simply an existential realism in the sense that it seeks to differentiate existence from essence. Also because it considers the concrete existence of objects such as the I and with it 'one person,' the real material world and above all the real existence of God as belonging to the central objects of philosophy.²⁹ The greatest service, which phenomenological realists from Husserl of the *Logical Investigations* to Dietrich von Hildebrand and to the present have performed, is revealed in the ontological presuppositions and the suitable method for a radically objectivistic and realistic philosophy. Their precepts and

²⁶I have also tried to show this in *Back to Things in Themselves*, 1987, chapter 2.

²⁷There is, already in ancient philosophy, also a kind of *cogito* to be found in Parmenides

²⁸Cf. in particular Hildebrand (1964) and Seifert (1987, chapters 3-4). Through his radically different interpretation of the subject as a transcendental ego, which allows for no archimedean point for the knowledge of an objectively existing world (no 'piece of the real world', as Husserl in his Cartesian Meditations put it), and which, moreover, is responsible for the constitution of all meaning and all real being, the phenomenology of the later Husserl distinguishes itself from phenomenological realism in perhaps almost as radically a way as through its assumption of the dependency of the *eîde* and necessary essences on the subject.

²⁹Cf. also, Rocco Butiglione (1989, p.9-75); and Josef Seifert (1989, chapters 1-4, 9-15).

observations, developed through precise investigations into the objective and necessary essences and *a priori* knowledge has at the same time kept in mind the meaning of the subject (*cogito*) for philosophy and has recognized the importance of philosophical knowledge regarding real existence.

2. Rigorous Science and Intersubjectivity: Critique of Husserl's Claim that a Rigorously Scientific Philosophy may not be "Thoroughly Controversial"

A final aspect of phenomenological realism, one that was already mentioned at the very beginning and given a brief answer, concerns the claim raised by Husserl that a rigorously scientific philosophy which does not build itself on an universal consensus and which is not intersubjectivity verifiable cannot be scientific. Therefore, at the most only pure logic can be a philosophical science. Only when one prescind from the philosophical interpretation of logical laws, which separates psychologism from formalism and Platonism. The scandal of the contradictions between diverse philosophical systems can only lead to skepticism or to a new, formalized and purely logical philosophy. Philosophy would then become pure and applied formal and symbolic logic, perhaps additionally linguistic analysis. Everything else, which is not an object of consensus, including this thesis itself, would be unscientific.

In contradistinction, different realist phenomenologists have tried to show that philosophical knowledge is certainly completely objective, but that it has so many methodological, intellectual and moral pre-conditions that the contradictions and prejudices that reign in philosophical circles become all the more understandable. In the case where knowledge is easier to obtain and does not have so many ethical and existential implications, it would in fact normally lead to a consensus concerning objective knowledge and even to the probability of suppositions. In the situation, however, where many blind spots and hindrances stand in the way of genuine knowledge, as is the case with philosophical knowledge, one cannot expect such a consensus. The roots of philosophical errors have been investigated in Husserl in his *Prolegomena* as well as by Balduin Schwarz in his book entitled *Der Irrtum in der Philosophie*.³⁰ Schwarz examines the varied intellectual, methodological, psychological and moral hindrances to knowledge and finds the full rationality and objectivity of philosophical knowledge seems to concur with the Socratic recognition. This being many philosophical truths (for example, one is not permitted under any set of

³⁰Cf Balduin Schwarz (1934).

circumstances to do something unjust) will never be accepted by the majority of philosophers or by the general populace.³¹ Hence, the conflict of opinions is to be explained - not through a lack of evidence regarding the things themselves, nor through a lack of scientific method in philosophy - but rather by means of the difficulties and hindrances, which lead to errors in philosophy. More than in any other science, these common and so fundamental errors arise, since the knowledge obtained in these other sciences does not require, as Plato says in the allegory of the cave at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Republic*, a *metanoia*. And this recognition has nothing to do with a “*Weltanschauung* philosophy,” as if one could capriciously explain every rational and intuitive cognition, which does not have just purely intellectual but also moral preconditions, as depending on a world view; thereby making the possibility of consensus a condition of the scientific character of philosophy. However, this would constitute a completely arbitrary and groundless thesis.

Moreover, realist phenomenologists are in agreement with philosophers like Plato and Augustine who said that no error and no thoroughly skeptical system is possible without already implying a wealth of cognitions on which every consensus as well as every meaningful dialogue depends. Every disagreement and every philosophical argument presupposes a general *Logos*, that is, a knowable structure of reality. For without the knowledge of being, all dialogue, all understanding and all arguments would be meaningless. From this, one can lay down evidence - not for the unknowability of being - but for its intelligibility.

Along the paths that I have only sketched, a number of thinkers united in the school of phenomenological realism have tried to give classical realism a new foundation and in my opinion, they have admirably succeeded.

³¹Cf. for example, Plato, *Crito*. cf. concerning the idea of value-blindness, Hildebrand (1982).