Grenzprobleme of Phenomenology: Metaphysics

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In approaching the topic of this volume – "horizons" of phenomenology – my first thought was simply to list the contents of *Husserliana* volume 42, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*. In homage to the great Alan Ginsburg's dictum – "first thought, best thought" – I provide the short list of those contents here (Husserl, 2014, v–xvii):

1. Phenomenology of the unconscious and the limit-problems of birth, sleep, and death
2. Phenomenology of the Instincts
3. Metaphysics: Monadology, teleology, and philosophical theology
4. Reflections on Ethics

My second thought was to focus on the problems or open questions that have loomed large in my own phenomenological work, a list that partially overlaps with Husserl's:

1. Phenomenology of reason
2. Ontological pluralism and metaphysics
3. Phenomenology of thinking
4. Second-person phenomenology

But a list is not an essay, and so I will limit myself to a question that arises in reflecting on the relation between phenomenology and metaphysics. Among the various topics mentioned in *Grenzprobleme* under "metaphysics," I will mostly leave teleology and theology aside and will focus on monadology – more specifically, on how to understand monadology in light of the relation between givenness and being established by the transcendental reduction.

The editor of Husserliana 42, Rochus Sowa, distinguishes, within the general heading of *Grenzprobleme*, between "margin" or "limit" problems (*Randprobleme*)

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and "totality" problems (*Ganzheitsprobleme*). The former treat issues – e.g., animal consciousness (animal "monads"), birth, death, and the unconscious – that are *motivated* within the field of direct phenomenological evidence but require "privative" or "constructive" methods for their elucidation. The latter, among which Husserl includes "metaphysical" problems, concern *totalities* such as the community of monads (and its ultimate theological "teleology") and "the constitution of the world as a totality" (Husserl, 2014, xxiv–xxix). Though the two sorts of *Grenzprobleme* communicate with one another in significant ways, my focus in what follows will be on totality-problems. In my view, Husserl's (tentative) approach to these totality-problems entangle him in something like Kant's Antinomy of Reason: the purely dialectical extension of concepts that have validity within the realm of experience to totalities that escape such experience in principle yields equally compelling, yet contradictory, conclusions. I will illustrate this matter (rather than demonstrate it) with reference to Theodore Sider's physicalistic metaphysics, in which the subjectivity that Husserl takes as metaphysically basic is *eliminated* through such pure argumentation.

Among the many questions that arise along this path, I will focus on whether the transcendental reduction entails that the physical world metaphysically depends on consciousness. My own view – to state this up front – is that it does not, though Husserl seems to have thought that it did. This is why the question of "monadology" is not only a "*margin* problem" (e.g., animal monads) but also a "*totality*-problem" for transcendental phenomenology, one horizon for phenomenological investigation. To set the stage, I will first present some reflections on what I take transcendental phenomenology to be (§1), moving from there to a contrast between the resulting "metaphysically neutral" conception of transcendental philosophy and A. D. Smith's version of a "metaphysically idealist" conception that draws on Husserl's concept of the monad (§2). I shall then briefly examine three other accounts of the relation between phenomenology and metaphysics, only one of which (I argue) really confronts the kind of metaphysical monadology that we find in the *Grenzprobleme* volume, i.e., Husserl's own conception of what "metaphysics" is. This, in conclusion, will lead to a warning of problems ahead if we follow Husserl's lead here (§4).

1   Phenomenology and Contemporary Philosophy

Elsewhere, I have argued that what is distinctive of transcendental phenomenology is its focus on normatively structured meaning (Crowell, 2001, 2013). This is what defines, or ought to define, the phenomenological approach to consciousness, being, phenomenality, and other such concepts. For some, this focus on normativity veers away from what is distinctly phenomenological toward concerns more typical of analytic philosophy. Phenomenologists tend to understand such concerns in much the way Husserl understood Paul Natorp's neo-Kantianism – namely, as motivated by "top down" logical construction, conceptual presuppositions, and dialectical argumentation, rather than by "bottom up" descriptions of how such constructions

are evidentially grounded in the givens of pre-reflective consciousness, the proto-logic of perceptual experience. But while this "proto" dimension can no doubt be explored phenomenologically, the main *philosophical* reason for doing so, I think, is to better understand intentional – that is, meaningful – experience. I don't claim that consigning transcendental phenomenology to the "space of meaning" is origi-nal with me; on the contrary, my claim is that this is what Husserl had in view in the approach to consciousness made possible by the transcendental reduction. Similarly, I have argued that whatever Heidegger meant by "being," the phenomenologically defensible takeaway is the distinction between an entity and what it is/means to be that entity.

Today, many Husserlians seem to think that a position is phenomenologically significant only if it "genetically" pursues intentional content back to modes of consciousness that lack normative structure, and many Heideggerians seem to believe that Heidegger's real phenomenological contribution consists in breaking with transcendental "subjectivism" in favor of an ontology of the "event" (*Ereignis*). I remain unconvinced. As I see it, such proposals are to be evaluated on the basis of whether they are necessary to account for normatively structured meaning (i.e., canonical intentionality, the "as-structure"). *That* is our best point of reference for assessing their validity; in the absence of such a point of reference we are free to accept or reject such proposals, according to our whim, as more or less interesting speculative visions.

This insistence on there being some check on the validity of philosophical claims informs the phenomenological principle of *Evidenz,* and it determines the specific sense in which phenomenology is a *transcendental* philosophy. More pointedly, to retain its distinctive kind of epistemic authority phenomenology cannot abandon its focus on intentional correlation. Phenomenological philosophy is what one gets when one adopts the reflective stance and remains exclusively within it (Crowell, 2001). But even if reflection picks out the *topos* of phenomenological inquiry – namely, *experience* as a descriptively accessible correlation-structure – it is equally important to emphasize that the meaning which inhabits this experience is norma-tively assessable. For instance, experiencing something *as* a snake, tree, or apple involves conditions of satisfaction that are right there *in* the experience, at stake in it, and the "operation" of such normative conditions must therefore be reflectively *described;* neither logical reconstruction nor neurological or cognitive-scientific explanation can do the job. If this is true, then whatever ground is attained by a phenomenological reflection on conditions of possibility – or, put otherwise, what-ever is supposed to elucidate the constitution of meaning – must be something that is responsive to norms *as normative*. This puts strong constraints on what can be invoked in phenomenological philosophy.

Like logic, phenomenology is not restricted to philosophy, transcendental or oth-erwise. Logic serves as a necessary tool in all domains of inquiry, and phenomenol-ogy, understood as careful attention to the way things show up for us in first-person experience, has a similarly essential role to play in any discipline where something like *Evidenz* establishes what that discipline is *about.* Sometimes phenomenology's contribution is a critical one. For instance, phenomenological reflection can identify

points at which physicalist presuppositions distort the way questions about perceptual content are raised in cognitive psychology. As Husserl said already in relation to the psychology of his time: those who deny the importance of "armchair" descriptions of first-person experience in the study of perception, insisting on nothing but what can be confirmed experimentally, must already appeal to such experience to determine whether their experiments actually have perception in view at all (Husserl, 1983, 181–190). Sometimes the contribution is more positive. Phenomenological reflection on embodiment and temporality contributes directly to work in cognitive science, and phenomenological reflection on empathy and intersubjectivity has significant implications for research in the social and human sciences. But if we are talking about phenomenological *philosophy*, things look different.

Philosophy is a complex practice of inquiry with its own norms and stakes that circumscribe what is at issue in "doing" philosophy. Of course, as a social practice, the norms and stakes of philosophizing are frequently contested and hierarchized in different ways, producing "schools" and "traditions" within a broader field in which at least *some* commitments are shared. Here is not the place to analyze this sort of practice in detail. My point is only that, in contrast to phenomenology's role in relation to other disciplines, phenomenological *philosophy* must – according to Husserl, and rightly in my view – be pursued within what Husserl called the "*epoché*."[1] That is, philosophy (which has a stake in "ultimately grounded" truth and so follows the practical norm of "presuppositionlessness") can borrow nothing from other sciences as premises for its own inquiry. The strength of the reasons for this commitment to the autonomy of philosophy *vis-à-vis* empirical and formal sciences is disputed, but Husserl was quite right to insist on it, as was Heidegger.

Husserl introduced these reasons in his critique of "naturalism," or better, "scientism." There need be no necessary conflict between "consciousness" and "nature" in all possible understandings of these terms, but both Husserl and Heidegger objected to the idea that natural science should dictate the terms in which philosophical questions are asked and answered. Instead, philosophical questions must address the field of normatively structured meaning that becomes thematic through the transcendental-phenomenological "reduction." The questions on the horizon of phenomenology – its "open questions" – are thus the open questions of philosophy generally, questions that *stay* open since there is always more to be said about whatever stage the discussion has reached. But what is distinctive about phenomenological philosophy is that those questions will always entail a stance on the meaning of the reduction. By way of example, I will here explore the relation between transcendental phenomenology and *metaphysics*: Does the reduction permit of a metaphysics carried out entirely on the ground of transcendental phenomenology?

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[1] In a recent Special Issue of *Continental Philosophy Review*, Matthew Burch argues that "applied" phenomenology is necessarily a collaborative and interdisciplinary research program (Burch, 2021). In the same issue, Dan Zahavi argues that in such contexts it is not necessary to invoke the *epoché* and transcendental reduction (Zahavi 2021). However, it is otherwise in phenomenological philosophy.

Both Husserl and Heidegger view phenomenology as a way of investigating the disclosure or constitution of that meaning through which entities are given, rather than as a direct investigation into properties of entities. In contrast, it is often thought that metaphysics investigates the essential properties of entities and provides causal (or otherwise "grounding") explanations for "what there is."[2] So the question arises: by what means could phenomenology segue from a transcendental concern with meaning to a determination of the basic properties of entities – i.e., to a metaphysics of what Husserl called "ultimate facta" and Heidegger called "beings as a whole"?[3]

If the positive (empirical) sciences, broadly construed, explore the properties of entities ("empirical realism"), perhaps Kant was right to hold that philosophy has no access (via argument, or some *intuitus originarius*) to more "basic" metaphysical properties of those entities. And if that is so, metaphysics as an inquiry into "ultimate facta" or "beings as a whole" (*ta onta*) is not a cognitively grounded inquiry.[4] When it seeks to establish cognitive *bona fides* by drawing premises from the positive sciences, metaphysics becomes world-view. Theodore Sider's physicalism is refreshingly direct about this: his argument for being metaphysically realistic about what he calls "structure" concludes by summarizing the "worldview" that results. It consists of an "ideology" (a set of primitive terms), a "fundamental theory phrased in terms of the ideology" (identifying metaphysical laws that are more basic than the laws of physics), and a "metaphysical semantics for nonfundamental discourse" (using the ideology as a translation manual for ordinary linguistic behavior) (Sider, 2011, 292).[5]

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[2] The idea that metaphysics deals with "what there is" has a long pedigree, but in recent analytic metaphysics its proximal source is Quine and refers to the "ontological commitments" of a language or theory. In a phenomenological context, this can be confusing since, for Husserl (and, I would argue, for Heidegger also), "ontology" and "metaphysics" are distinct, though related, inquiries. For Husserl, as we shall see, ontology is an eidetic inquiry which deals with possibilities, whereas metaphysics deals with ultimate questions of fact. The analytic literature treats ontology as part of metaphysics, while recognizing that metaphysics is not exhausted by questions about "what there is" – for instance, there are questions about what grounds what, ultimate causes, mereology, teleology, fundamentality, perdurance through change, free will, and so on. See Hofweber (2009). Though many of these topics are also taken up in *Grenzprobleme*, I will focus here exclusively on the question of whether "what there is" metaphysically depends on transcendental subjectivity.

[3] On the conception of metaphysics that is shared, despite significant differences, by Husserl and Heidegger, see Crowell (2018).

[4] Uriah Kriegel (2013) carefully examines the various epistemological options open to "revisionary" metaphysics for establishing the cognitive significance of its theses and finds them all lacking. While he does not consder transcendental phenomenology specifically, I would argue that his critical insights apply to any metaphysics supposedly grounded in the latter.

[5] We shall return to Sider's "knee-jerk" metaphysical realism (2011, 20) below. In Sider's terms, Husserl's idealistic "worldview" would also consist of an ideology (a set of primitive terms provided by monadic structure of consciousness), a fundamental theory (of "constitution" as the metaphysical "law" of monadology), and a metaphysical semantics or translation manual (e.g., recasting ordinary things as "noemata").

Some contemporary phenomenological metaphysics is pursued in a similar way: just as the physicalist moves from a sense of "physical" established in natural science to a (quasi-) reduction of all phenomena to the physical as their metaphysically "fundamental" reality, some phenomenologists inflate a certain concept that derives from phenomenological reflection on first-person experience (e.g., flesh, desire, *Erscheinung als solches*, possibility, monad, the given/gift) into a fundamental principle of the whole of what is. Such approaches pose a challenge to the claims – in comparison, very modest ones – of transcendental phenomenology, and in my view the Husserl of the *Grenzprobleme* falls into this category. But in what sense, if any, do such phenomenologically crafted concepts retain their meaning and authority when extended to domains where no first-person evidence is possible, to the "actually" infinite totalities – world, God, monad – which Husserl calls "totality-problems"? That, it seems to me, is an open question.[6]

2   Transcendental Phenomenology and Metaphysics

I thus arrive at the horizon of phenomenology that I wish to explore in some detail: Is transcendental phenomenology – governed by the reduction, for Husserl, and inseparable from transcendenal *idealism* (Husserl, 1989, 419–20) – a *metaphysical* idealism? Does it have metaphysical "implications"? Husserl argued that though phenomenology "excludes every naïve metaphysics that operates with absurd things in themselves," it "does not exclude metaphysics as such" (Husserl, 1963, 38). But what does Husserl understand by "metaphysics" here?

This question has recently received a good deal of attention, focused on Husserl's idea that transcendental subjectivity has the character of a "monad" and that the "ground" of the "world" is a "community of monads" which exists "absolutely" and to which the world, with all its "transcendent realities" is "relative."[7] A clear statement is found in *Cartesian Meditations* where, after describing the ego as both a "pole of identity" and as a "substrate of habitualities," Husserl proposes to call the "ego taken in full concreteness" by "the Leibnizian name: monad." He continues:

> The ego can be concrete only in the flowing multiformity of his intentional life, along with the objects meant – and in some cases constituted as existent for him – in that life. Manifestly, in the case of an object so constituted, its abiding existence and being-thus are a correlate of the habituality constituted in the ego-pole himself by virtue of his position-taking (Husserl, 1969, 67–68)

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[6] Of course, there are approaches to metaphysics that take direct aim at phenomenology – for instance, so-called "speculative realism," which proceeds by adopting the logico-mathematical idea of "possible worlds." And many versions of "new realism" proceed on phenomenological grounds but reject Husserl's idealism: for instance, Gabriel (2016), Figal (2010), and Keiling (2015). Here, however, my focus will be restricted to the question of what Husserl's own metaphysical "idealism" is and whether it can be defended phenomenologically.

[7] For some critical discussion, see Mertens (2000), Tengelyi (2014), Loidolt (2015), De Palma (2015), Loidolt (2017), Jansen (2017), Zahavi (2017), De Santis (2018).

So the monad is neither simply a "pole of identity" nor the stream of conscious experiences as such, but that stream insofar as it involves a form of self-awareness that can "habitualize" itself into the constitution of "existent" (transcendent) objects. This, in turn, as Husserl writes later in the same text, is possible only if the monad "is in communion with others like himself: a member of a community of monads" without which there can be no *objective* "world of experience." Such communion, established by way of empathy, replaces Leibniz's pre-established harmony: Husserl argues that because "communion" between monads is in principle unlimited, "there can exist only a single community of monads" and "only one objective world" (1969, 139–40).

All this raises as many questions as it answers, of course, so to make a start toward clarifying the picture, I will here focus on a single strand of the monadology issue: Within transcendental idealism, what does it mean to say that the world *depends* on consciousness?

Now, this question is not unambiguous, and the ambiguity turns on the meaning of the phenomenological reduction. In *Ideas I* (1913) Husserl introduced the reduction in the context of an "epistemological" project involving a "Cartesian" search for a "presuppositionless" beginning in philosophical inquiry (Husserl, 1983, 66). The ordinary realism of the natural attitude – roughly, the view that the world and the things in it are simply "there" as they present themselves in experience and serve as the ground of all cognitive and practical projects – is to be "suspended" (*epoché*) in order to reflect "critically" on the perceptual and other conscious acts in which worldly things are given *as* the things they are. These acts, responsive to norms of validity, enable experiences to be "mutually legitimated or corrected by means of each other" instead of merely "following upon" or subjectively "replacing" one another (Husserl, 1965, 87). The "transcendental reduction," then, is the reflective method that discloses the correlation between conscious acts and their intentional objects ("noemata") and the syntheses of identification in which the meaning of those objects is "constituted." Husserl calls this correlation-structure "absolute consciousness," and I will argue that this "absolute" should be understood in a *metaphysically neutral* way.

What do I mean by "metaphysical neutrality"? The *epoché* precludes us from "positing" the existence of the objects that show up in the natural attitude; that is, "we make no use" of their supposed "valid being" in any kind of philosophical explanation (Husserl, 1983, 61). Of course, we do not *deny* their existence either; rather, they are reflected upon solely as "unities of meaning" (Husserl, 1983, 128) correlated with specific (types of) acts of consciousness united with one another in the unity of one stream of consciousness by means of temporal and "founding" relations. According to Husserl, it is exclusively within this correlational unity of consciousness that the *Evidenz* supporting all natural-attitude positing of being can be critically assessed for its scope and adequacy. The transcendental-phenomenological concern, in other words, is not whether this tree or this state of affairs actually exists; rather, it is solely the "epistemological" one of identifying the essential *evidential* demands involved in positing the tree or state of affairs *as* what it is,

including its claim to exist.[8] If metaphysics has to do with claims about "what there is," then transcendental phenomenology is metaphysically neutral in the sense that it makes *no* such claims but only claims about how things present themselves evidentially as being. Dan Zahavi summarizes the view: "On such a reading" – he is referring to David Carr's – "all that transcendental subjectivity can be said to be constituting is the meaning of the world and not its being" (Zahavi, 2010, 78).

But what does "being" mean here? Husserl's account of the reduction in *Ideas I* might appear to undermine the metaphysically neutral interpretation. A key text in this connection is §44 of *Ideas*, where Husserl argues for the "merely phenomenal being of something transcendent" (here, empirical reality) and the "absolute being of something immanent" (i.e., consciousness). What does "absolute being" mean?

Husserl initially approaches the term by considering the different kinds of *Evidenz* in which consciousness and transcendent reality are given.[9] A transcendent thing is given in "profiles" that always entail more than what is sensuously given; hence, the evidence for its existence is always "presumptive." In contrast, consciousness or immanent being, grasped in the evidence of reflection, is not presumptive. Consciousness is not "adumbrated" (Husserl, 1983, 96), so the *existence* of consciousness is "apodictically" given in any genuine grasp of one of its moments, even though the temporally structured stream of consciousness as a *whole* can no more be given adequately than can a transcendent thing. So consciousness is absolute being in the sense that the validity of its claim to exist now does not depend on the further course of experience. On this picture, transcendental phenomenology can remain metaphysically neutral because, in considering this kind of evidence, it can *acknowledge* the distinctive way in which the existence of consciousness is given without, however, making any use of it in *explaining* the (metaphysical) nature of things. Phenomenology is not in the business of explaining the nature of things; it is transcendental clarification of the meaning and validity in which things of whatever sort, including consciousness itself, are given. Transcendental idealism is just the recognition of this (asymmetrical) correlation structure that underlies the realism of the natural attitude: "transcendental idealism contains natural realism entirely within itself" (Husserl, 1962, 254).

However, the language of §44 might be read in a more metaphysical way when Husserl later seems to suggest that transcendent reality is not merely "relative" to consciousness in the sense that its meaning and validity is given through (constituted in) consciousness, but rather *depends* on consciousness *for its existence*.

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[8] This locates phenomenology in the neighborhood of verificationism, and A. D. Smith interprets Husserl's metaphysical idealism as requiring an "ideal verificationism" (2003, 186). However, if one sets aside Husserl's own metaphysical ambitions, phenomenological verificationism might support a "deflationary" understanding of metaphysics as "descriptive" rather than "revisionary," akin to that proposed by Amie Thomasson (2015).

[9] Indeed, in copy A Husserl changes "Being" to "Givenness" in the title of the section. However, he also adds a marginal note: "None of §44 can be used!" It is interesting to observe that as late as the 1950s Heidegger still urges that historical "account-settlers" might find "much to consider" in "comparing" Ideas §44 with §44 of *Being and Time* (on truth as disclosedness), though the numerical overlap is "entirely coincidental" (Heidegger 2020, 12).

Reality is "according to its sense, a merely intentional being" which can be "determined […] only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: beyond that it is nothing." Indeed, "in the absolute sense [reality] is nothing at all" (Husserl, 1983, 112–13). Further, Husserl argues that "no real being […] is necessary to the being of consciousness itself" (1983, 110).

The metaphysical picture would then be this: through the reduction I grasp that consciousness exists necessarily, while its intentional correlates are *phenomena bene fundata* – posits whose existence has continually demonstrated itself in the evidence of ongoing experience, and in relation to which nothing currently speaks against the expectation of their continued existence. On such a reading, consciousness is a "monadic unity" with its own "thoroughly peculiar 'forms'," a unity that "in itself has nothing at all to do with nature, with space and time or substantiality and causality" (Husserl, 1965, 108). Worldly things, in contrast, as unities grounded in syntheses of identification (the intuitive fulfillment of intentional implications), depend on consciousness, *cannot exist* without their metaphysical ground. If "absolute" means metaphysically *fundamental*, transcendental idealism would be a metaphysical idealism.

The ambiguity in §44 is incorporated into Husserl's conception of consciousness as a "monadic unity." In *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* Husserl introduced the term in a metaphysically neutral way, namely, by highlighting two distinct modes of givenness. The monad's unity is provided by *normative* forms or laws that enable its experiences to "correct" or "refute" one another rather than simply replace one another in time, whereas "nature" or transcendent reality is governed by non-normative relations of space and time, substantiality and causality. Here, monadic unity is "Leibnizian" only in the sense that normative laws do not permit admixture with non-normative laws of "nature" – and not in the sense that only monads truly *exist* as, e.g., "metaphysical points."[10] As Husserl says in the *Crisis*, consciousness is a realm of "mental [*geistige*] processes" – not psychological (*psyche*) but normative, "minded" – that "constitute forms of meaning […] entirely out of mental material." But by this time a hint of Husserl's metaphysical idealism is unmistakeable: The monad is "completely closed off within itself, existing in its own way" (Husserl, 1970, 112). This way of existing allows for "communalization;" indeed, the individual monad "functions constitutively only within intersubjectivity" (1970, 172). That is, the "world" as a *valid* "meaning-construct [*Sinngebilde*]" is grounded in a *community* of monads (1970, 113). As Daniele De Santis (2018) has shown, in *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl uses this transcendental premise to argue to a "metaphysical result [*Ergebnis*]" concerning one of the *Grenzprobleme*'s "totality-problems" – namely, that there can be only one actual world.

Still, by itself such a metaphysical "result" does not directly address the question of whether the *world itself* – and everything in it – "depends" on the monadic community for *its* existence. The claim that it does is at the heart of A. D. Smith's

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[10] On the Leibniz-Husserl relation, see the essays in Cristin (2000). Also Mertens (2000), and Pradelle (2007).

metaphysical reading of transcendental idealism. Smith argues that, for Husserl, consciousness – the monad, or rather, the monadic community – exists absolutely and physical (transcendent) things *supervene* on consciousness. Given the right concatenations of acts, a physical world *must* exist as the noematic correlate of consciousness, but physical things can no more exist apart from those acts (their "supervenience base") than a game of rugby can exist without its supervenience base in "human behavior, intentions, etc." (Smith, 2003, 184). The supervenience relation is asymmetrical, since all sorts of human behavior can exist without a rugby game existing – or, more to the Husserlian point, all sorts of concatenations of consciousness can exist (e.g., ones in which, as Husserl imagines, the ongoing course of experience allowed for no syntheses of identification) without a physical world existing. Thus the *existence* of the latter depends on the existence of consciousness: "physical facts are 'nothing over and above' experiential facts" (Smith, 2003, 185).

To pose the question of metaphysical dependence more precisely, I will look at three recent papers which examine Husserl's transcendental idealism, focusing on how each construes the dependence of reality on consciousness. I choose these papers because they neatly present the dialectic in Husserl's thinking about metaphysics, though they by no means exhaust their authors' views on the topic. Each author embraces the claim that Husserl's idealism is consistent with empirical realism, and each recognizes the broadly verificationist role of reflection on intentional correlation (concerned with the "meaning and validity" in which things are posited, rather than with actually positing anything). Further, all three seem *primarily* interested in showing that transcendental idealism is not wedded to its Cartesian beginnings: the constitution of "actual reality" requires that transcendental subjectivity be embodied, embedded, and intersubjective, that it "realize itself" along with the world that it constitutes.[11] But this argument leaves the metaphysical dependence question open: Rudolf Bernet defends something quite close to a metaphysically neutral conception of Husserl's idealism. Against this, Dan Zahavi argues that transcendental idealism does have metaphysical *implications*, namely, of an "antirealist" sort. Ullrich Melle, finally, poses the dependence question in the context of

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[11] In the *Crisis* Husserl argued that his original way of motivating the reduction in *Ideas I* by "reflectively engrossing oneself in the Cartesian *epoché* of the *Meditations*" had the "shortcoming" that it "brings the ego into view as *apparently* [my emphasis] empty of content" (Husserl 1970, 155). As our authors emphasize, Husserl's mature view acknowledges that constitution of the world is the achievement of transcendental intersubjectivity (or a community of monads) bound together through empathy, and so through a necessary embodiment. Nevertheless, Husserl retains a certain priority for the "indeclinable" and "primal 'I'" which is "actually called 'I' only by equivocation," whose "transcendental life" involves "making itself declinable," whereby "it constitutes transcendental intersubjectivity" (1970, 184-85). The point of mentioning these perplexing aspects of Husserl's transcendental idealism is this: even granting that a real world requires intersubjective constitution, the "fundamental" phenomenological (and eventually, metaphysical) ground is the individual monad.

what *Husserl himself* understood by "metaphysics."[12] If Melle's picture captures what Husserl thought transcendental idealism entails, I suggest that we not follow him. Though I will not be able to provide the full argument here, it seems to me that a metaphysical understanding of monadology is not *entailed* by the transcendental reduction but rests on *arguments* that are, just as in Kant, antinomical.[13]

3   Three Approaches to Transcendental Idealism

Rudolf Bernet characterizes Husserl's transcendental idealism as an "epistemological type of idealism that is exclusively concerned with the relationship between knowing and the known" (Bernet, 2004, 10), but he marshals Husserl's revisions to the Sixth Logical Investigation, composed around the time of *Ideas I*, to argue for an idealism that owes more to Leibniz than to Descartes and is "less problematic" than the one found in *Ideas I* (2004, 4). While Bernet does discuss the dependence of empirical reality on consciousness, his real concern is to show that consciousness is not a *metaphysical* absolute. Properly understood, transcendental idealism will "no longer have any reason" to take the "dependence" of things on consciousness to entail the *independence* of consciousness from its "intentional objects." A consciousness that can constitute an actual world must belong to that world, must "be *'empirical'* in a sense that would not run counter to its purity" under the reduction (2004, 16). The crux of his analysis is found in the distinctions Husserl draws between ideal possibility, real possibility, and actuality (*Wirklichkeit*).

For present purposes, the distinction between "ideal" possibility and "real" possibility concerns *empirical* objects, not mathematical or logical "idealities." An ideally possible object (e.g., a centaur) is one that can be imagined quite apart from any connection with the motivated course of our actual world-experience. A real

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[12] Husserl uses the term "metaphysics" differently in different contexts, and we cannot sort them our here. Thus both Bernet and Zahavi can be said to treat some aspects of what Husserl understood by the term. But only Melle's approach deals with the kind of "totality-problems" which were the ultimate horizon of Husserl's metaphysics. Zahavi (2017, 65), for instance, lists five senses of metaphysics, one of which is "a speculatively constructed philosophical system dealing with the 'highest' and 'ultimate' questions concerning the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, etc." Leaving aside the issue of whether Husserl's ultimate position is "speculative" (in the phenomenologically "bad" sense, as I will argue it is), these are surely questions that Husserl understood as on the horizon of transcendental phenomenology. But Zahavi limits his concern to another of these senses, namely, "the issue of whether reality is mind-dependent or not." Following Melle, I will argue that for Husserl himself the answer to this question (as a metaphysical rather than a transcendental one) is not decideable in abstraction from his "speculatively" constructed monadology.

[13] Kant, of course, attempted to get around the limits placed on metaphysics by the antinomy of reason with an appeal to the demands of "pure practical reason" and its "postulates." Husserl makes a similar attempt at a "rational faith" grounded in an "*absolutes Sollen*" (eg., Husserl 2014, 317), which provides another path from transcendental "monadology" to a metaphysical teleology and theology. Though I won't go into that aspect of Husserl's metaphysics here, I find it unconvincing for reasons that are extensively, if uncharitably, articulated by De Palma (2019).

possibility, in contrast, is motivated; it is one "for which something makes a case," one that *could* "fit in with [our actual] realm of reality," or world. For instance, it is really possible that, when I cut holes in the walls and ceiling of my study, I will find wooden joists and studs. Such objects, "were they actually given," would "be integrated harmoniously into the actual reality that is the field of our common experience"; it is *motivated* by our previous experience (Bernet, 2004, 8). A real possibility becomes an "actual reality" through its "realization" – that is, through the "accomplishment of an act of [intuitive] fulfillment" (2004, 8). A purely "ontological" (eidetic) approach to possibility, such as Husserl pursued in the *Logical Investigations*, cannot account for "actual" being, but a "phenomenological" approach, which appeals to the criterion of intuitive fulfillment, can (2004, 4).[14] And for Bernet, "it goes without saying" that this account of actuality "is a phenomenological thesis not a metaphysical one" (2004, 9). What are the implications of this approach for the question of whether actual things *depend* on consciousness for their existence?

First, to be actual is to be more than just a "particular case of the essence of reality," since this is still only real possibility; the actuality of an object "entirely depends on the intuitive and actual givenness of this object" (2004, 10). But if, as Husserl claims, no series of perceptions can "verify the actual existence of a thing," how *can* such a thing be distinguished from real possibility? Bernet's answer is twofold. On the one hand, establishing something as actual through the "realization" of a prior (real) possibility depends on a consciousness that itself "actually exists" (2004, 11). Such a consciousness is worldly in the sense that it is the course of its own previous experience that provides the "norm" of "adequate knowledge" governing the possible validity of its anticipation. But second, this norm is "not imposed from the outside"; rather, it is the (actual) *thing itself* (2004, 15) – a regulative idea or "Idea in the Kantian sense" – a teleological concept that depends on infinitizing the contingent, empirical way things show up for us.[15] Thus the "actual reality of the world depends *phenomenologically* on the actual reality of consciousness," i.e., "on the actual course of pure experience" (2004, 12–13).

An "empirical" but "pure" consciousness is thus a *Faktum*; consciousness has the "necessity of a fact" (Husserl, 1983, 103). Husserl explains that while an eidetic (rational) ontology contains the grounds for a *possible* nature, it contains "nothing of a factic one," and so "facticity is not the terrain of phenomenology and logic [i.e.,

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[14] Ontology is an eidetic investigation which takes the "world" into account as a possible "contentful" (empirical) manifold governed by "consistency and compossibility"; that is, ontology "constructs the *logos* of a possible world." All such possible worlds, including the actual world, are "real" in Husserl's sense. What makes the actual world actual is not a distinction in ontological status but rather the fact that, if we are to discover its *logos*, we must "begin from the factically empirical," consult what is intuitively given (Husserl 1959, 213-14). This "facticity" will become the terrain of Husserl's metaphysics, but it follows that such metaphysics can only rest on a *conditional* apriori: if the factic course of experience continues to validtate itself, then its apriori world-ontology must hold. Hence metaphysics cannot be purely eidetic – a mere "doctrine of categories" – and this raises questions about its cognitive ground.

[15] On the infinite in Husserl's metaphysics, see Tengelyi (2014, 534-548).

ontology] but of *metaphysics*" (Husserl, 1956, 394). And, he continues, "the miracle here is rationality": since there is no *eidetic necessity* that the course of conscious experience allow for a strict natural science, the "miracle" – from the transcendental point of view – is that "a correlation obtains between factic consciousness and empirical science" in the actual world, a point registered in the *conditional* character of the phenomenological apriori (see fn 14).

Bernet cites Husserl to the effect that "it is inconceivable that a thing would exist" without this "relation to the *hic et nunc*" of "the one who actually determines it," but he interprets this to mean that such situatedness is necessary for any epistemic *verification* of actuality (Bernet, 2004, 17; Husserl, 2002b, 271). He thereby reproduces the ambiguity surrounding the *metaphysical* dependence question we encountered in §44. Bernet does not leave it at that, however. He concludes by distinguishing between idealism in a "broad" sense – the *ontological* thesis of a "necessary correlation between the possibility of objects and the possibility of an intuitive consciousness of such objects" – and idealism in a "strict" sense, which "goes much further" (2004, 19). This latter is *metaphysical* in the sense just elucidated, having to do with the facticity of the world. It "makes claims about 'things in themselves'" *and* "it makes their actual existence depend on the actual existence of embodied subjects" (2004, 19). If it is "banal" (2004, 3) to say that "there are no thinkable things without a consciousness that thinks them," it is far from banal to say that "no transcendent empirical things can exist without there existing embodied subjects that have an actual […] experience of them" (2004, 19).

In the end, then, does Bernet think that transcendental phenomenology entails this "strict" or metaphysical form of idealism? It is hard to tell. On the one hand, he notes that when Husserl claims that "the meaning of the being of the object depends on its intuitive givenness," this promotes "consciousness to the role of supreme judge of all issues concerning being" (Bernet, 2004, 20). On its own, however, this says nothing about existence-dependence. Husserl's account of how the *meaning* of "actual" being depends on consciousness is easily understood in metaphysically neutral terms. On the other hand, Bernet also notes that Husserl "undoubtedly set about bringing to light a dependence of the nature of objects and of their modes of being on acts of intuitive consciousness," and he (rightly) argues that this sort of "transcendental idealism" is *inseparable* "from Husserl's phenomenology" (2004, 20). But to say that the "nature" (essence) and "modes" of being (ontic modalities) of objects depend on intuitive consciousness just restates the thesis of "broad" ontological idealism, underwritten by the reduction as our methodological access to all such meaningful distinctions. It need not entail metaphysical dependence. Indeed, Bernet concludes by reminding us that transcendental idealism is grounded in Husserl's "phenomenology of knowledge," and he warns that "every extrapolation of the meaning of Husserlian idealism beyond the limits" of this epistemological approach "is exposed to the worst sorts of misunderstandings" (2004, 20). To my ears, this sounds like a version of metaphysically neutral transcendental phenomenology.

But if transcendental idealism is not directly a metaphysical idealism – i.e., is concerned with meaning and validity rather than with positing an absolute metaphysical *Faktum* or ground – might it nevertheless have metaphysical *implications*?

Dan Zahavi answers this question affirmatively, so we might wonder whether the existential dependence of real things on consciousness is among those implications.

Like Bernet, Zahavi seems primarily concerned to undermine the view that transcendental subjectivity is a Cartesian consciousness cut off from the world; and, like Bernet but against Dermot Moran and A. D. Smith, he argues that transcendental idealism is not a "speculative" and "baroque" form of "metaphysical" idealism (Zahavi, 2010, 75). Finally, again like Bernet, the position he defends is transcendental idealism in a "fundamentally and essentially new sense," as Husserl put it, "the proof [of which] is phenomenology itself" (Husserl, 1969, 86; quoted in Zahavi, 2010, 76). Such an idealism aims "not to offer a metaphysical account of reality, but to justify and understand what it means for the world to count as real and objective;" that is, it aims to *elucidate* "mundane transcendence through a systematic disclosure of constituting intentionality" (2010, 77). Thus, for Zahavi, the phenomenological correlation, revealed by the reduction, is basic; the necessity of such correlation, and any "dependence" of things on consciousness that follows from it, does not entail "metaphysical dependence" (2010, 78).

At the same time, Zahavi rejects the metaphysically neutral interpretation of the reduction, according to which phenomenology excludes "the actual existence of the world from consideration" in order to focus on its "sense or meaning" (Zahavi, 2010, 78). This won't do, because it would mean that transcendental phenomenology is "in principle compatible with a variety of metaphysical views, including metaphysical realism or subjective idealism" (2010, 78) – and Zahavi is keen to show that transcendental phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. Hence the dependence question, signaled in the title of his paper, looms large: in what sense is consciousness "absolute" such that transcendent things, as metaphysical realism understands them, could not exist without consciousness?

Beginning with metaphysical idealist interpretations such as Smith's, Zahavi examines and dismisses several suggestions for what the "dependence" of things on consciousness might mean. Causal dependence is dismissed, since this would turn "transcendental subjectivity" – the embodied, embedded, intersubjective "realization" of "pure" consciousness, as Bernet put it – into a "prime mover" in direct competition with empirical cosmological theories like the Big Bang. Supervenience is also dismissed, since it suggests a phenomenalism that Husserl explicitly rejects (Zahavi, 2010, 79–80).[16] Against such views, Zahavi holds that "Husserl's decisive point" is that "reality, far from being some brute fact that is detached from every context of experience and from every conceptual framework is rather a system of

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[16] Zahavi also briefly considers whether the relation might be one of *Fundierung*, which he seems to identify with supervenience, arguing that this would entail a form of "panpsychism" (2010, 80). While I do think that panpsychism might follow if *Fundierung* were a relation of metaphysical grounding – which, while not necessarily a causal relation, operates on the same "ontic" explanatory level as causality – I would argue that phenomenological founding is a transcendental relation and is the best candidate for clarifying the kind of dependence of transcendent things on consciousness that Husserl has in view. See Crowell (2021).

validity and meaning which needs subjectivity […] if it is to manifest and articulate itself" (2010, 80).

One might think, however, that this changes the subject. Of course – one might say – if reality is understood as a "system of validity and meaning," it can *show itself* only in a correlational context. But this seems to get us no further than real possibility in Bernet's sense. It does not justify Husserl's apparently stronger claim (Husserl, 1983, 129), referenced by Zahavi, that "reality depends on subjectivity" because "it is just as nonsensical to speak of an absolute mind-independent reality as it is to speak of a circular square" (Zahavi, 2010, 80). Zahavi understands this to mean that "an objectivistic interpretation of [the world's] ontological status" must be rejected on phenomenological grounds. Husserl's idealism thus "redeem[s] rather than renounce[s] the realism of the natural attitude" (2010, 80). But – such a realist might ask – doesn't the natural attitude understand the existence of the things it deals with precisely as metaphysically (or "ontologically") mind-independent?[17]

Zahavi's position on the absolute character of consciousness, and so also on the meaning of Husserl's idealism, involves accepting the sort of argument pursued by Bernet – "no object is thinkable as *actual* without an actual subjectivity capable of realizing such an object in actual cognition" (Husserl, 2002a, 277; cited in Zahavi, 2010, 82) – and also involves formulating the precise sense in which the relation between subject and object is asymmetrical: "the absoluteness that Husserl ascribes to subjectivity pertains to its manifestness"; that is, as "self-manifesting or self-constituting" it possesses "something that all objects per definition lack." Objects "are relative and dependent" *in the sense that* "the condition for the appearance of any object is located outside that object itself" (2010, 83). So far, this is entirely compatible with a metaphysically neutral interpretation of the reduction. But further, Zahavi affirms that transcendental idealism "doesn't deny the existence of mind-independent objects in the uncontroversial sense of empirical realism but only in the controversial sense of metaphysical realism" (2010, 84). So to address the *metaphysical* dependence question it is necessary to understand what metaphysical realism is.

As a first approximation, Zahavi describes it as the view that a transcendent reality "exists independently of any thought or experience" we may have of it (2010, 85). This could mean two things: first, that it is possible for something to exist that in principle precludes *all* possibility of our experiencing it, a Kantian *Ding an sich.* Husserl, Bernet, and Zahavi all reject this view.[18] Second, it might mean that a given transcendent thing, correlated to a specific veridical act (or series of acts), exists whether or not such acts take place. On either meaning, the metaphysical realist holds that if we want to grasp reality, we need to "strip away the subjective" from our experience of the world – all the ways in which "it happens to present itself to us human beings" (2010, 85). Thus Zahavi seems to have in mind a view like

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[17] As we shall see, Ullrich Melle argues that precisely because Husserl's idealism is metaphysical, it poses a direct challenge to the realism of the natural attitude.

[18] There is much to be said about this matter, but we will have to leave it aside here. For arguments against Husserl's thesis, see Yoshimi (2015).

Theodore Sider's, who aims, by means of an artificial language ("ontologese"), to theorize the (metaphysically) "real," abandoning both experience and "conceptual frameworks" other than physics, our "best empirical theory" about "what is."

Sider expresses incredulity at the thought that subjectivity could play a role in metaphysics (Sider, 2011, 18). Further, "knee-jerk realism requires that the physical description of reality be objectively privileged" because, he argues, "physical notions carve [nature; what is] at the joints" (2011, 20). In phenomenological terms, Sider is convinced that what Husserl calls the "physicalistic abstraction" from all subjectivity, which defines the "naturalistic attitude" (Husserl, 1989, 27–29), leaves nothing metaphysically *fundamental* out of account. According to Zahavi, Husserl's transcendental idealism "amounts to a rejection" of this sort of "metaphysical realism" (2010, 85). Hence it is not metaphysically neutral because the reduction has this *negative* metaphysical implication: a mind-independent physical world, as Sider understands it, is just as "nonsensical" as a "round square." But is it really?

Zahavi's argument that it is hinges on the claim that transcendental idealism is "defined" by its "deliberate blurring of the distinction between ontology and epistemology": the "meaning" of being, existence, actuality, and so on is defined by reflecting on how that meaning is given and constituted. But why should this entail that a physical world metaphysically independent of consciousness cannot exist? Zahavi admits that the "deliberate blurring" in question might appear to yield "a rather deflationary definition" of idealism (Zahavi, 2010, 85), but if it is a form of deflationary ontology, then it precisely leaves the existence-dependence question out of account, or else denies that it is meaningful. Amie Thomasson, for instance, sees Husserl as embracing a "meta-ontological deflationism" that rejects "substantive" metaphysical questions, such as existential dependence, precisely *because* there is "no sense to 'ontological' questions in which they cannot be answered easily, by perfectly ordinary standards" (Thomasson, 2015, 295–317).[19] Along these lines, as we saw, Zahavi explicitly denies that Husserl's idealism entails that "consciousness is the metaphysical origin or source of reality." But he also admits that, as a philological matter, "Husserl might indeed consider consciousness as a necessary condition for reality" and that, if he does, "Smith is right in saying that for Husserl nothing would exist in the absence of consciousness" (Zahavi, 2010, 86). But if that is truly Husserl's position – that is, if, in contrast to the view of idealism Zahavi himself defends, Husserl's *own* conception of idealism includes "a theoretical investigation of the fundamental building blocks, of the basic 'stuff' of reality" (Zahavi, 2019, 51) – then it *is* a metaphysical idealism. There would be something metaphysically impossible (and not just "nonsensical" in the deflationary sense) in the very idea of a purely physical world. Husserl's idealism would be the mirror image of Sider's physicalist metaphysics: according to both, but by appeal to precisely opposed metaphysical arguments, phenomenal beings (ordinary tables, artworks, and trees) do not metaphysically "exist."

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[19] Identifying what these standards are is not necessarily "easy," but there is nothing metaphysically arcane about them.

I will argue that Ullrich Melle is right to find such a metaphysical view on the horizon of Husserl's idealism. The point about Zahavi's position that I want to emphasize here, however, is that his "deflationary" reading of transcendental idealism differs from a metaphysically neutral reading *only* in its *argument* for the "negative" metaphysical implication that (supposedly) rules out metaphysical realism. The argument is *grounded* in the distinctively phenomenological, or transcendental, "blurring" of ontological and epistemological motifs, but this blurring is not itself *defended* metaphysically. Hence the "anti-realism" toward which it points us (Zahavi, 2010, 87) is, I would argue, best understood in metaphysically neutral terms – that is, as eschewing any argumentation that aims to draw metaphysical "implications," whether idealistic or realistic. For any such implication will run both ways: If phenomenology entails that a reality metaphysically independent of consciousness is impossible, this equally implies that reality *metaphysically depends* on consciousness.

Ullrich Melle takes up many of the themes and arguments that we have already encountered in the previous two papers, but with the advantage (in this context) of interpreting them in light of Husserl's own "strict," or explicitly metaphysical, interpretation of transcendental idealism. Hence it becomes possible to locate more precisely the steps in Husserl's argument where metaphysical theses are supposedly entailed by the reduction – and to evaluate the plausibility of this supposed entailment.

To begin with, Melle takes note of the fact that Husserl's claims – for instance, in §44 of *Ideas I* – about the "relativity" of empirical actuality to consciousness belong to an *eidetic* analysis of the different ways in which consciousness and reality are evidentially given – that is, they are meant to *motivate* the reduction and are carried out "still on the ground of the natural attitude" (Melle, 2010, 94).[20] The "abyss" between consciousness and reality (Husserl, 1983, 111) that results from this "epistemological" reflection poses the ontological problem of how the two can be related to one another at all, a problem that non-phenomenological approaches often attempt to solve by means of a "picture" theory or "sign" theory of perception. In *Transzendentaler Idealismus* (Husserl, 2003), many of whose texts were written at the time of Husserl's articulation of the transcendental reduction, Husserl expends much effort refuting such theories: there is no phenomenological basis for "indirect" theories of perception; in perception, the object is "given in person [*leibhaft gegeben*]" (Melle, 2010, 96). But this introduces a further problem, namely, a potential "gap between the [transcendent] object and its [immanent] appearing." It is this gap that the reduction is supposed to close, and in the texts of *Transzendentaler Idealismus* such closure has a "strict" metaphysical meaning (2010, 96).

As Melle notes, Husserl's argument hinges on the idea that perception, in being directed at the real thing, is simultaneously "directedness toward validity" in a "process of demonstration [*ausweisen*] and justification." The "being" or "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*) of a transcendent thing "does not appear" as the thing does; it must

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[20]All translations from Melle's original German are my own.

"prove itself" (2010, 96). If we ask how this directedness toward validity, revealed by the reduction, can overcome the gap that threatens to leave us stuck in immanence – why the "thing itself" cannot lie beyond the reach of all experience – Husserl will respond that we have understood "immanence" *psychologically* and have thereby fallen back into an "indirect" theory of perception (Melle, 2010, 97). The reduction, then, facilitates Husserl's "refutation of this [kind of] skepticism and the false metaphysics of a thing-in-itself bound up with it" (2010, 97). But it does so, as Melle explains, by means of an idealism that understands the dependence of things on consciousness in a *metaphysical* way, one that goes beyond the "deliberate blurring" of epistemology and ontology.

To appreciate this point it is important to note, as Melle does (2010, 93), that in these texts Husserl – uncharacteristically, given his frequent rejection of such "dialectical argumentation" – is constructing a *proof* for transcendental idealism; that is, he is constructing an argument, based on transcendental ("verificationist") premises established within the phenomenological reduction, to a metaphysical conclusion which itself escapes any, howsoever mediated, phenomenological *Evidenz*. We are familiar with these transcendental premises: In order to posit the existence ("actuality," *Wirklichkeit*) of a transcendent thing, it is necessary that the thing show itself and maintain itself in an ongoing and norm-responsive (*Geltung*-tracking) series of experiences of various sorts. Though this is never definitive, so long as the thing consistently shows itself in such experience there is no reason to doubt it, and so also no reason to think that it is "merely an appearance [*blosser Schein*]" (Melle, 2010, 98). The price we pay for this "securing of transcendence," however, is the "assertion of an in principle relativity" of actuality to consciousness, which means that the connection between transcendence and consciousness cannot be "external, additional, and contingent." As Melle unpacks this point: "no being and no truth is thinkable without possible givenness and without possible knowledge" (2010, 99).

To show how this entails a metaphysical conclusion, Melle draws on the distinctions between ideal possibility, real possibility, and actuality central to Bernet's account of Husserl's "Leibnizian" approach to transcendental idealism, incorporating them into Husserl's "proof" of metaphysical idealism. First, the idea of an actual thing-in-itself (or actual world outside our own) is merely an "ideal" possibility, something for which nothing in our experience speaks. It is thus equivalent to a "fiction." Matters stand otherwise with respect to the idea of an actual transcendent thing which is not now being experienced, since we conceive such things as *real* (that is, *motivated*) possibilities. But this sort of motivation presupposes "some connection with and reference to a current [*aktuelle*] experience" that can be motivated by it (2010, 100).

So far, so good; all this remains intelligible within a metaphysically neutral reading of the reduction. But for Husserl it follows that "the world owes its actuality to consciousness," that without the latter "there is and can be no actuality." Or, as Husserl writes, "If one says that a world could exist [*existieren*] without an existing ego that grasps [*erfasst*] it, this is nonsense" (Husserl, 2003, 119; quoted in Melle, 2010, 101). This direct statement of existential dependence is immediately hedged, however: the reason it is nonsense is that the *truth* of the *claim* that such an actual

world could exist "is nothing without groundability [*Begründbarkeit*] in principle," and groundability presupposes, as we have seen, an *aktuelles Ich*.

So despite Husserl's metaphysical conclusion, the reasoning behind it still turns on the verificationist premises established by the reduction; roughly: The very idea that an actual world could exist independent of consciousness is absurd. This is because phenomenology shows that the world is intrinsically (i.e., not "externally and contingently") *relative* to consciousness. Intrinsic relativity is established through the reduction to the necessary correlation between the positing of any actual being and an actually existing ego, a coherent, *Geltung*-tracking series of intentional experiences (monad). Thus, no claim about an actually existing world that excludes consciousness can be *justified*.

Melle then examines certain predictable objections. In his responses we can see how Husserl's proof is supposed to work, and why, despite its verificationist premises, it must be given a "strict" metaphysical reading. The first objection holds that even if the groundability of the *truth* of positing an actual empirical object presupposes an "actual" ego capable of intuitive acts of fulfillment, as Bernet argued, this does not mean that "the *existence* of the object of that truth" requires it; it does not entail the *dependence* (*Abhängigkeit*) of the object on consciousness (Melle, 2010, 102). Melle's Husserl dismisses this objection: whatever we *think* we mean by it, once phenomenology has shown that without reference to an actual ego we are in fact only trading in "ideal possibilities" equivalent to "fictions," the distinction between truth and "actual" existence itself proves to be "groundless" (*bodenlos*). Of course, as Husserl notes, consciousness can take many forms, some of which are incapable of the norm-responsiveness required for any consciousness of meaning and validity; the existence of a rational consciousness, then, is a "pure *factum*" ("the miracle here is rationality") which we continually experience in ourselves. We rational beings can and do make distinctions between ideal and real possibilities, and we do so on the basis of "actual" experience, which therefore can and must serve as the "norm" of all being (Melle, 2010, 104).

A second objection is more worrisome. It attacks the *conclusion* of the argument through a seeming *reductio*, drawing on the "fact of the evolution of consciousness in natural history" (Melle, 2010, 103): How can the actual emergence of consciousness be understood, when, prior to that emergence, there was no actual ego to anchor its intuitive fulfillment? Husserl answers that just as the actual existence of things contemporaneous with, though not currently experienced by, my actual consciousness can be established as real possibilities thanks to *motivated* "experiential paths that lead from actual experiencing to the ends of the earth," so too there is a *temporal* experiential path, "anchored" in my present, that leads from now to the most distant ages of natural history (Melle, 2010, 100, 103).

As Melle goes on to explain – thereby making common cause with Bernet and Zahavi – the full argument requires that the consciousness in question be "worldly," i.e., that it has "realized" itself *in* the world constituted through its intentional achievements. No sense can be made of an "anchoring" in an "actual" ego that is not itself experienced as embodied, embedded, and intersubjective (Melle, 2010, 104). But, as Melle shows, Husserl takes this point to entail a metaphysically idealist

conclusion. First, if Husserl's "proof" has gone through, then, as Zahavi also argued, "a merely material world is impossible; the actual world must be a psycho-physical world with […] humanoid creatures in it" (2010, 104). This does not mean that the existence of the world metaphysically depends "on a part of it" (namely, the current human community); in regard to that "part," we are still on the ground of the verificationist or conditional phenomenological apriori: an actual world can only demonstrate itself *if* there is a suitably rational monadic community (2010, 105). Such a view is consistent with a metaphysically neutral interpretation of the reduction, but Melle's reading highlights Husserl's metaphysical intentions: To say that "the world does not exist independently of consciousness" means that "the world cannot [first] exist as a merely material world in which, subsequently and contingently, certain material things attain [*erhalten*] a conscious appendix" (2010, 105). Understood in this metaphysical way, the empirical "emergence" of consciousness in natural history presupposes the *prior* "absolute" existence of consciousness. So Husserl *accepts* the supposed *reductio* but does not see the conclusion as absurd because he doubles down on the idea that grounding, in the sense of justification, has *metaphysical* import.

With a good deal of understatement, Melle notes that this idea "has far-reaching metaphysical consequences" (2010, 105). For instance, Husserl's position somewhat resembles the strong anthropic principle: since the current world is one in which rational minds can successfully pursue science, the emergence of such sapient life is somehow *necessary,* though this necessity cannot be derived from the laws of physics. But Husserl's claim is in fact much stronger: because a merely material world is not possible, the metaphysical *ground* of the world must include consciousness. Phrased otherwise, if *anything* exists, then consciousness must exist. This is not panpsychism, since Husserl does not maintain that transcendent things *themselves* possess consciousness as one of their real parts. Rather, the metaphysical ground is absolute consciousness itself, the monad – or rather, the mondadological community (*Monadenall*) whose members "realize" themselves as human beings within the limits of birth and death but whose metaphysical actuality is, as Melle puts it, "from eternity to eternity" (2010, 106).

4   The Horizon of Phenomenological Metaphysics

This last point directs us to one place (among many) in the *Grenzprobleme* where Husserl's metaphysics of the monad appeals to a dialectical *argument* that moves from a phenomenologically evident premise to a conclusion about a "totality-problem" that far exceeds such evidence (Husserl, 2014, 145–53). First, given the essentially temporal (protentional-retentional) structure of consciousness, Husserl argues that it is *impossible* for consciousness to begin or end. If that is so, it follows that in what we imagine to be geological periods in which all consciousness was absent, the monadological community did in fact *exist*, but in a state of "torpor" (*Dumpfheit*). Husserl does not pretend to have done more to clarify what this means

beyond making a metaphysical argument for its necessity, based on premises delivered by the reduction's transcendental *ontology,* its clarification of the meaning of being. Nor, as Melle notes, does this argument establish "w*hy* absolute consciousness or the monadic community awoke to world-constitution, and how much necessity or contingency there is in this awakening and in the course of world constitution itself" (Melle, 2010, 106). These are the "teleological" questions that, for Husserl, remain on the horizon of phenomenological metaphysics.

As Melle explains, such arguments go beyond the ontological "relativity" (or deflationary ontological "pluralism") that follows directly from the reduction. Husserl's proof is meant to "free us from the limits of the natural attitude" – naïve realism – and so constitutes "an argumentative alternative to the method of *epoché* and reduction." In contrast to Zahavi, Melle argues that "both paths lead to the same metaphysical truth about absolute being," a truth that "stands in contradiction to the general thesis of the natural attitude" and is, indeed, "the exact mirror-image [*Widerspiel*]" of the latter (Melle, 2010, 106).

In this respect, Husserl's metaphysics is the "exact mirror image" of Sider's. For both, ordinary things are *phenomena bene fundata* but do not figure into the fundamental metaphysical structure of what is. For Sider, that structure includes only "physics, logic, and set theory" (2011, 292). For Husserl, in turn, metaphysical structure includes only *monads* and their various levels of constitutive accomplishment. Further consideration of this dispute between the two positions would show that the arguments they employ to arrive at the metaphysically "fundamental" are themselves mirror images of one another – that is, we find ourselves facing an *antinomy* in which we have nothing to go on but pure argumentation, the conclusions of which cancel each other out. The lesson I suggest we draw from this is not exactly the one that László Tengelyi proposes – namely, that we have to do here with an *agon* between two fundamental worldviews, transcendentalism and naturalism (Tengelyi, 2014, 411–433) – but it is close: transcendental phenomenology is and ought to be metaphysically neutral; it should leave worldview proposals to the scientists and theologians.

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