

The methodological significance of Husserl's concept of evidence and its relation to the idea of reason

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1. Introduction

Husserl's analysis of evidence from the period of the *Logical Investigations to Formal and Transcendental Logic* is developed in connection with the progressive uncovering of the apriori structures of intentional experience. However, the intimate relation which obtains between the concepts of evidence and experience does not mean that we *experience* evidence as though evident acts were distinguished from all others by virtue of their object. Experiences of evidence do not, in other words, constitute a special class of intentions nor do they have their own characteristic objects which belong to them structurally.¹ Traditional epistemological reflections on evidence often commit this error when, for example, evidence is regarded as an "uncommon special datum," (Hua XVII, 295) an experienced characteristic which is added to the act as an *index veri*, usually identified as a compelling feeling of subjective necessity. By carrying out a resolution of evidence to experience such that the transcendental theory of experience and the transcendental theory of evidence coincide, Husserl has something radically different in mind: evidence is not a special order of intentions which *occasionally* accompany experience, nor is it to be identified with any singular experience; it is rather an "apriori structural form of consciousness" itself, (Hua XVII, 295) an apriori structural form which pervades all the manifold levels of intentional life. Thus, for Husserl, the philosophically serious question which evidence poses is not simply a matter of clarifying the sense in which we sometimes

possess it in contrast to those occasions when we do not. Rather, the question that evidence raises concerns the very conditions by which experience itself is possible. When the problematic of evidence is so enlarged, it becomes clear that for Husserl, as the structural form which belongs to the “unity of life,” a life of consciousness “cannot exist without including evidence” (Hua XVII, 295). Stated otherwise, the unity of life is evidence’s performed effect. Precisely how this claim is to be understood and how this conception of evidence is related to a phenomenologically determined idea of reason are the questions addressed by this essay.

It is the thesis of this essay that Husserl’s understanding of evidence has profound consequences for the phenomenological determination of reason. By replacing the ideal of predicative evidence and propositional truth with the universal evidence of pre-predicative experience, the Husserlian reflection on evidence provides a point of departure for circumscribing the problematic of reason in its full breadth. Within the phenomenological reduction reason will recover itself as the self-elucidation of intentional life. No longer construed as an empty generality, reason will emerge as a living *telos* which belongs to every sphere of human praxis, to any action self-consciously guided by full insight. Thus, in the end, the phenomenological idea of reason not only illuminates the logic of intentional experience but man in his concrete humanity.

In brief, I propose to develop this enlarged conception of reason through an analysis of the experiential and methodological dimensions of evidence paying particular attention to the problem of the relativity of evidence in Husserl’s later thought – the question of its “definitiveness” (*Endgültigkeit*) – and its subsequent overcoming through the phenomenological revaluing of relativity within the transcendental problematic.

2. Evidence and the logic of intentional experience

2.1 *General characterization of evidence and its methodological dimension*

It is impossible in the space of this essay alone to present a complete account of Husserl's understanding of evidence and even less of its development. The interest of this essay is relatively modest and systematic in spirit. Nevertheless, if only to situate the following discussion, a few remarks concerning the general features of the Husserlian conception of evidence are in order. Husserl defines evidence as that intentional performance which consists in the giving of something itself (*die intentionale Leistung der Selbstgebung*). As the consciousness of the "intended-to meant" in the manner of "itself-seen," that is, seized upon itself originaliter, evidence is the pre-eminent form of intentionality; it is the "primal" form of consciousness (Hua XVII, 166). However, the giving of "something-itself," as an intentional process, is not the apprehension of an indifferent finality, but is a function in the "all embracing nexus of consciousness" (Hua XVII, 168). To be conscious of something, in other words, is not a simple having of it, but reveals itself to be a complex intentional achievement of many acts of evidence corresponding to genetically different levels of experience. In the *Formal and Transcendental Logic* it becomes clear that in carrying out the methodological return to the "things themselves" (*Sachen selbst*), first announced in the *Logical Investigations*, the originally seized upon is not strictly the originally given. Thus, perception, for example, despite its preeminence for Husserl as the primitive mode of self-giveness, is never, as a single intentional act, "a full objectivating performance" (Hua XVII, 165). Rather, it entails a multiplicity of concordant experiences of identification and re-identification. Evidence is not, therefore, an empty generality but a structural differentiation within intentional experience and so ramified into different modes and degrees of originality according to the categories of what is, the categories of possible objective sense: whatever exists has its own peculiar manners of objective self-giveness and thus its own modes of validity.

The differentiations of evidence and the degrees with which it is given indicates the sense in which the concept of evidence is to be understood as both an element of a phenomenological theory of experience as well as a methodological principle. In all instances in which, on the basis of an analysis of intentional experience and its structure, different kinds of evidence can be distinguished on essential grounds, the resulting distinction is significant not only with respect to the general problematic of transcendental experience but methodologically as well. There are, however, multiple ways in which it is meaningful to speak of the essential differentiations of evidence. Because the category of objectivity and the category of evidence are, in Husserl's words, "perfect correlates," to every fundamental kind of objectivity, a fundamental species of experience, and so of evidence, corresponds (Hua XVII, 169). Thus, although evidence is characterized everywhere the same as the giving of an object itself, this does not mean that the experience of evidence is everywhere alike. Evidence is "subject to varying norms of perfection."² To the different categories of objectivity are correlated essentially different species of experience and so fundamentally different intentionally indicated, evidential *styles* pertaining to the further enhancement of their perfection (Hua XVII, 169). Methodologically, this means that the *manner* by which the experience itself may be further enhanced with respect to the fullness of its objective self-givenness is essentially predelineated on the basis of the experience itself and in conformity with its specific character, the objective region to which it belongs. The evidence of a universal judgment, for example, is different from that of a perceptual judgment. They correspond to different orders of experience. This entails, methodologically, a differentiation in their manners of confirmation, in the way in which they are to be "made evident," brought to the mode of self-givenness appropriate to their objective nature.

Evidences may also be distinguished according to their modalities. Perception and recollection, for example, refer to different, although intentionally related, orders of experience and noetic performances. They therefore raise different methodological considerations with regard to their possible verification.

2.2 *Evidence and the degrees of adequacy*

Most significant, however, for the specifically phenomenological conception of evidence, and certainly with respect to its relation to the concept of reason, is the differentiation of evidence into degrees of perfection or adequacy. It must be emphasized from the start, however, that the opposition between intending and fulfilling acts upon which the modalities of perfection or adequacy rest, applies to the full range of noetic modalities. It should not be taken as one formal distinction among others but the intentional structure within which evidence is phenomenologically determined. Consequently, what is said here of evidence *in forma* regarding its ramification into degrees of adequacy can be illustrated by any noetic modality.

As noted above, despite its irreducibility, evidence is not a function of a singular isolated act but a moment in a wider unity of consciousness. It is one of intentionality's fundamental laws that in the dialectic of signitive intention and intuitive fulfillment every experienced self-givenness points beyond itself to an openly endless multiplicity of further possible confirming experiences which can be realized in a synthetic unity of acceptance, a "con-posito" resulting in one unified consciousness of the "same" (Hua XVII, 168). Furthermore, because this pointing beyond is essentially predelineated on the basis of the content of the *actual act*, this intentionally projected system does not represent an empty possibility but one that is rationally motivated as the idea of its perfection only partially realized in the actual content. By virtue of the anticipatory structure of intentional experience every actually experienced evidence implicitly "demands" further givings of the object itself as "supplementation of its objectivating effect" (Hua XVII, 168) effectively establishing a virtual methodological rule for its fulfillment through the rationally motivated idea which is projected by the act. Thus it is that, thanks to evidence, the life of consciousness has an "*all-pervasive teleological structure*, a pointedness toward 'reason' and even a pervasive tendency towards it" (Hua XVII, 168–169). Obviously, because it invests the life of consciousness with such a teleological structure, evidence can not be abstractly limited to a special class of intentions but is related to the *whole* of the life of consciousness.

Thus, although it is the case that certain evidences, such as the evidence of perception, are in principle, i.e., on essential grounds, inadequate, this does not entail that the ideal of adequacy does not apply to them. One should not think of the ideal of adequacy as an objective standard of evidence external to intentional life and so incommensurate with particular noetic modalities. As a projected idea it is an immanent moment of the act which effectively relates the actual, albeit partial, intuitive content of the cogito to the fulness, albeit merely signitive, of the meaning-intention.

However, because transcendence lies in the proper essence of experience itself, as the anticipation of a continuing and always projected identity, experiences of evident actuality possess a future structure and so can no longer be conceived of as finalities, pure and absolute. Consequently, the possibility of deception belongs to every kind of evidence: every evidential awareness of the form “now I see it” is by its nature preliminary and can be intentionally modified in the course of further experience by new evidences. Self-givenness is no longer simply a question of what one has as in-itself. This raises the question of the definitiveness or relativity of evidence and truth. Since the consciousness of having something itself is not a straightforward possessing but a “having” in an experiential and temporal contexture, evidence must be laid bare with respect to both the “what” that one has *and* the intentionally projected horizon within which it stands. From this perspective Husserl launches his critique of the naive conception of evidence and its underlying presupposition of an absolute truth-in-itself beyond all relativity.

2.3 *The relativization of evidence and the revaluing of relativity*

The central question is, then, how can the problem of truth and its relativization be presented such that it is still possible to speak intelligibly of the legitimacy of truth and evidence despite their essential relativity? In what sense can truths, although essentially involved in relativities, provide a norm for objective being and true knowledge? Husserl himself raises the question of the “definitiveness” of truth and evidence in *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*.

Is Evidence, is the direct intuition of the *adaequatio* already truth in the full sense? Truth is surely definitiveness [*Endgültigkeit*.] But in the having of something itself, experience can come into conflict with experience, bringing about a modalization. Can this not continue *in infinitum*, never resulting in definitiveness? And if it should, how can we know it? (Hua XI, 102)

The problems of the relativity of truth, the decidability of all judgments, and the nature of the “in itself,” are clearly interrelated. Because of the essential epistemic contingency of experience it has become questionable to maintain that behind every judgment there stands a definitive and inviolable truth, that, as Husserl expresses the fundamental issue of decidability, “every question must be able to find its answer” (Hua XI, 103). Such a view necessarily presupposes an existent-in-itself which is decided “before hand” (*im voraus*), a position which comes to formal expression in the logical principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle.³

Consequently, the experience of any objectivity, indeed, of any world, is no longer regarded as the apprehension of an absolute in-itself, but rather as a constitutive formation, a projection of meaning and being foreshadowing and validating itself in the teleologically oriented dialectic of intentional life. For this reason Husserl states that the “supreme terminus for the problems of phenomenological philosophy is the question of the ‘principle of teleology’” which is disclosed concretely in the universal structures of intentional experience.⁴ Stated otherwise, and with what is for him uncharacteristic suggestiveness, the supreme “problem of constitution” is the question of the being of “what is beyond being”;⁵ the ideal, identical, self-same sense maintained and projected throughout the changing intuitive foundations of actual givenness.

Thus, within the problematic of a universal teleology the notion of identity is transformed. In experiences of evidence the relation of identification obtains between the core of experienced givenness and its projected *idea* of totality. We are not left, therefore, with a simple concept of relativity: although such truths are essentially involved in relativities they nevertheless can continue to

provide norms for objective being and true knowledge despite the phenomenological dismantling of the ideal of the regulative ideas and methods of exact science and the in-itself it posits as an absolute norm. The relativity of evidence does not simply translate into untrustworthiness. This is so because for Husserl the nature of relativity is itself revalued within the transcendental problematic. Although original experience is not a domain of absolute objectivities fixed once and for all in themselves, as a fabric of horizontal and intentional references it can nevertheless be systematically explicated by following the predelineated system of intentional anticipations within which its object is given; that is, by proceeding from actual evidence to implied evidence, or from relativity to relativity.⁶ Not content to rest with the logical constructions of deduction, the evidential critique which phenomenology carries out is a movement from the given to that which it implies. It is a movement reminiscent of the socratic *maieutic* which, in turning the eye of the soul, seeks to elicit a knowledge which we already possess but only virtually.⁷ In this process of horizontal explication we have the truth, then, but not “falsely absolutized.” Rather we have it in each case within its horizons, which are not “overlooked or veiled from sight” (Hua XVII, 285), relegated to the margins, but are themselves systematically thematized. Thus, although the existent is no longer taken to be an existent-in-itself and so no longer establishes a basis for an absolute inviolable cognition, a final validity beyond all relativity, it is in principle possible to discover progressively more about it, to qualify it further as the explication of its horizon proceeds thereby enlarging its epistemic value and enhancing its rational weight. Husserl replaces the absolute truth of the in-itself by a “living truth, drawn from the living spring of the absolute life and self-consciousness turned toward this absolute life” (Hua XVII, 285).

The horizon, consequently, effectively posits an absolute into the sphere of relativities by establishing a *method* for the relative perfecting of the imperfect based on the content of actual givenness. Not, as we have seen, the absolute of an “in itself,” but the methodological absolute of the “ever-more.”⁸ The cognition itself remains relative but situated as it is within this system of intentional implications its relativity is disarmed, provisionally legiti-

mated, *rationalized* insofar as it continues to conform in further experience to the essence of the type of experience which it is. One need only consider an example from sensuous experience to see the measure of security it provides despite the essential relativity of its evidence. Indeed, the totality of world-objectivities as a whole is evidently accessible despite its relativity not as an *object* but as a *style* of conformable experience. That transcendence – the “ever-more” – belongs to the proper essence of every world-experience neither annuls its objectivating effect – the actuality of its object – nor its rational status. As an effective performance, the evidence of any world-experience is “woven into systematically built performances” (Hua XVII, 289). The phenomenological clarification of any such achievement must resist falsely abstracting the given from this fabric as though evidence was an intentionally indifferent finality and not a living intentionality. Inadequate and insufficient in themselves, evidences are rationalized in the whole.

Ontic certainty, therefore, rests upon the “anticipatory” certainty of the future course of evidence being brought into a harmonious fulfillment. The over-arching harmony of the world, the total world-horizon, is sustained throughout the vital process of validation and reformation, error and correction, which necessarily presupposes and reaffirms it. To this universal synthesis of concordant and conforming intentional syntheses belongs a universal certainty of belief:

“The” world, for us, corresponds to the universal synthesis of harmonious and concordant intentional syntheses, to which belongs a universal certainty of belief [*Glaubensgewissheit*.] But, as already mentioned, there are here and there ruptures [*Brüche*], disharmonies, such that partial beliefs are cancelled, transformed into disbelief and giving rise to doubts which may remain unresolved. But in the end, to every such disbelief there belongs a positive belief of a new objective sense, to each doubt a material resolution. The world supports many particular changing senses as it proceeds through the series of successive world meanings despite the changes in the unity of synthesis. It is a permanent and abiding world [*fortdauernde Welt*], only corruptible, one might say, in its parts ... (Hua XI, 101).

Although in the course of living experience validity often gives way to error, in this alteration of validity, the world-horizon as a whole is never undermined by any intermittent disharmony in its parts. Because the intentional world-horizon of experience emerges as the absolute norm of objective being and truth by which all relative, "situational" truths enjoy a share of legitimate certainty, Husserl is able to avoid succumbing to either a dogmatic absolutism on the one hand, or a sceptical relativism on the other, without resorting to or positing an absolute criterion which is located outside the life of intentional experience. Within the immanence of transcendental reflection one must now turn to the "infinitudes implicit in the entire, synthetically unified, *world-experience*" which extends throughout the life of the experiencing ego: "one must explore the intentionalities implicit in its *all-embracing style*" (Hua XVII, 289). All deceptions are experienced within this larger world-experience solely as an alteration of validity: the experience of deception is possible only on the basis of the originality of a *new experience* or evidence which dispels the deception, replacing it with the consciousness "now I see that it is an illusion" (Hua XVII, 164). The evidence of experience is, in other words, "always presupposed in the process" (*ibid.*).

A similar analysis is possible in the case of "internal" experience which has received a great deal of attention in traditional epistemological research because it was here that the actual having of something itself was believed to have been unquestionably secured in contrast to the untrustworthiness of external perception. However, despite its apparent simplicity the constitution of the evidence of internal experience — the givenness of the immanently objective — rests upon a complex synthesis as well. Specifically, the synthesis of the consciousness of inner time. Evidence here must still be understood as a performance within intentional complexes, in this case the horizon of temporal duration in which the datum is successively re-identified as the same. As a single perception divorced from its temporal horizon the living present of immanent experience does indeed possess an apodictic uncancellableness and it can be said that here at least doubt is impossible. But even here, where it may be said that the immanent datum makes its appearance really in the consti-

tuting mental process, “we must be warned against the *error* of believing that already, with this *real occurring*, the datum is fully constituted as an object” (Hua XVII, 291). Insofar as it is merely a moment, it is empty: “Here it is clear the actual given in itself cannot be annulled. But of what use is it when it is only a moment?” (Hua XI, 110). It is an *object* only insofar as it exists in time; that is, “existing with evidentness of being recognizable as the same throughout all the changes of the subjective modes of the past as it recedes from the present” (Hua XVII, 291). Thus, in the end, the problem of the constitution of the in-itself is a problem for memory (*Wiedererinnerung*) (Hua XI, 111).⁹

The experience of such an *immanentes Empfindungsdatum*, in other words, is never a perfect and adequate evidence with respect to something existent (*Seiende*) (Hua XVII, 291): with respect to its objective sense, the question is its persisting identity in time. Inner and external evidence are then on an epistemically equal footing despite the traditional theoretical bias favoring the former. As a question of the “ever more” and the “always again,” the situation is ultimately the same with only particular differences for every evidence (Hua XVII, 291). Accordingly, the identity of the self-identical in-itself has been described as a “surplus” (*Überschuss*)¹⁰ opposed to the actual course of identifying experience.

3. Truth and the in-itself

When by virtue of the essence of the experience its object can in principle never come to perfectly adequate givenness, when the identical objective self can never be furnished by consciousness as fully determinate in itself, the perfection of adequate objective self-givenness corresponding to this objectivity exists only as an idea of reason; that is, as the projected correlate of the ideally closed and infinite system of possible cognitions of concordant sense. Phenomenologically, perfect self-givenness is, then, the “unity of an infinity which allows itself to be beheld as a possibility in a process of infinity” (EU., p. 346). The only sense an absolute can have in the life of transcendently reduced experience is that of the teleologically functioning ideal of such totality and completeness.

In contrast to the position developed in the *Logical Investigations* the “in-itself” is now included in the phenomenological analysis itself. Indeed, from the perspective of Husserl’s later writings it becomes apparent that one of the central inadequacies of the *Prolegomena* is precisely this pre-phenomenological understanding of the in-itself.¹¹ There, with the in-itself understood largely in terms of fulfillment, truth is strictly correlated with an as yet not fully clarified concept of givenness. Now, by including the in-itself in the constitutive analyses themselves, a deeper concept of evidence and givenness emerges which avoids the dogmatic resonances of that earlier work and at the same time overcomes the always threatening danger of slipping into either a logical absolutism or a sceptical *crise pyrrhoniennne*.¹²

The sense of the revaluing of the relativity of evidence must be partly understood in terms of this reconception of the in-itself from that of a simple and independent absolute of givenness to that to which one can repeatedly return.¹³ In its broadest sense the in-itself now refers to potentialities of evidence: “First of all to the potentiality of the infinity of intendings of every kind that relate to something as identical, but then also to the potentiality of verifying these intendings, consequently to potential evidences which as de facto experiences, are repeatable *in infinitum*” (Hua I, 96).

Consequently, the methodological and normative significance of the phenomenological concept of evidence does not rest upon the fact that it establishes a criterion or guarantee for truth despite the misleading and often misunderstood characterization of evidence as the “experience of truth” (*Erlebnis der Wahrheit*) in the *Prolegomena*. Does this not contradict phenomenology’s central methodological principle, that intuitive experience alone constitutes the ultimate basis for the justification of all claims? Only if intuitive evidence is taken naively to be a simple standard of certainty. It is precisely this view of evidence which I have tried to dismantle. In light of this, to continue to speak of the phenomenological concept of evidence as establishing a criterion can be dangerously misleading. The traditional meaning of the stock of philosophical concepts are transformed within the parameters of a phenomenological reflection. Consequently, in an effort to avoid any possible misunderstanding we should refrain from em-

ploying the concept of a criterion in connection with the Husserlian understanding of evidence.¹⁴ As I have argued, given that the phenomenological elaboration of the concept of evidence proceeds within a more general analysis of intentional experience, i.e., that from the beginning evidence is identified with givenness, Husserl could not help but abandon any notion of evidence as a simple criterion.¹⁵

Because the identity of the given always transcends the act through which it appears, evidence is not an absolute security against deceptions. As we have seen such an apodicticity cannot be meaningfully ascribed to a single mental process divorced from the wider context of the unity of intentional life. Evidence is not the measure of absolute and apodictically certain knowledge: as a “functioning intentionality” which belongs to the *whole* of conscious life there is no sense in speaking of the “evident as such” any more than one can speak of the “true as such” or any other absolute “in itself.”¹⁶ Truth is a function of evidence in the sense that it is relative to the effective performances through which it is objectively brought about. The meaning of the Prolegomena definition of evidence as the “experience of truth” must then be read in light of the structural investigations of the Second Volume, specifically the Sixth Investigation, where truth is located originally in the consciousness of the fulfilling synthesis of identification between the objective sense as signitively intended, and that sense as it presents itself and which gives at first hand the object of this intention. Such a synthetic agreement represents a certification of the claim made by the signitive act: the object reveals itself as it has been projected. As a structural possibility within intentional experience truth is primarily a constitutional problem: “The heading True-being and Truth (in all modalities), indicates, in the case of any object meant ... a structural differentiation among the infinite multiplicities of actual and possible cognitions” (Hua I, 97). Obviously truth is no longer to be simply understood propositionally. The meaning of the traditional *adaequatio intellectus et rei* account is phenomenologically reformulated as well. “Appearing in the sense of being correct” (*Richtigseins*) is distinguished from “appearing as true” (*Erweisen als wahr*): the former rests upon the latter. The evidence of the *adaequatio*, understood as the correspondence of state-

ment and fact, presupposes the original givenness of the appearing state-of-affairs itself.

The relativity of truth must be understood, then, not as a result of the *de facto* limitations of human reason, but as a necessary consequence of the fact that this synthesis of identification is an essentially “asymptotic” process and in principle incapable of being “achieved all at once.”¹⁷ It is now clear that as long one remains within the pre-phenomenological understanding of the in-itself, that is, understood as the objective *fulfillment* of an intention, the relativity of the intention threatens to appear as a limitation of our ability to know the truth.¹⁸ The in-itself is, however, not accidentally relative but *essentially* relative; its relativity is not a function of its fulfillment but refers to its intentional essence which allows its object to be revealed only through the opening of its intentional horizon, by including that which is not yet explicitly fulfilled. Thus, oriented toward the intention and its horizon, and no longer exclusively towards its fulfillment, the implicit dogmatism of the earlier determination of the in-itself and its corresponding concept of truth is overcome. All givenness, therefore, is presumptive and any finality regarding evidence is in principle excluded. This in no way undermines the account of evidence as teleologically oriented toward the fullness of objective self-givenness. Evidence is not an experience in which its object is apprehended with immediate finality but rather is a functioning intentionality in which an object is more “closely qualified.”¹⁹

There is no evidence which functions as an apodictic last evidence — all evidence is relative; but relative only to *new* evidence. Its relativity does not mean that there is something outside it against which it can be measured. Accordingly, because evidences are corrected only by other evidences this relativity is not to be taken as the mark of an imperfection but should be understood as establishing a methodologically rich principle.

4. The self-disclosure of the universal apriori of reason

The universal apriori of reason may now be characterized as the style of conforming synthesis, the sustaining of the dialectical

teleological relation between a finite imperfect cognition and its idea of perfect fulfillment. It is the maintenance of permanence in movement; the "temporal self-actualization of an eternal and infinite identity of sense."²⁰ Accordingly, as the static and absolutist idea of truth-in-itself beyond all relativity has been replaced by the dynamic concept of verification, *becoming*-valid, so the idea of reason is revealed only through the process of "becoming rational." Reason is not for Husserl a monolithic whole but is an "essential becoming; a constant unfolding which is interpreted as a necessary coming-to-itself."²¹ Rationality is measured, then, by the "experiences in which it is disclosed."²² To say that rationality exists is not to blindly espouse an 18th Century faith in a fixed universe of immutable truths which are accessible to human understanding. As Merleau-Ponty warns, rational meaning-formations and the intentional dialectic from which they emerge "should not be set in a realm apart, transposed into absolute Spirit, or into a world in the realist sense."²³ To speak of the presence or self-disclosure of reason is to say that in the progress of intentional life cognitions confirm each other, and a world of meaning emerges. Reason is the unification of all intentional acts under the teleologically effective ideas of totality and completeness. The ideal of perfect adequacy, of perfect evidence and absolute truth, is the effective telos of all intentional activity, it is that which all evidence in its relativity approximates and to which it aspires. Reason, then, is neither a fixed *idea* which is realized *in concreto* and subsists apart from the life of consciousness, nor a *faculty*. It is a *task*; a task directed toward a self-established goal. It is, in other words, the endless and infinite openness of self-validating inquiry itself.²⁴

One may well ask at this point if the ideas of finality and completeness are systematic requirements for any specifically phenomenological conception of evidence? That they are is not only the conviction of this essay but, as I hope to have shown, the principle by virtue of which the concepts of evidence, experience, and reason are phenomenologically unified. As immanent moments of intentional experience, the ideas of finality and intuitive completeness cannot be separated from the experience of evidence.

That the fullness of objective self-givenness can be of different

degrees of perfection – the fact that the fulfillment of an intention can in principle be further enhanced and that every intention anticipates and projects the idea of its own perfection – is, then, the insight upon which Husserl is first able to conceive the true methodological significance of the concept of evidence and thereby disclose the nature of reason. No longer a standard of simple certainty given once and for all and inviolate, evidence is, rather, a “norm for all certainties that pretend to attain to knowledge.”²⁵ The phenomenological dismantling of the idea of an absolute-in-itself has rendered the simple identification of truth and evidence untenable theoretically and methodologically. The true methodological import of the principle of evidence, as has been seen, is the requirement that what is experienced be brought to true expression.

Therefore, despite their essential relativity, we do indeed still possess a “genuine” truth and evidence as the presence of the things-themselves, but the legitimacy of this truth and the relative adequacy of its evidence can only be understood from the perspective of the analysis of intentional implications within a projected horizon. We have the truth in a “living intentionality” whose *own content* enables us to distinguish between “actually itself given” and “anticipated,” a content that, with the uncovering of its attendant intentional implications, “leads to all those relativities in which being and validity are involved” (Hua XVII, 285).

Within the relative intentional experience itself the distinction between modalities of actuality, between the rational and the non-rational, is not only possible but is made on the basis of the experienced *relative content* itself in its relation to its projected horizon. Thus, rather than being the mark of an imperfection which undermines the possible realization of evidence, the openness of intentional implications which accompany every cogito is that which makes the experience of evidence as such possible.

Husserl, then, no longer speaks of *absolute* truth and certainly not *one* truth. The concept of an absolute truth-in-itself functions as a regulative idea, a methodological ideal founded upon the apriori of intentional experience. Thus, it would be a mistake to interpret Husserl’s continuing reflection on the nature of evidence as an interest in actually discovering an adequate and perfect evidence, and thus apprehend an absolute truth as its objective cor-

relate. The object of Husserl's investigations is to clarify the essential structure of evidence and its relation to the dimension of infinity which constitutes evidence as an idea of reason, that is, the idea of an infinite synthesis of evidence and its objective correlate, the "in-itself" as an endless possibility of re-identification. The phenomenological goal is not to secure objectivity but to understand it (Hua VI, 193).

The methodological significance of the concept is, then, the normative ideal it establishes, the ideal of adequate self-givenness, and the recognition that every evidence is a *relative* index of this ideal's attainment. It is not, then, the role of the phenomenological concept of evidence to replace or supplant the rigorous methodological standards and methods of the sciences but to clarify their original sense. Husserl is not opposing his universal characterization of evidence and reason to the usual one as though it were, in his words, "a new 'theory' ... Rather we are presenting it as an evidence attained at a higher level, by the phenomenological explication of any experience and of any actually exercised 'insight'" (Hua XVII, 167). The phenomenological conception of evidence borrows nothing from the methods of the science. It results solely from a reflection upon experience itself and those experiences in which warranted insight obtains.

5. The enlargement of the apriori of evidence and reason

To this point the phenomenological conception of reason has been determined strictly in connection with uncovering the experiential and methodological dimensions of evidence; that is, as an immanent structural form belonging to all positing acts. This account of reason, however, is not complete. As the endless and infinite openness of self-validating inquiry itself, i.e., as the teleologically effective idea of totality and completeness toward which all experience is directed, the problematic of reason is not exclusive to the field of the intentional logic of experience but belongs to every sphere of human praxis, extending beyond the purely theoretical to the practical affairs of life and ultimately to man in his genuine humanity. How is this enlargement of the concept of reason from that of an apriori structural form immanent to intentional life to

that of a practical norm for human history to be understood?

5.1 *Praxis and theoria*

Before confronting this question directly a word about the distinction between practical truths of life and the exact truths of science hinted to above is in order. Because in the end all truths are relative, it is appropriate to speak broadly of two truths: on the one hand, there are the everyday practical, situational truths, which, although relative, are exactly what praxis in its particular project seeks and needs. On the other hand, there are "scientific truths," the grounds of which lead back to the situational truths of practical life, but in such a manner that scientific method is not for this diminished, since science must have recourse precisely to these and only these truths.

One recognizes the legitimacy of such relative truths in the affairs of daily life where it is always a matter of a practically perfect type of exactness corresponding to an acquaintance with things as they really are in our practical relation to them. This is the only truth practical life knows and indeed needs. As Husserl notes, the trader in the market place has his "market truth." Is it to be relegated to the category of a pseudo-truth because in the practical relation in which it stands it distinguishes itself from the truth of the scientist who judges with different aims, who is, in other words, involved in a "different relativity"? (Hua XVII, 284). The point is not to deprecate one or the other, but to recognize that praxis establishes its own relativities and norms appropriate to its guiding interest. The resulting truths are, despite their relativity, not only sufficient but, determined by and relative to the specific interest involved, the best possible. Thus the ideals and norms of practical life and experience are as legitimate as the ideals of "exact" evidence posited by the interests of theoretical reason. We must not lose sight of the fact that for the human being in his surrounding world there are many types of praxis, of which theoretical praxis is a historically late concern. With it emerges a new interest foreign to the life of pre-scientific reason: the discovery and securing of truths with a new, ideal sense of "final validity (*Endgültigkeit*)," "universal validity (*Allgültig-*

keit)” (Hua VI, 113). Its object is, in other words, the transformation of knowledge which is imperfect with respect to its scope and constancy into perfect knowledge in accordance with the ideal of a world which is fixed and determined in itself.

Objective science with its ideal of universal truth asks questions only on the basis of a world existing in advance through this pre-scientific life (Hua VI, 113). The critique of the scientific enterprise, then, requires a return to the pre-given world as the “ever available source of what is taken for granted” (Hua VI, 124): that to which the praxis of both theoretical and practical life lay claim as a matter of course and from which both arise. Consequently the validity of the life-world in contrast to the mathematically substructured world of science is itself never a problem for reason since every experience presupposes and validates it. The question of the problem of the “being of the world” is really directed to and motivated by “regional” worlds; that is, it is a question about the status of various possible world *interpretations* which arise from our variegated practical relationships to it but not of the original world itself.

The relativization of truth does not result, therefore, in denying us a meaningful and useful concept of truth. Quite the contrary, with the return to the pre-theoretical experience of the lived-world, and the consequent rehabilitation of the notion of *doxa* as the source upon which all praxis is founded, the concept of truth as a singular and absolute norm is replaced by a multiplicity of truths. There is not one but many truths, each of which must be understood within the horizon of its own specific aims.

5.2 *Reason as a practical norm for human life*

Adumbrated at a higher level of reflection, however, reason represents not only the logic of intentional experience and the *telos* of any rational praxis, that is, any act directed by the sense of its specific object, but the idea of developing humanity itself reflected in the historical movement of philosophy as the embodiment of the idea of a radically self-justifying and methodologically self-conscious universal science of principles (*universale Prinzipienwissenschaft*). The relation between the norma-

tive dimensions of the concepts of evidence and reason – of the idea of rational justification and methodological self-consciousness – and the idea of developing western humanity as a *philosophic culture* is explicitly addressed by Husserl in the manuscripts from 1923/24, collected and published in two volumes under the title *Erste Philosophie*. In these manuscripts Husserl undertakes what amounts to a teleological-historical investigation of the idea of philosophy as a universally grounding, *normative* science of principles; that is, they are an effort to reawaken and recover through the accumulated concretions of time the original sense, and so telos, of the philosophical project as an historical-cultural formation, as a praxis of human life. The investigation turns on the clarification of the fundamental correlation which obtains between, on the one hand, the principles of evidence, reason and philosophy, and, on the other, between philosophy and the historical destiny of western man.

The central significance of the methodological and normative dimensions of the concept of evidence for the idea of philosophy as a universal and absolutely self-justifying science of beginnings was recognized by Husserl as early as the *Logos* article (1910). It is, however, only in the later writings that the normative significance of philosophy as a teleological ideal for *life* is recognized and by virtue of which the concepts of evidence and reason assume universal normative relevance for all human projects, practical as well as theoretical. How is philosophy's normativity to be understood? Because philosophy embodies the idea of a self-validating and rational inquiry, it effectively posits the normative ideal for any human action which aspires to rationality. The norms of rational justification are, then, elevated to the level of a developing humanity (Hua VII, 204) which through the establishment of a philosophic culture both acts on and defends the legitimacy of the self-intuited norms and laws of its acting. To be sure, not a culture of philosophers, but a culture which, as a result of historically adopting the normative canons of the theoretical attitude of radical self-criticism, marks a transition to genuine philosophical self-consciousness. The philosopher prescribes an attitude and praxis for man which is grounded in the exercise of his absolute freedom and responsibility. It is, therefore, the attitude by which man transcends his finitude and opens the horizon

of knowledge as a self-imposed, albeit infinite, task. In this sense the idea of science or philosophy is to be taken as an index for a pure culture in general. Philosophy, then, represents the idea of genuine humanity because its historical task has been to guide the “dim strivings of mankind” (*der blind dahinstrebenden Menschheit*) to the attainment of that most profound self-consciousness which is its “true and genuine sense of life” (*zu dem ihres wahren und echten Lebenssinnes*) as a rational cultural formation striving for self-comprehension and clarity (Hua VII, 205): that is, a culture founded on an ultimate understanding of itself and resolved to form itself out of the free exercise of its insight into the norms of an ultimately self-determining rationality. Western man genuinely comes to himself in and through philosophy.²⁶

In its most universal sense the task of philosophy is to show, then, how a true and genuine human development is possible, not merely in the manner of a bare, organic, “blindly passive growth” (*blind passiven Wachstums*), but a development which proceeds out of the exercise of its own autonomous freedom (Hua VII, 205). As the science of all possible genuine laws and norms as such, philosophy is a life-form for man. It is the spiritual shape of a humanity for which the principles of rational autonomy and methodological self-consciousness are the normative ideals of all of its actions and by which it progressively raises itself above the level of passive growth, governed by the necessities of the natural organism, to the level of freedom and self-determination based upon a commitment to self-understanding. It is not an accident of history that political institutions of self-legislation appear with the emergence of the philosophical attitude in Athens of the 4th Century B.C. Philosophy is only possible when man first takes *himself* as an object of inquiry, freely submitting his actions and beliefs to rational norms. The task of philosophy, of course, has not been completed. We must distinguish the *factual* circumstances of philosophy’s historical development from philosophy as a historical *idea*. As idea, philosophy remains a continuous project for mankind. Its form is not that of an uninterrupted development marked by the regular acquisition of lasting spiritual formations. Nevertheless, despite the accidents of its *de facto* historical career, a definite ideal of a universal praxis and its methods forms the beginning: “this is, so to speak, the primal establishment of the

philosophical modern age and all of its lines of development” (Hua VI, 9–10). As an idea of reason, of the infinite teleological ideal of perfect self-comprehension and autonomous freedom, the idea of philosophy represents the infinite goal of humanity’s responsibility to continue to “struggle to understand itself” (Hua VI, 12). As such it is “an Idea, which, as further exposition shows, is only in its style a relative, temporary validity, and which is to be realized in an unending historical process” (Hua V, 139).

Herein lies the significance of the concept of evidence for both reason and philosophy: evidence represents the normative and methodological ideals which discloses the universal motivation and effective telos of philosophy as the genuine expression of a uniquely rational life.

6. Conclusion

With the problematic of evidence so enlarged such that it encompasses not merely special cases of predicative evidence and experience but indeed circumscribes the apriori conditions for the possibility of the unity of life itself, the relation which obtains between the phenomenological concept of evidence and reason is determined. The normative requirement the ideas of evidence and reason posit are everywhere the same; namely, that all that is experienced be brought to a true expression relative to its objective domain. The ideal of rationality is, therefore, clarity of purpose and intention. Within the context of Husserl’s phenomenological orientation reason and intuition, traditionally opposed to one another as contrasting modes of infinity and finitude, are not to be conceived as separate or independent modes of knowing but rather as two essential and necessary moments fundamental to all cognitive experience. Neither is reason, properly understood, a faculty in the Kantian sense. Although it emerges as the fundamental form of all positing acts, reason is not an invariant and fixed form but the living telos of intentional life. It is the absolutizing form of totality which completes the partial evidence of all intuition and experience. As a result reason has been characterized as an openness, as the teleologically effective idea of totality toward which all experience in all of its manifold orders is

directed. Thus, it can be said that, for Husserl, with the resolution of all questions of validity to the experience of evidence and the reason of experience, the “reason of evidence” reveals itself to be the “evidence of reason” – the self-disclosure of reason. In other words, insofar as evidence is that irreducible structural form of consciousness by which experience and life as such are possible, the transcendental theories of evidence and reason coincide such that a life of consciousness is not possible without including evidence.

Notes

1. Elisabeth Ströker, “Husserl’s Principle of Evidence: The Significance and Limitations of a Methodological Norm of Philosophy and Science,” *Contemporary German Philosophy*, Volume I (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982), tr. Robert Pettit, p. 116.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
3. See Hua XVII, Section 77.
4. Husserl makes this claim in a letter to Welch. The text of this letter is reprinted in *Phenomenology: Continuation and Criticism. Essays in Honor of Dorian Cairns* (The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1973), eds. F. Kersten and R. Zaner.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Suzanne Bachelard, *A Study of Husserl’s Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), tr. Lester Embree, p. 213.
7. Gaston Berger, *The Cogito in Husserl’s Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), tr. K. Mclayghlin, pp. 37–38.
8. Bachelard, p. 214.
9. “Das momentane Erleben ... das wir in seinem gegenwärtigen Werden erschauen, haben wir freilich in undurchstreichbarer Gewissheit. Aber das Seiende, das wir damit erfassen, ist als an sich seiend nur gemeint, wenn wir es nicht nur als momentanes Datum im Modus Gegenwart nehmen, sondern als das identische *dabile*, das in beliebig wiederholten Wiedererinnerungen gegeben sein könnte – das ist wenn wir es als zeitliches Datum ... die identische eine ist gegenüber den möglichen Orientierungen, wie sie wechselnde Erinnerungen geben” (Hua XI, 110). It should also be noted that when Husserl thinks of transcendental subjectivity as inter-subjectivity, the “in-itself” of the object is determined through an inter-subjective constitution. It is impossible within the limited space of this essay to address the many questions which this conception of inter-subjective constitution suggests.

10. Ernst Tugendhat, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970), p. 238: "... erscheint die Idealität der Identität als ein Überschuss über die faktische und stets endliche Identifizierung."
11. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
12. When the development of Husserl's analysis of evidence from the *LU* to *FTL* is considered it becomes clear that, although throughout the body of his work Husserl is preoccupied with the centrality of this concept, there is, as Tugendhat notes, a decided shift away from a concern with securing a certain evidence (Evidenzsicherung) to that of the clarification of evidence (Evidenzaufklärung); *ibid.*, p. 230.
13. "... das Ansich transzendiert den einzelnen Akt, aber diese Transzendenz ist ihrerseits phänomenologisch zu verstehen als beliebiges Zurückkommenkönnen auf dieselbe," *ibid.*, p. 230.
14. Herbert Spiegelberg is a prominent voice against this position, maintaining that self-evidence is properly a criterion of truth. With respect to the question of Husserl's growing recognition of the relativity of truth, Spiegelberg, in his essay "Phenomenology of Direct Evidence," *Doing Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), argues that this represents an unnecessary reversal on Husserl's part in his later works.
15. Thus I must disagree with Spiegelberg's otherwise insightful account that this is a "striking shift" on Husserl's part. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
16. Ströker, p. 116: "Something that is 'evident as such' would make no sense unless of course one were talking about something that is evidently perceived, remembered, etc." There is no conflict, then, between the phenomenological conception of truth and evidence and talk of an "Truth in itself," or, for that matter, any "in itself," as claimed by de Waelhens in *Phénoménologie et Vérité* (Paris: Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1969).
17. J.N. Mohanty, "Toward a Phenomenology of Self-Evidence," *Exploration in Phenomenology: Papers of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), eds. Carr and Casey.
18. Tugendhat, p. 247.
19. Ströker, p. 116. An example of such a misunderstanding of Husserl's concept of evidence and its methodological import can be found in the interpretation of A. Naess (see "Husserl on the Apodictic Evidence of Ideal Laws" in Mohanty's *Readings in the Logical Investigations* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977], pp. 65–75). As is not uncommon, Naess's interpretation rests almost exclusively on a reading of the Prolegomena alone and the definition of evidence as an "immediate intuition of truth itself." On the basis of this definition Naess summarily dismisses Husserl's conception of evidence for failing to provide that which it does not offer; an absolute guarantee or criterion for recognizing when one is in fact in possession of genuine truth.

20. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), tr. E. Ballard and L. Embree, p. 158.
21. Walter Biemel, "The Decisive Phases in the Development of Husserl's Philosophy", *The Phenomenology of Husserl* (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1970), ed. R.O. Elveton, p. 168.
22. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1962), tr. Colin Smith, p. xix.
23. Ibid.
24. Phenomenological reason is "'Intentionale' Vernunft, die sich als Intention schon immer vorweg und übersteigend ist ... Die phänomenologische Vernunft ist kein durch ein festliegendes und zu vergegenständlichendes Apriori begrenzte, sondern eine 'offene Vernunft'"; Ludwig Landgrebe, *Phänomenologie und Geschichte* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1969), p. 165.
25. Ströker, p. 120.
26. "Überhaupt kann man die Geschichte der Philosophie (die, wie sie ursprünglich als universale Wissenschaft ist, so ihrem wesentlichen Sinne nach universale Wissenschaft bleiben muss) unter dem Gesichtspunkte ihrer grössten Menschheitsfunktion betrachten – unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihrer notwendigen Bestimmung, ein universales und letztrationales Selbstbewusstsein der Menschheit zu schaffen, durch welches sie auf die Bahn einer echten Menschheit gebracht werden soll" (Hua VII/1, 205–206).