

Consciousness is not a Bag: Immanence, Transcendence, and Constitution in *The Idea of Phenomenology*

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Abstract A fruitful way to approach *The Idea of Phenomenology* is through Husserl's claim that consciousness is not a bag, box, or any other kind of container. The bag conception, which dominated much of modern philosophy, is rooted in the idea that philosophy is restricted to investigating only what is really immanent to consciousness, such as acts and sensory contents. On this view, what Husserl called "the riddle of transcendence" can never be solved. The phenomenological reduction, as Husserl develops it in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, opened up a new and broader sense of immanence that embraces the transcendent, making it possible both to solve the riddle and to escape the bag conception once and for all. The essay will discuss ways in which this new conception of immanence is tied to the key Husserlian themes of appearance, phenomenon, essence, seeing or intuiting, and constitution.

On April 26, 1907, Edmund Husserl delivered the first of five lectures that were published posthumously, in 1950, under the title *The Idea of Phenomenology*. The published text also included a concise "Train of Thought in These Lectures" that Husserl had written immediately after giving the final lecture. *The Idea of Phenomenology* has an importance in Husserl's work disproportionate to its modest size, for it is here that transcendental phenomenology makes its debut, or at least takes its first confident steps. This is the signal event in a 4 or 5 year-period—from about 1907 through 1911—of striking development in Husserl's thought. His phenomenology of time and time-consciousness matured during these years and would remain constant in its essential features over the next quarter century. His understanding of phantasy and its relation to perception and other forms of re-presentation achieved a new depth of insight and sophistication. It is no stretch to

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see these and other contemporary developments not merely as accompanying Husserl's new and richer understanding of phenomenology, but as following from it. The respective investigations of these areas are moments in the phenomenology of reason understood in Husserl's expansive and comprehensive sense, and it is precisely the general problem of reason or knowledge that *The Idea of Phenomenology* addresses. Of course, the conception of phenomenology as a transcendental enterprise first announced in this work still stirs up controversy and conflicting interpretations, even among those who claim more than a passing acquaintance with Husserl's thought. What I hope to show in this paper is that Husserl's warning in *The Idea of Phenomenology* that consciousness is not a bag, box, sack, or any other kind of container, affords a way of clarifying and linking the fundamental themes, not just of the lectures, but of transcendental phenomenology itself.

In the last of the five lectures, Husserl claims that consciousness is “not something like a mere box [*Schachtel*] in which things given simply are” (Hua II, p. 71/52), adding that “objectivity is not something that is in knowing like something is in a bag [*ein Sack*]” (Hua II, p. 74/55), and that objects are not in acts as if they were “in a case or container [*Hülse, Gefäss*]” (Hua II, p. 12/68).

Why do these statements occur toward the end of the work, and why does Husserl make them it all? He makes them because the claim that consciousness is like a bag has considerable philosophical allure, even for the phenomenologist, and because it has deep historical roots; and he makes them at the end of the work for the reason that *The Idea of Phenomenology* has an internal development that takes it from an initial, naive stage of reflection that might lend itself to the bag conception to a much more complex and sophisticated position that makes it clear that the conception is mistaken. This evolution is vividly marked by a process of discovery, by the confrontation of difficulties and complications in what has been found, and, in the end, by the achievement of a better grasp of precisely the idea of phenomenology itself.

The movement from simple to complex, from naive to sophisticated, is a common pattern in Husserl's thought. In some his works, particularly in texts of different dates, this is a matter of discovering things he had failed to see earlier. The best example of this is surely Husserl's discovery of the transcendental Ego. In the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), he writes that “I must frankly confess that I am unable to find this Ego, this primitive, necessary center of relations” (Hua XIX/1, p. 324/549). Then, in the second edition of the *Investigations*, he famously announces that “I have since managed to find it, i.e., have learned not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic” (Hua XIX/1, p. 324 note/549, note 2). In *The Idea of Phenomenology*, however, the movement of discovery is clearly deliberate, designed to take the reader from a beginner's grasp of phenomenology to a mature understanding of its breadth. To miss this pattern is to risk misconceiving the very core of Husserl's position and the fundamental concepts that compose it. Said positively: to follow the work's train of thought is to uncover the authentic sense of Husserl's understanding of immanence, transcendence, the reduction, constitution, and consciousness itself.

1 The Problem

Husserl opens the lectures with the observation that the natural attitude and the sciences it sustains take the possibility of knowledge for granted. The philosophical attitude, on the other hand, does not. As the phenomenology of knowledge, it reflects on the relationship between knowledge and its object (Hua II, p. 19/16). Its aim is to reveal the essence of knowledge. Now knowledge is essentially *knowledge of objectivity* (Hua II, p. 19/16). Husserl's concern with the issue of knowledge and objectivity does not, of course, make its first appearance in *The Idea of Phenomenology*. It was present in the *Logical Investigations*, which were concerned with “the relationship between the subjectivity of knowing and the objectivity of the content of knowledge” (Hua XVIII, p. 7). In *The Idea of Phenomenology*, however, there is a new sense of urgency that this correlation between experience and object is fraught with “the deepest and most difficult problems” (Hua II, p. 19/17), which Husserl now sums up under the title of “the riddle of transcendence” (Hua II, p. 43/33).

The riddle of transcendence is “the initial and the guiding problem for the critique of knowledge” (Hua II, p. 36/28). But transcendence always brings its twin—immanence—along with it. So the riddle is really the riddle of the correlation between immanence and transcendence, and attending the riddle in *The Idea of Phenomenology* is what will become the familiar cast of Husserlian characters: the natural attitude and its reduction; the intentional act or *cogitatione* and its intended object, essences, constitution, and, lurking behind all these, the temptation to view consciousness as some kind of container.

Husserl's solution to the riddle unfolds in three moments. First, there is a naive stage, identified with the natural attitude and particularly with the psychological attitude. This stage has its own conception of immanence and transcendence. In the second stage, a new attitude and a new discipline, phenomenology, appear—more sophisticated, to be sure, but still with a certain naiveté, which manifests itself in one-sidedness and a failure to appreciate the complexity of the phenomena it has discovered. In the third stage, with a better self-understanding, phenomenology finds diversity and complexity where before it had found homogeneity and simplicity, and it manages, once and for all, to exorcise the specter of the bag. At this stage, the phenomenological players—immanence, transcendence, and so on—fully master their parts. *The Idea of Phenomenology* thus perfectly illustrates what Husserl once referred to as the universal “peculiarity of phenomenological analysis. Every step forward yields new points of view from which what we have already discovered appears in a new light, so that often enough what we were originally able to take as simple and undivided presents itself as complex and full of distinctions” (Hua XXIII, p. 18/19).

2 Stage One: The Psychological Attitude

The psychological attitude is a species of the natural attitude and reflects the way in which the science of psychology goes about its business. The natural attitude is

marked by absorption in mundane objects. The psychological attitude, in taking up the mental life, accordingly treats it as a set of worldly events and objects. The “*psychological phenomenon*” is a datum in objective time, belonging to the experiencing ego understood as a real person in the world. Consciousness is taken to be a worldly thing containing experiences of knowing. “At first,” Husserl writes, “one is inclined to interpret, as if it were entirely obvious, immanence as real [*reale*] immanence in the psychological sense” (Hua II, p. 5/62). Real (*reale*) immanence is the condition of being contained “in the consciousness of a person and in a real [*realen*] mental phenomenon” (Hua II, p. 7/64). The immanent is taken to be in the mind as one thing is said to be contained in some other thing. What is in the mind is “immanent”; what is not in the mind is “transcendent”: “...The immanent is in me, the beginner will say at this point, and the transcendent is outside me” (Hua II, p. 5/63). The riddle of immanence and transcendence, formulated at this stage in terms of inside and outside, becomes the question: “How can I, this person, in my experiences, make contact with a being in itself, something that exists out there, outside of me?” (Hua II, p. 7/64). Here the psychological approach, even that of descriptive psychology, leads to the conception of consciousness as a bag. Mental events, experiences and their contents, are taken to be really contained in the mind. They might also serve, on occasion, as grounds for the deducing or inferring of the existence of objects outside the mind-container.¹

This conception held sway over much of modern philosophy from its inception on. Descartes had his “treasure house of the mind” (Descartes 1986, p. 46), brimming with ideas, and Locke compared the mind to an “empty cabinet” (Locke 1924, p. 22), a “dark room,” a “closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without” (Locke 1924, p. 91). Then, of course, there was Leibniz’s monad bereft of doors and windows. It really makes no difference in this tradition that Locke thought that only experience, a kind of causal commerce with the world, could fill the empty closet with mental contents, while Leibniz took the mind-monad to be a nest of innate ideas whose origin owed nothing to the world beyond it. In either case, the direct and immediate object of knowledge, whatever its source, is something inside the mind—in Husserl’s terms, something really immanent.

Husserl, of course, does not reject real immanence—the *Logical Investigations* and still earlier texts make that clear—but he does want to distinguish real immanence in the psychological sense (*reale Immanenz*) from real immanence in

¹ As early as 1894, Husserl campaigned against a version of this position, the image theory, according to which “every presentation relates to its object by means of a ‘mental image’” (Hua XXII, 305). In the *Logical Investigations*, he describes the image theory of perception as holding that “the thing itself is ‘outside’... : and the image is in consciousness as its representative,” and calls the view a “fundamental and almost ineradicable error” (Hua XIX/1, 436/593). This is certainly an implicit criticism of the container conception of consciousness. It is interesting to note, however, that while Husserl criticizes the application of the image theory to perception, he does not offer a developed view to replace it. Furthermore, he largely accepts the image theory with respect to phantasy and memory until about 1907, when he gave the lectures that make up *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Husserl’s decisive case against the bag conception and the image theory must await the appearance in the 1907 lectures of his mature account of the reduction, immanence, transcendence, and constitution, themes to be discussed in the next two sections of this essay.

the phenomenological sense (*reelle Immanenz*). The former makes its appearance in the natural attitude, from which Descartes never fully freed himself, and leaves itself open to interpretation in terms of the bag conception.

Now that conception has an undeniable tidiness about it and owes its historical attraction to its ability to supply unity and identity to consciousness and a home for ideas and experiences. And it is potentially attractive to phenomenology because it affords a place where the phenomena can display themselves and be seen.

If the bag conception gets its initial impetus from the psychological attitude, the philosophical—or phenomenological—attitude, on the other hand, “*lies in a wholly new dimension*” with a “*wholly new point of departure* and a wholly new method” (Hua II, p. 24/20). Applied with care, as phenomenology, it will yield a quite different understanding of consciousness.

3 Stage Two: The First Phenomenological Step

Husserl wants to explain the possibility of knowledge in the *Idea of Phenomenology*; he seeks to solve the riddle of knowing by disclosing its essential structure. Psychology, *assuming* the possibility of knowledge, can explain it only as a natural fact. It therefore fails to clarify “knowledge in terms of the essential possibilities of its achievement” (Hua II, p. 6/63). Since Husserl thinks “the conceptual pair *immanence* and *transcendence*” (Hua II, p. 5/62) is at the heart of the riddle and of its solution, he faces the challenge of disclosing the authentic meaning of these elusive concepts and how they are related—or not related—in knowing. He must do this without letting the inquiry slip back into a psychological account.

How is this possible? By adopting a new attitude and exercising the phenomenological epoché or reduction: The reduction in its first step yields the *cogitatio* or act of consciousness, not as a real event inhabiting a mundane ego, but as something simply given as itself, presuming nothing else. This is the pure phenomenon as opposed to the psychological phenomenon. The pure phenomenon is really immanent, but not in the psychological sense of real immanence. The psychological sense of real (*reale*) immanence, as we have seen, involves actual existence inside a particular mundane Ego. The “reality” there is that of something in the world. The phenomenological sense of real (*reell*) immanence, on the other hand, makes no claims about the natural reality of anything. It simply refers to the phenomenon of the act of knowing as it appears to us in its purity. In a sketch on time-consciousness from about 1909, Husserl cautions against “materializing” consciousness (Hua X, p. 324/337). The psychological phenomenon is the act materialized, so to speak, the act of knowing conceived after the pattern of a real event in the real world. The reduction rescues the phenomenologist from this materialization of the act and from psychological real immanence (Hua II, p. 7/64). Thanks to the reduction, the act is allowed to be itself.

The focus on the act as pure phenomenon is the “first step in the phenomenological consideration” (Hua II, p. 4/61). It enables the beginning phenomenologist to sidestep the question that one can always ask in the case of the transcendent knowledge in the objective sciences: “how can knowledge reach out beyond itself,

how can it make contact with a being that is not to be found within the confines of consciousness?” (Hua II, p. 5/62). There is no such problem with the *cogitationes* taken simply as given. They are free of the riddle of transcendence, comprising “a sphere of *absolutely immanent givenness*” (Hua II, p. 43/33). Even if consciousness is thought of as a container, the *cogitationes* are there, in the bag, fully revealed to the phenomenological gaze. One does not worry about having to contact them; one simply has them.

Husserl aims at establishing a new science in *The Idea of Phenomenology* that can reveal the essential structures of knowing. To have the act of knowing in his grasp as pure phenomenon is, he thinks, enormously useful for this purpose. On the other hand, the transcendent findings of the positive sciences are of no help whatsoever. Indeed, at the beginning of this new science only what is really immanent is available. “At first any form of self-givenness other than the self-givenness of the really immanent is not yet in view” (Hua II, p. 5/63). I may therefore use the really immanent, but “that which is transcendent (not really immanent) I may not use. For that reason I must perform the *phenomenological reduction*; I must *exclude all that is posited as transcendent*” (Hua II, p. 5/63).

If we take stock of this first sortie into bringing the idea of phenomenology to clarity, we find both loss and gain. The first step of the reduction excludes the transcendent in any sense, although at this stage we have only a sketchy notion of what the transcendent is. So we have lost something that might, to the reasonable observer, appear to be quite important: the object of the *cogitatio*, the known object. On the other hand, we have gained what is really immanent, the *cogitatio* itself—the act of consciousness and its real components—in its self-givenness. “Only through...the *phenomenological reduction* do I acquire an absolute givenness that no longer offers anything transcendent” (Hua II, p. 44/34).²

Husserl does concede in this first stage that the reduced *cogitationes*, the pure phenomena, “refer intentionally to objective reality” (Hua II, p. 45/34), but he does not do anything with the observation, except to say that “nothing is thereby assumed about *the existence or non-existence of reality*” (Hua II, p. 45/34). Having said that, he immediately claims that with the securing of the reduced *cogitationes*, “we drop anchor on the shore of phenomenology” (Hua II, p. 45/34). It is worth noting that Husserl does not advertise the reduction as forcing us into a sealed Cartesian chamber. His image is that of a vessel that carries us to the shore of a new land. Severing ties to transcendent existence (the natural attitude) is a kind of philosophical liberation, freeing us to roam. We must take this new domain as it presents itself and use nothing pregiven in our efforts to understand it. We have reached the “mainland of givenness,” Husserl says, though, he cautions, it is veiled

² It is certainly possible to argue that something like this form of the reduction is already implicitly at work in the *Logical Investigations* and in lectures and sketches written before 1907 (such as the lectures on time consciousness from 1905), in the sense that Husserl attempts in those texts to focus purely on acts of consciousness and their contents, all of which are *reell* moments of consciousness. As we shall see, the conception of the reduction that comes explicitly to the fore in *The Idea of Phenomenology* makes possible and explicitly sanctions not only the investigation of the *reell* components of consciousness, but of transcendent intentional objects as well. It opens the door to a firmly grounded and far richer conception of phenomenology, one that has shed the vagueness and confusion that haunted phenomenology’s first steps.

in “clouds of obscurity,” and we are tossed about in “gales of scepticism” as we approach it (Hua II, p. 46/35). This new land is the territory of phenomenology, and at first it is difficult to form a clear idea of it. It will have to reveal itself gradually. Husserl’s efforts to break with the “natural” or “scientific” way of seeing things is an attempt to dispel the theoretical clouds that obscure our view, and to clear away the imported constructions that substitute for the “pure phenomena,” the things themselves. Indeed, the ideal of presuppositionless philosophy is fully at work in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, and Husserl is clear about what the ideal means: “no knowledge can, at the beginning, count as pre-given *without examination*” (Hua II, p. 33/26).

With the reduction, the natural attitude’s absorption in objects in the world gives way to the focus on what is “absolutely given and grasped in pure immanent seeing” (Hua II, p. 45/34), that is, on the *cogitatio* as pure phenomenon just as it is in itself and in the way in which it gives itself (Hua II, p. 45/35). Phenomenological reflection, Husserl writes, is “reflection that simply ‘sees’” (Hua II, p. 44/34). This notion of seeing plays a key role in *The Idea of Phenomenology* and is tied to the unfolding of the central themes in the work. “*Every experience whatsoever,*” Husserl insists, “*can be made into an object of pure seeing and apprehension... And in this act of seeing it is an absolute givenness*” (Hua II, p. 31/24). Perception, for example, “stands right before my eyes, as it were, as something given” (Hua II, p. 31/24).

Such phenomenological seeing, Husserl argues, is opposed to “thinking.” It may be hard to imagine Husserl saying that nothing “is more dangerous to the intuitive knowledge of origins, of those things absolutely given, than to think too much” (Hua II, p. 62/46), but he does say it, thereby anticipating by four decades Wittgenstein’s injunction: “don’t think, but look” (Wittgenstein 1953, §66). In Husserl’s case, “thinking” means discursive understanding—deducing, inducing, or “deriving in a reasoned way new things from things... that count as already given” (Hua II, p. 7/64)—as opposed to seeing or intuiting. The seeing here is reason: “*Intuitive knowledge is that form of reason that sets itself the task of bringing the discursive understanding to reason*” (Hua II, p. 62/46). For Husserl, there is no abyss between the realm of intuition or seeing and the realm of reason. Hence he can consistently urge us to use “as little understanding as possible, as much intuition as possible (*intuitio sine comprehensione*)” (Hua II, p. 62/46). What is given itself is the target of seeing; what is not given is transcendent and the target of discursive understanding, as in Descartes’s *Meditations* when Descartes tries to argue his way out of the box that is his ego precisely because what is transcendent—the world, God—is not given in seeing. (Descartes’s own existence, on the other hand, is given in seeing). Reflecting on this Cartesian legacy, Husserl writes in the *Crisis*: “for centuries almost no one took exception to the ‘obviousness’ of the possibility of inferences from the ego and its cognitive life to an ‘outside,’ and no one actually raised the question of whether, in respect to this egological sphere of being, an ‘outside’ can have any meaning at all...” (Hua VI, p. 82/80).

Husserl’s notion of seeing, when it first appears, has an affinity with the bag conception, at least superficially. Husserl notes that we may understand how perception “makes contact with what is immanent,” but not “understand how it

makes contact with what is transcendent” (Hua II, p. 49/38). The bag conception could account for this. If the *cogitationes*, the pure phenomena of consciousness, are thought to reside in a mind-container, then they would be readily available to be seen. One would just see things present there in consciousness. The seeing would concern the *cogitationes* only: transcendence as an issue would be set aside. The *cogitationes* would then be treated as “free-floating particularities” in real immanence (Hua II, p. 75/55), like fish in a bowl. This is the shore phenomenology seems to have reached at this stage. In this respect, the bag conception seems ideal for phenomenology, providing a perfect context for the notions of immanence, of absolute givenness (“it’s in the bag”), of seeing. It’s as if with the epoché one has captured the entire world of acts and their real contents, and then secured them within the phenomenological container, where they become available to the philosophical gaze.

This conception of the epoché seems to have been operating, for example, in Husserl’s early analyses of time-consciousness. In his 1905 lectures he suggests that the phenomenologist is concerned solely with intentional acts and the contents immanent to them—“the apprehension contents and act-characters,” as he puts it (Hua X, p. 10/10)—and not with the transcendent temporal objects they may intend, though it must be said that he has a difficult time keeping the object out of the picture. In fact, in lectures given in the winter of 1906/07, the object, in effect, sneaks back in, though under the guise of a sensory content immanent to consciousness. In this text, Husserl presents the epoché as consisting in a “shift from an ordinary external perception to an immanental perception of its sensation-content...” (Hua X, p. 279/289). He gives the example of a stagecoach rumbling toward us. The phenomenologist is supposed to focus attention on the rumbling noise or on the sound of the postilion’s horn, “while abstracting from everything they signify transcendently. We then say of these contents that they are immanent objects...” (Hua X, p. 279/289). The motivation behind this move is no doubt to secure the absolute givenness of the phenomenological datum, and, in keeping with this initial stage of phenomenology, “*what is absolutely given* and *what is really immanent*” are taken to be one and the same thing (Hua II, p. 9/65). A year or so earlier, in 1905, Husserl might have left it at just that, taking it for granted that the phenomenologist cannot talk about a transcendent object but only about an immanent content that is a real component of consciousness. In these 1906/07 lectures, however, he asks a pointed question: “*What does immanence signify in this case?*” And he goes on: “Does it signify that the object is not outside but *in consciousness* and that consciousness is, as it were, a bag into which the unitary object is stuck?” (Hua X, p. 279/289). Husserl’s answer seems to be in the affirmative. He still gives every appearance of being determined to banish the transcendent from the territory of phenomenology. Phenomenological reduction teaches us, he says, that “in external perception the sound of the postilion’s horn is a transcendent reality; in the essentially altered focus of immanental perception it is nothing transcendent but something immanent,” and that implies “a real [*reales*] containing of the object in the perception” (Hua X, p. 279/289). Significantly, however, Husserl ends the discussion with the admonition that “we need to be very

careful here” (Hua X, p. 279/289). As we shall see, when he gives the lectures that comprise *The Idea of Phenomenology* later in 1907, this care will bear fruit.

Now, of course, if the issue of the transcendent object and how it could be known were allowed to arise, the bag conception would offer little help, particularly if the standard of phenomenological seeing were enforced. For the transcendent object, as Husserl conceives of it at the beginning of *The Idea of Phenomenology*, is precisely not there to be seen: it is outside the bag, and one could reach it only through deduction on the basis of something given in consciousness. But such “thinking” could never achieve its goal, Husserl suggests, since it cannot in principle see what it is aiming at. The situation would be analogous to the person born blind with respect to colors; deduction on the basis of scientific theories about color the person may have learned will never let the person actually see colors (Hua II, p. 6/63). None of this concerns Husserl in this first step into phenomenology, however, since he has put the object out of play.

When the reduction is initially made, the beginning phenomenologist abandons the psychological attitude and gains what is really immanent in the sense of the *cogitatio*. This is “the first step in the phenomenological consideration” (Hua II, p. 4/61), but not the last. It supplies us with a field of research, but also tends in the direction of the bag conception. It puts one in the position either of leaving the intended object out of consideration altogether if one wants to restrict oneself to what is given, or of claiming that the only access to the object is through deduction or some other kind of thinking. Neither path can finally satisfy Husserl. And even if *cogitationes* themselves are free of the riddle of transcendence, the riddle remains as far as their objects are concerned. Husserl will have to press on.

4 Stage Three: The Developed Phenomenology of Reason

In the last section, we encountered a definite sense of immanence: real immanence as real inherence in consciousness or in the act of knowing (Hua II, p. 36/27). It was matched by the equally definite sense of transcendence as not being “really contained in the act” (Hua II, p. 35/27). Phenomenology initially seems restricted to the investigation of what is really immanent, specifically, to the *cogitationes*. But as Husserl gradually develops the idea of phenomenology, it becomes apparent that it is a “fatal mistake” to presuppose “that the only actually comprehensible, unquestionable, absolutely evident givenness is that of a *moment really contained in the act of knowing*” (Hua II, p. 35/28). The fatal mistake is to restrict evident givenness to real immanence, to conflate the two. So we take a further step, and introduce a distinction within the notion of immanence itself: the distinction “between *real immanence* and *immanence in the sense of self-givenness*” (Hua II, p. 5/63). The simple and original notion of phenomenological immanence gives way to a complex notion. This new sense of immanence is “*absolute and clear givenness, self-givenness in the absolute sense.*” The real (*reellen*) immanence of the *cogitatio* would only be a special case of this “*broader concept*” (Hua II, p. 9/65). Husserl goes further. He calls this broader concept of immanence “*immanence in the genuine sense,*” and it marks the breadth of the phenomenological domain: “As far as

self-givenness extends,” Husserl writes, “so far extends our phenomenological sphere, the sphere of absolute clarity, of immanence in the genuine sense” (Hua II, p. 10/66). Genuine immanence is no longer restricted simply to real containment in consciousness or in an act of consciousness. Genuine immanence *is* givenness, wherever it is found, even in the case of a transcendent object. This position immediately threatens the plausibility of the bag conception as an adequate account of consciousness. To be given is not necessarily to be contained in consciousness or in an act. So immanence does not refer to or entail being in a bag; it does not mean being “inside.” It is not a “locational” term. It refers to a *way* of being given: that is, the givenness of something itself to pure seeing. Immanence’s twin, transcendence, undergoes a similar transformation. It preserves the sense of what is not really contained in the act of knowing, but it can nonetheless be genuinely given, despite the fact that it “transcends” the act and is irreducible to it (Hua II, p. 65/9).

The introduction of the idea of genuine immanence leads Husserl to a another distinction within immanence: between the *appearance* and *that which appears*. “Appearance” is an ubiquitous—and ambiguous—term in philosophy generally, and certainly in phenomenology. *The Idea of Phenomenology* helps to clarify its meaning. Phenomenology, of course, is sometimes defined as the description or study of appearances, but that does not tell us what the appearances in question are. One meaning of the term is definitely ruled out in phenomenology: the Platonic sense in which it means “mere appearance” as opposed to authentic reality. Nor does it carry the Kantian sense of the phenomenal world in contrast to the hidden realm of things-in-themselves. Some phenomenologists take the appearance to be the intended object. Thus Aron Gurwitsch defines “the appearance of a thing as the thing itself as given in a particular one-sided manner of presentation...” (Gurwitsch 1964, p. 184). He identifies it with Husserl’s noema. Husserl himself, on the other hand, writes that “things given immanently... present themselves in something like ‘appearances,’ in appearances that are not themselves the objects, and do not really contain the objects...” (Hua II, p. 71/52). In some modern philosophers the appearance is taken to be a mental content mediating between consciousness and its object. Husserl finds this possibility equally unpalatable:

For “things to be given” is for things to *present* themselves....And this does not mean that the things are once again there for themselves and then “send their representatives into consciousness.”...Rather, things exist, and exist in appearance, and are themselves given by virtue of appearance (Hua II, 12/68).

If Husserl rejects the identification of the appearance with the intended object or with some third item mediating between consciousness and object, what does he take it to be? In most texts, and certainly in those from this period, he identifies it with the act or *cogitatio*. He therefore distinguishes the appearance, understood as act of consciousness, from what appears, the intended object. With respect to the perceiving of a tone, for example, we must make “a distinction within immanence between the *appearance* and *that which appears*. Thus we have two forms of absolute givenness, the givenness of the appearing and the givenness of the object—and the object within this immanence is not immanent in the real sense; it is not part of the appearance...” (Hua II, p. 11/67).

Another slippery phenomenological term (oddly enough) is “phenomenon.” One might assume that it can be used interchangeably with “appearance,” and in fact in *The Idea of Phenomenology* Husserl does occasionally use it in this way, but he also stresses that the term covers more than the act or *cogitatio*. The phenomena phenomenology studies have a twofold sense: “as appearances, presentations, acts of consciousness in which these or those objectivities are presented” and, on the other hand, as the objects that present themselves in the acts. The meaning of the word is twofold because of the essential correlation between *appearing* and *that which appears* (Hua II, p. 14/69). So “phenomenon” is not, after all, a simple synonym for “appearance”; it embraces act and object, while “appearance” usually signifies only the act. Husserl does concede that phenomenology contributes to the word’s ambiguity, since in ordinary discourse “phenomenon” usually refers to something transcendent that appears, while in phenomenology “the *cogitatio*, the appearing itself, becomes an object, and this encourages the development of the equivocation” (Hua II, p. 14/69).

The example of perceiving a house helps clarify these distinctions. “This house is a transcendence, and forfeits its existence after the phenomenological reduction” (Hua II, p. 72/53). This means many things: that we are not concerned with the house in its existence, as the roofer or the architect might be; that we are not concerned with whether it exists or not, as the Cartesian might be; and that we do not take it to be a set of ideas really contained in the mind, as the Berkeleian would. It still *appears* as an existing, transcendent object, that is, as something irreducible to my perception of it. After the reduction we are indeed left with the perceptual *cogitatio*, which is the equivalent of the “appearing of the house,” which in turn is equivalent to one of the two senses of “house-phenomenon.” But that is not all we are left with, for it is also evident that “...a house appears in the house-phenomenon” (Hua II, p. 72/53), a particular house with particular determinations (made of brick, with a slate roof, etc.).

With the introduction of the new, genuine sense of immanence, the clouds obscuring our vision of the mainland of phenomenology suddenly dissipate, and we discover a landscape immeasurably richer and more complex than what phenomenology in its initial stage could offer. Now the intentional object, which in the reduction’s first step had been rigorously excluded, is available. The phenomenologist can be concerned both with what is really immanent—the *cogitatio*—and with the *cogitatio*’s intentional object, which is neither a *cogitatio* itself nor anything existing in a *cogitatio* (Hua II, p. 55/41). We noted that Husserl earlier granted that the *relation* to something transcendent can be “an inner characteristic” of the act, but that he explicitly chose not to draw out the implications of the concession at that point. Now he does. In fact, to realize the project of *The Idea of Phenomenology*—to explain the essence of knowledge—demands an inquiry into both the side of the act and the side of its object (Hua II, p. 55/41).

“Essence” is the first sort of object Husserl locates in the newly expanded phenomenological territory: it is the “new objectivity that counts as absolute givenness” (Hua II, p. 8/65). With the objectivity of essence, we break out of the notion of real containment and into the legitimate sense of transcendence, for the essence is transcendent in the sense that it is not a real part of the *cogitatio* (Hua II,

p. 56/42), even though it is absolutely given (Hua II, p. 9/65). An act is singular, the essence is general, and thus is “in the [*reellen*] sense, transcendent” (Hua II, p. 9/66). Only prejudice would deny transcendence here. The admitting of the essence into the realm of phenomenology as something given releases a flood of other kinds of objects. Indeed, it would again be a prejudice (Hua II, p. 62/46) to restrict the range of self-givenness, and therefore immanence, to essences. “There are diverse modes of objectivity,” Husserl insists, “and, with them, diverse modes of so-called givenness” (Hua II, p. 63/47). Husserl cites the example of memory, which “from the start...offers different forms of objectivity and givenness, all interwoven with each other” (Hua II, p. 67/49).

The genuine and complex sense of immanence issues from a more sophisticated conception of the phenomenological reduction. Unlike the reduction in its first step, which restricts the investigation to the sphere of real immanence, to the sphere of the *cogitatio*, the reduction here limits it “to the sphere of pure self-givenness, to the sphere of what is not merely talked about and referred to” (Hua II, p. 60/45). But this is scarcely a limitation at all. Rather than confining and contracting the area that can be studied, it breaks down barriers and opens things up. True, the reduction still brackets a certain kind of transcendence, that is, transcendence in the sense of what is not given at all, but that does not entail the transformation of the object that is given into something really immanent in the act that intends it. It rather means that, thanks to the reduction, “I can take it just as I ‘see’ it, as I ‘experience’ it” (Hua II, p. 69/51).

What does this more sophisticated understanding of the reduction imply for seeing? It too opens up. Pure seeing need no longer restrict itself to the really (*reell*) immanent (Hua II, p. 9/66). In the “naive stage” of consideration, Husserl presented seeing as “just plain seeing, a featureless mental look, always one and the same, bearing no distinctions within itself.” And as for the things it saw, they were simply “there in consciousness and seeing simply sees them there...All distinctions lie in the things...” (Hua II, p. 12/68).

Husserl’s mature position, on the other hand, is that seeing is complex. Husserl uses “seeing” somewhat ambiguously in *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Often it refers to what the phenomenologist does, that is, to phenomenological reflection after the reduction, but sometimes it refers to what happens in any particular act: “*seeing consciousness*,” Husserl writes, “...is just acts of thought formed in certain ways, and things, which are not acts of thought, are nevertheless constituted in them” (Hua II, p. 72/52). Perhaps one could say that Husserl’s point is that acts of consciousness are not simple acts of awareness with all the complexity pushed to the side of the object. Rather, any given act has its way of constituting its object, depending on the kind of act it is, and this constitution is not simple. It is the business of phenomenology to capture, in its seeing, the complexity of the kind of act in question and to distinguish it from the complexity of other kinds of acts; in that case, phenomenology is the seeing of the seeing that occurs straightforwardly in the acts on which it reflects. Starting from the givenness of the particular act and its object, it moves to the givenness of the act’s essence; and there is nothing simple about seeing or directly intuiting an essence. Phenomenological seeing is not like shooting fish in a barrel. It is a more delicate operation, like fly fishing. And it is an

active process that works hard: “It compares, it distinguishes, it connects, it places in relation, it divides into parts, it separates off moments. But it does all this in the act of pure seeing” (Hua II, p. 58/43). Phenomenology’s task is “to track down... *all correlations and forms of givenness*, and to elucidate them through analysis.” Hence this task is not trivial, “as if one would just have to look, just have to open one’s eyes” (Hua II, p. 12/68). Here, perhaps, Husserl parts company with Wittgenstein.

Now what becomes of the bag conception in the face of all this? As Husserl refines his notions of reduction, seeing, immanence, and transcendence, the conception progressively loses ground as an adequate way of understanding consciousness. Of course, one might argue that the bag conception is again ideally suited to the sort of seeing we have been describing: both the appearing and what appears would be right there in front of one in the bag. All one would have to do is look at them. This, however, leaves the issue of transcendence dangling, and assumes a naive view of seeing and of the act and its object. Phenomenology must get inside what it sees, not just gaze on it from the outside, which the bag conception invites. The latter is the standpoint of the natural sciences, the third person perspective. The reduction, on the other hand, adopts the first-person perspective and allows one to analyze the act from within. The problem with the onlooker view is that it will take the act to be a set of psychological facts or physiological activities that can be observed and measured, or, if an “internal” approach is taken, to be the entertaining or having of opaque ideas or images within the container-mind. This is why the issue of transcendence is left hanging in psychology. The image from the psychological perspective is really immanent. No account is given of how the act—say, of perception—might reach out beyond the really contained image to an object truly transcendent to the perceptual *cogitatio*. As Husserl asks elsewhere: “If I put an image in a drawer, does the *drawer* represent something?” (Hua XXIII, 21/23). From the first-person perspective, one perceives an object, not an image. If I observe someone looking intently out to sea from the deck of a ship, and I start looking out to sea too in hopes of glimpsing what the other person apparently sees, my aim is not to have the same immanent image the other person might be supposed to have (from the third-person perspective)—an impossible enterprise—but to see what he or she sees, a whale, for example. Similarly, even in pure imagining, I imagine an *object*, a mermaid, say, not an internal picture.

It is the emergence of the theme of constitution in the final stage of the unfolding of the idea of phenomenology, however, that signals the demise of the bag conception once and for all. “...‘Constitution’ means,” Husserl writes, “that things given immanently are not, *as it first appeared* [emphasis mine], in consciousness as things are in a box [*Schachtel*]...” (Hua II, p. 71/52). Specifically, the bag or box conception succumbs to two aspects of constitution: its complexity and its dynamism. We noted that Husserl at first presents the *cogitatio* as simple, and he evades the issue of its activity in presenting objects. But the simplicity of the *cogitatio* cannot be maintained in the face of the enormous variety of conscious acts. Furthermore, transcendence as an issue is insistent, refusing to be set aside, for the simple reason that acts have objects, and that the kinds of acts mirror the diversity of

the forms of objectivity they intend. Each kind of act constitutes its object in a unique way:

Objectivity is not something that is in knowing like something is in a sack, as if knowing were a completely empty form—one and the same empty sack—into which one thing is put, and then another. Rather,...one can distinguish as many basic forms of acts of knowing, groups, and interconnections of acts of knowing, as there are basic forms of objectivity (Hua II, pp. 74–75/55).

This diversity is a function of a constitutional consciousness that is a dynamic process, not a static place. Things we experience are not just there in a bag for the taking. They need to be brought to givenness, and this is what constituting consciousness does.

[I]t...turns out that it makes no sense at all to speak of things as if they were simply there and need only to be seen. For this “simply being there” is a matter of certain experiences of a specific and changing structure, such as perception, imagination, memory, predication, etc.; and things are in them not as they might be in a case or container. Rather, things *constitute themselves* in these experiences even though they are not to be found in them in the real [*reelle*] sense (Hua II, p. 12/68).

It is the things themselves that are given in appearances or acts, not representations that they might send into consciousness.

Constitution therefore displaces containment. Objects are constituted by consciousness rather than contained in it. Containment implies that the object or its surrogate is ready-made and dropped into consciousness-the-container, at which point it can be seen. Constitution implies that the object as known is an accomplishment of consciousness and must be brought to consciousness, which, depending on the act, can occur in different ways, presenting objects that are given to consciousness in different ways. These *cogitationes* or appearances “in a certain sense create objects for the ego” through their “changing and highly peculiar” structures (Hua II, p. 71/52). The object of memory, for example, is not something ready-made that one stumbles upon in consciousness; it presents itself only in a specific kind of act, the act of remembering. And this is the case for every other kind of object. When constitution thus replaces containment, the transcendental dimension steps onto the stage in its place.

There is, it should be noted, one interpretation of constitution, sometimes found among Husserl’s critics, that would reinstate the container view. Husserl speaks now and then of the “*ultimate sense-bestowal of knowledge*” (Hua II, p. 76/55). If sense-bestowal means that the object is straightforwardly the product of consciousness, then inevitably the product would be lodged in the consciousness that constituted it. But that does not seem to be Husserl’s meaning at all. True, he does speak of appearance as “in a certain sense” creating objects (Hua II, p. 71/52), but by that he only means that if we are to have objects, they must appear to us through acts of consciousness, and hence “cannot be separated from appearance” (Hua II, p. 12/68). Appearances give things, and give them in distinct ways, but they do not make them out of whole cloth.

Finally, Husserl stresses the “teleological *forms of interconnection*” among acts. Acts of knowing are not, in fact, free-floating particularities (Hua II, p. 75/55). One phase of a perception, for example, is essentially tied to others implied by the horizons of its object. Or memory is essentially connected to perception: the object I remember is an object I once perceived. Constituting consciousness is a web of interrelated intentional acts and their correlates, not a housing for disconnected experiential atoms. “...In these connections...all the objectivity of real spatial-temporal actuality constitutes itself—not in one blow, but in a gradually ascending process” (75/55). The role of interconnection and genesis in constitution points again to the complexity of constitution and of the constituted object, and how inadequate the image of the object as a simple thing stuffed into a bag proves to be. The bag conception is like a black hole, drawing each thing in and compacting it, but also disconnecting it from everything else. Husserl’s conception of consciousness as constituting restores the essential connection between seeing and what is seen, and discloses the complexity and dynamism inherent in both. Thinking for Husserl is always outside the bag.

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