

Gustav Shpet’s Implicit Phenomenological Idealism

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Abstract The issue of whether the phenomenology presented in *Ideen I* was a metaphysical realism or an idealism came to the fore almost immediately upon its publication. The present essay is an examination of the relation of Gustav Shpet, one of Husserl’s students from the Göttingen years, to this issue via his understanding of phenomenology and, particularly, of the phenomenological reduction, as shown principally in his early published writings. For Shpet, phenomenology employs essential intuition without regard to experiential intuition. *If* we look on transcendental idealism as the label for this methodology, which disregards but does not deny either the empirical or its correlative species of intuition, then Shpet was such an idealist, all the while adhering to a metaphysical realism. In this way, Shpet could proclaim phenomenology to be the fundamental philosophical discipline without precluding the possibility of other philosophical disciplines insofar as they were conducted in relation to consciousness taken not as the “possession” of a human individual, but eidetically and thus not a “possession.”

1 Transcendental Phenomenology: A Realism or An Idealism?

As is widely known, many of Husserl’s own followers in Munich and Göttingen were both perplexed and troubled by a number of the pronouncements they found in *Ideen I* upon its publication in 1913. Committed to a metaphysical realism, they looked askance on Husserl’s seemingly idealistic turn in that work. In disbelief, at least some searched through it for statements that would buttress their own commitment to realism—hoping thereby to quell their anxiety and concomitantly affirm

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their cherished wish that their acknowledged “master” had not completely abandoned what they conceived to be the basic ontological stance behind the *Logische Untersuchungen*.¹ Among the most famous expressions of this endeavor was Gerda Walther’s 1922 index to the *Ideen*, in which she provided two subentries on “phenomenological idealism,” one for passages allegedly supporting idealism and one “contra” idealism.² We need not say more than that Husserl himself, who became increasingly enamored over the years with characterizing his phenomenology as an idealism, was displeased with Walther’s efforts, and in the 1928 edition it was replaced by Landgrebe’s compilation.

There were, indeed, reasonable grounds for the trepidations of Husserl’s early enthusiasts and disciples. Undoubtedly, already in his 1913 work Husserl labeled his overall conception as “*transcendental* phenomenology” and wrote that “something transcendent necessarily must be experienceable [...] by any *actual* Ego as a demonstrable unity relative to its concatenations of experience” (Hua III/I, pp. 6, 102/xx, 108). We could undoubtedly find many additional passages that lend support to an idealist—even solipsistic—reading of *Ideen I*, including the very title of the next section, §49: “Absolute Consciousness as the Residuum After the Annihilation of the World.” In light of them, some of Husserl’s early followers, such as Roman Ingarden, refused to countenance and follow the path that they felt led Husserl to idealism, viz., that of the phenomenological reduction.

Nevertheless, as Walther’s index also shows, a case could also be made for a realist interpretation or understanding of *Ideen I*. For example, Husserl, earlier in §42, wrote that “the physical thing is transcendent to the perception of it and consequently to any consciousness whatever related to it.” (Hua III/I, pp. 86–87/89) And in the next section, Husserl amplified this statement, saying that in intuitive acts we grasp an “in itself,” which, along with other expressions in that section, has prompted Dermot Moran to write that “this appears to be a commitment to direct, empirical realism” (Moran 2000, p. 122). Although an explicitly ontological-realist defense and reading of *Ideen I* did not become part of the secondary literature, such an interpretation formed the background, as it were, for other young devotees of Husserl. Simply identifying the phenomenological reduction with the eidetic reduction, they conceived phenomenology, following Husserl’s own words in his “Introduction,” as “a science of essences” that did not so much reject “matters of fact” as simply expressed no particular interest in them. (Hua III/I, p. 6/xx) Transcendental phenomenology, then, was the adoption of a purely eidetic attitude that merely *excluded* but did *not* deny “every sort of transcendence” (cf. Hua III/I, p. 198/209).³ One quite recent convert to the phenomenological program, albeit possibly with

¹ For a clear expression of this bewilderment on the part of one of Husserl’s closest disciples, see Stein (1986, p. 250).

² “The problem whether Husserl was an epistemological realist or idealist (as many thought) was of particular importance to me, and I amassed all the assertions for each of the two conceptions.” (Walther 1960, p. 214).

³ Recently Sebastian Luft wrote, “To this day, many presentations of the reduction repeat this faulty identification of both [the phenomenological and the eidetic] methods and equate ‘eidetic intuition’ with the reduction’s establishment of the correlational a priori” (Luft 2012, p. 251). Of course, Luft is correct,

qualification, was the relatively young Russian scholar Gustav Shpet, who had come to Göttingen initially for research on his eventual thesis dealing with what we, from the standpoint of early phenomenology, would conceivably regard as the incongruous topic of historical methodology. As we shall see in what follows, Shpet went on to display a rather idiosyncratic, but convoluted, attitude toward his German master's teachings.

In this essay, we shall examine Shpet's relation to Husserlian transcendental or phenomenological idealism via his understanding of phenomenology and the phenomenological reduction as shown principally in his early published writings.⁴ Our focus here is not Shpet's disagreements with Husserl, but with what Shpet took to be the place and the role of phenomenology, as enunciated up to and with *Ideen I*, in philosophy as a whole.⁵ We shall also look at remarks made in lecture notes, which have only recently come to light and which help to illuminate Shpet's position as expressed in his published writings.

2 Enter Shpet

Shpet arrived in Göttingen in late April 1912 to work, as mentioned, on his planned thesis. He stayed there together with his family apparently until August, returning to Moscow for approximately 1 or 2 months. There is no firm evidence that he even so much as met Husserl during this first stay in Göttingen, but, however it occurred, the two did become acquainted quite shortly after Shpet's return to Germany in late September. If he was familiar with Husserl's publications prior to this time, they could not have made a significant impression on him, since he did not seek out Husserl earlier. Whatever the case, Shpet matriculated at the University for the academic year and began attending—whatever the motivation—Husserl's lecture-course "*Logik und Einleitung in der Wissenschaftslehre*" that winter semester and participated in the seminar "*Metaphysische und wissenschaftstheoretische Übung über Natur und Geist*" (Shchedrina 2015, p. 61).

In light of Shpet's class attendance, and given the deep-seated reluctance on the part of many among Husserl's Göttingen students to embrace Husserl's newly emerging idealist turn, a natural question to ask is to what extent Shpet mingled with them personally and was influenced in his understanding of Husserl's teachings and writings by them. Unfortunately, relying solely on the written record, there

Footnote 3 (continued)

but, as he admits, many have made this mistake. One question is whether Shpet was among this group making such a mistake—or did he, in effect, follow Husserl to a full phenomenological idealism?

⁴ Savin writes, "the fact that Shpet studied with Husserl in Göttingen allows us to consider him a Russian representative of this [the Munich-Göttingen] school" (Savin 1997, p. 27). If we were to accept a period of study under Husserl in Göttingen as the necessary and sufficient condition for being a representative of the Munich-Göttingen school, we would have a great number of such representatives.

⁵ For Shpet's specific disagreements with Husserl, see Nemeth (2009), the present essay being, in intent, complementary to it. Whereas the earlier essay criticized Shpet from a Husserlian perspective, here this author assumes Shpet's viewpoint.

is little evidence of any such interaction. Some 12 years older than Edith Stein and 14 years older than Ingarden, it would be understandable that Shpet, a recent divorcee with two young daughters, would hardly mingle socially with others so much younger. Quite possibly, Stein had Shpet in mind when she wrote in her autobiography: “There were some other newcomers as well to Göttingen that summer. Reinach mentioned them to me immediately on my first visit to him at the start of the semester: a Russian professor who wished to study phenomenology at its source” (Stein 1986, pp. 291–292).⁶ Additionally, none of the names of the most prominent members of the Göttingen students (Stein, Ingarden, Reinach, Hering) appear at all in Shpet’s extant correspondence, leading us to conclude that his approach to phenomenology was influenced little, if any, by the student circle around Husserl in 1912/13 (Shpet 2012).⁷

We do know, though, that Husserl and Shpet developed a warm personal relationship by mid-1913 that included not only long conversations, correspondence, and an extended repeat visit by Shpet with Husserl in July 1914. Husserl’s *Ideen I* was published already in April 1913, and Shpet clearly must have soon acquired a copy, read it, and conceived the idea of writing in 1913 what became *Appearance and Sense* rather quickly. Given his travels that summer not just to Scotland but also back to London and then to Switzerland, Shpet worked quite rapidly reading Husserl’s work and completed writing, for the most part, his own book, finishing it by mid-October.⁸ It remains Shpet’s principal commentary on Husserl’s transcendental turn.

3 Phenomenological Idealism in *Appearance and Sense*

Already in his first chapter, Shpet acknowledged the Husserlian quest for a fundamental philosophy, a first philosophy of beginnings and principles. He understood this to be, however, a quest for the foundations of being itself, including that of the cognizing subject, to which Plato, one of the first genuine philosophers in Shpet’s estimation, afforded insufficient attention. This, in his mind, stood in contrast to what he termed the “negative” quest merely for cognitive forms. Kant, for example, sought not cognition itself, i.e., the being of cognition, but merely some allegedly universal forms in the hope of learning what and where there is cognition.⁹ Despite his

⁶ Since Stein did not mention Shpet here by name, we can reasonably conclude that the two remained largely unknown to each other.

⁷ The caveat here is that Shpet appears to have made friends by this time with both Alexandre Koyré and Jean Hering, since upon his departure from Göttingen for Edinburgh in late July 1913 they both saw Shpet off, presumably at the train station. Hering was 11 years younger, and Koyré 13 years younger than Shpet (Shchedrina 2015, p. 61).

⁸ Shchedrina writes that Shpet finished work on *Appearance and Sense* on 16 October 1913, since “this date is written in pencil at the end of his personal copy.” The same date appears also in Shpet’s diary (Shchedrina 2014, p. 142).

⁹ In his thesis, Shpet even more explicitly wrote, “Kant’s critique can have only a negative, destructive significance, and a philosophy that wishes to be erected on it alone will have to be a negative philosophy.” (Shpet 2002, p. 43) Shpet interpreted Husserl’s early proclamation of a “return to the things themselves” as a rejection of Kantian and neo-Kantian epistemology (Shpet 2002, p. 549).

shortcoming and oversight with respect to the cognizing subject, Plato importantly recognized the distinction between ideal being and actual being. The latter is concerned with facts, i.e., that which is in a definite time and place. Facts are contingent as against ideal beings, essences, which are necessary. In this way, we can speak of factual sciences, sciences of facts, in contrast to ideal sciences, sciences of essences. As mentioned above, Husserl called phenomenology a science of essences. Shpet, likewise, wrote, “phenomenology can only be a science of essences” (Shpet 1991, p. 11). Husserl’s specific contribution to the line of philosophy extending from Plato—a line that Shpet called “positive philosophy”—is his recognition of the being of cognizing reason as the problem, coupled with then establishing the relation of that being to other beings.¹⁰ This, however, was, for Shpet, Husserl’s problem. Its recognition is also what Shpet saw as Husserl’s ultimate contribution to philosophy.

Cognizing reason is manifested in the being of consciousness, and phenomenology, in determining this being, characterizes it as intentionality. Thus, consciousness through intentionality grasps or seizes essences. What is this procedure, this grasping or seizing? How is it accomplished? For Shpet, as for Husserl, it could not be a matter of abstraction, for “any abstraction from actuality always remains either a ‘part’ of actuality, or it is simply a fiction” (Shpet 1991, pp. 12, 47).¹¹ One thing we can quickly realize is that this grasping of essences requires from us another attitude than the one we have in everyday life, an attitude different even from that of the natural scientist, who is still concerned with factually given, albeit general, laws and principles. To attain this different attitude, the phenomenological attitude, we need to exclude or make no use of the natural world, of spatiotemporal factual being. Both Husserl and Shpet stressed that this exclusion, this phenomenological epoché, does not signify a doubt, let alone a negation, in the facticity of the natural world either in general or in particulars (Hua III/I, p. 65/61; Shpet 1991, p. 27). What it does mean is that our concern is with the world as eidos, in particular essences in their intimate relation to consciousness, where consciousness itself is taken not as does the natural science of psychology, but as an eidos with essential structures of its own. Insofar as we speak of Plato’s idealism owing to his theory of forms—in which non-spatiotemporal forms or ideas have a certain reality and “ground” the natural world—so too can we speak of Husserl’s *and*, up to this point, of Shpet’s phenomenological idealism already in 1913.

Of course, there is more to Husserlian “phenomenological idealism,” to intentionality and sense-constitution, than this essentialism, regardless of the importance we ascribe to a science of essences. We should emphasize here, however, that Shpet, unlike others around Husserl at the time, seemingly did not object to the *factual*

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, then, Husserl was not, for Shpet, a Platonist, but a representative of an ancient line of thought extending back at least as far as Plato, who was another representative, albeit the most outstanding, of that line. For a contemporary claim that Shpet saw Husserl as a Platonist, see Shijan (2005, p. 286).

¹¹ Also see Husserl (Hua III/I, p. 108/115), where we find, “One must see, however, that by such an ‘abstracting’ from Nature, only something natural can be acquired and not transcendently pure consciousness.” That is, the process of abstraction is a distillation or filtering of empirical Nature, but, as such, the remainder is still “natural.”

exclusion of the natural world and did not see it as an abandonment of realism for some sort of Cartesian or, worse yet, Berkeleyan idealism. Shpet simply saw the phenomenological epoché as the appropriate further extension of the eidetic reduction.

Whatever we may focus on within the science of essences, the question before us is *how* we attain these essences if it is not through a process of abstraction. Shpet, for an answer, appeals directly to Husserl. To each individually given, there is a necessarily or essentially given. As Husserl wrote, “*it belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence.*” (Hua III/I, p. 12/7) Just as the individual matter of fact is given through an empirical intuition, an essence is given through eidetic intuition (Hua III/I, p. 14/9; Shpet 1991, p. 14). In other words, for Shpet we can see empirical facts, and we can correlatively also see ideal essences. In eidetic intuition, we can then describe the object of the respective intuiting, viz., essences. The result is, for him, a phenomenological description.

Shpet viewed phenomenology in 1913/14 as contributing to Platonic “positive philosophy” by a determination of the essential being of consciousness. He wrote, “Consequently, the first problem of phenomenology, precisely defined, is: What is the being of pure consciousness, how can it be studied as such, and what is its content?” (Shpet 1991, p. 36). To accomplish this, Shpet viewed Husserl as proposing to clarify, via the eidetic “reduction,” the interrelation between consciousness and the transcendent object of consciousness. An essential elucidation of such an interrelation reveals that there are two types of being: consciousness and reality. For Shpet, as well as in his reading of Husserl, the former is given immanently and as something absolute, whereas “real,” physical things are given through adumbrations in appearances (Shpet 1991, pp. 30–31; Hua III/I, pp. 91–94/94–98). Shpet specifically stated that from this distinction and its corollaries Husserl drew conclusions that in his view agree with the preceding (Shpet 1991, p. 31).¹² Unproblematically, the existence of an object of an immanent perception is necessary. I cannot doubt the existence of my consciousness conceived as that very reflection on itself. On the other hand, the existence of a physical thing, say, this book in front of me, is not necessary just because it is given to my perception. Its existence is contingent, i.e., there is nothing countersensical in the doubt that the book is not “really” there. We are not engaging in a Cartesian doubt concerning whether the world truly exists. All Shpet—and Husserl, for that matter—is saying is that there is nothing in the *sense* of an expression of the world’s existence that its existence is absolute in the same way that an immanent perception’s existence is necessary. Shpet also concluded from this, from the essential necessity of consciousness, that phenomenology always studies whatever it takes as its object in terms of the correlative relationship between consciousness and that object. It can investigate both immanent and transcendent

¹² Shpet’s wording is, we must admit, somewhat ambiguous. He could have meant that he simply agreed with Husserl’s logic. That is, from the distinction mentioned, Husserl provided a logically valid set of conclusions, independent of the cogency of the distinction. However, Shpet could also have meant that he accepted Husserl’s distinction as correct as well as the logic leading to the conclusions. Only if we proceed with the latter interpretation, do we have a philosophically interesting claim.

objects, but in either case it is with the “determinate coefficient” of consciousness (Shpet 1991, p. 35). That is, all philosophical investigations should be undertaken keeping in mind the intentionality of consciousness.

Thus far, then, Shpet followed Husserl’s lead in maintaining that the fundamental science of philosophy is an eidetic description of potentially everything, provided, that is, that we never lose sight of consciousness *also taken eidetically*. Since Husserl called this pure or transcendental phenomenology, there is no reason why we cannot label Shpet’s program up to this point also as transcendental phenomenology. A transcendental phenomenological investigation keeps in mind throughout the correlative connection between the *cogito* and the *cogitatum* in its essential structures. In other words, it requires the investigator adopt a particular attitude toward the subject matter, the phenomenological attitude. Not to do so is characteristic of the dogmatic sciences and of everyday life. In the phenomenological attitude, our main concern is pure consciousness (i.e., consciousness taken eidetically), the being of which is intentionality. Consciousness always intends, i.e., is directed, toward something. That we exclude all transcendent being does not mean that we strip consciousness of objects. That would be impossible, for it would mean that we eliminate intentionality itself from consciousness. Instead, we make no use of transcendencies as such; we put all positings of something transcendent “out of action.” We make no use of transcendent actualities. (Hua III/I, p. 106/113; Shpet 1991, p. 37).

For a further clarification of the subject matter or content of phenomenology, we can make use of the fact–essence dichotomy. Each member of that division has an associated intuition, viz., experiential intuition and essential intuition. The former gives facts; the latter essences. For every fact or individual thing there is an essence, and every essence has possible corresponding individuals. Nevertheless, phenomenology is not simply concerned with essences, but with what we could call a subset—even though neither Husserl nor Shpet used that term—of the set of essences. For both Husserl and Shpet, the formalism of logic, for example, and mathematical sciences in general are excluded from pure or transcendental phenomenology. The former concern themselves with transcendencies, though these are transcendent in another sense than are the facts of the actual world. (Hua III/I, p. 158/170; Shpet 1991, p. 150).¹³ In this regard, Shpet quoted Husserl to the effect that transcendental phenomenology, although an eidetic science, belongs to a totally different class than does mathematics. (Shpet 1991, p. 87)

Thus, the tool that phenomenology employs, in Shpet’s eyes, is essential or ideal intuition in complete disregard of experiential intuition. This follows, he held, from the very essence of the reduction. We also see that by restricting itself to a

¹³ After discussing the possibility of excluding the objects of the material-eidetic sciences from transcendental phenomenology, Shpet added that Husserl’s position is “fundamentally correct.” They are to be excluded despite their ideality, since they are not taken in their necessary relation to consciousness (Shpet 1991, pp. 53–54). This serves as further testimony at this point to Shpet’s adherence to phenomenological idealism, via the phenomenological reduction. Savin writes that Shpet never even once mentions the expression “transcendental reduction” in his third chapter entitled “The Phenomenological Reduction.” Although literally true, Shpet does mention in that chapter the phenomenological reduction, which he took to be the same as the transcendental reduction (Savin 1997, p. 25; see Shpet 1991, p. 59).

description of the immediately given in ideal intuition phenomenology is a pre-theoretical discipline. Shpet—and in this case Husserl too—recognized the possibility of objections against phenomenological description particularly as it approaches ever more concrete levels of individuation, with the here and now. The general issue is how do we engage in description? Employing language to describe anything involves conceptual terminology. Does not this very fact involve theory and thereby jeopardize our very enterprise? When dealing with an eidetic concretum, phenomenology rescinds the individuation and elevates the essential content. Shpet remarked that he did not fully concur with the details of Husserl's treatment, but he wished to proceed to another matter, one that we shall see sharply separates him from Husserl.

Let me stress again that up to this point Shpet shared Husserl's general outlook. *If* what we have discussed thus far amounts to transcendental idealism, then Shpet was such an idealist, *malgré* his silence in the matter. Both Shpet and Husserl could accurately say that philosophically they were idealists, while in everyday life, i.e., in the natural attitude, they were realists. However, Shpet did not share Husserl's belief that the fact-essence dichotomy is exhaustive of all species of being, and therefore that the distinction between experiential intuition and eidetic intuition is exhaustive. Shpet believed that Husserl's dichotomy omits a peculiar species of empirical being, viz., social being. Taking his cue from Husserl's own words that each species of being essentially has a corresponding mode of givenness and along with it a mode of cognition, social being must, therefore, also have its own peculiar cognitive method (Hua III/I, p. 176/187; Shpet 1991, p. 100). Empathy, Shpet believed, plays a fundamental role in this mode. Admittedly, Husserl himself recognized a role for empathy, but from the perspective of *Ideen I* did not see it as a fundamental role.¹⁴ This oversight led him, according to Shpet, to overlook social being as a distinctive species of being. Shpet recognized that such an acceptance of social being would entail a significant modification of phenomenology, but he failed to expound on this here in 1913/14. Clearly, in one sense it need not entail a rejection of the essence of phenomenology itself, a description of cognition within the phenomenological attitude, since social being is a species of *empirical* being, which is "put out of play" within that attitude. One could, therefore, accept social being and yet be a transcendental idealist. Yet just as there is a one-to-one correlation between each empirically given something and an essence, so there should be an eidetic reduction of social being and then a further phenomenological reduction of the social.¹⁵ In this way, another immense and fundamental field opens up for phenomenological analysis.

Instead of pursuing a phenomenology of the social in *Appearance and Sense*, a topic that he acknowledged would prove long and arduous, Shpet turned instead to

¹⁴ Elena Gurko has grounds for writing—at least from the vantage point of 1913/14—that, "A deduction to the mental processes of the other is, for Shpet, possible by means of empathy, and revealed by Husserl but not valued by him in its fundamental significance" (Gurko 1999, pp. 10–11).

¹⁵ Shpet could justifiably be faulted for not carefully distinguishing the eidetic reduction from the phenomenological. On my reading here, he did recognize the distinction, but his failure to be clear has led others mistakenly, I believe, to charge him with departing from Husserl in this regard. One contemporary scholar writes, "It is noteworthy that Shpet, as against Husserl, in fact made no distinction between the phenomenological reduction, properly speaking, and the eidetic reduction" (Evstropov 2014, p. 62).

details in Husserl's *Ideen I*. One issue to which Shpet attached particular importance is the necessary correlation mentioned above between fact and essence and correspondingly that between experiential intuition and eidetic intuition. We can use both species of intuition to obtain knowledge owing to a third thing that serves as a representation for both. Shpet was aware that this sought-for third thing bears a certain resemblance to Kant's introduction of the schematism in the "First Critique," but he dismissed the charge rather abruptly for its superficiality. This "third thing" is a concept, and with it the issue looming over our investigation is how a concept can express an intuition. The sense data, *hyle*, of a mental process (*Erlebnis*) lacks anything pertaining to intentionality. These are overlaid by a stratum that bestows sense on them and introduces intentionality to them. Apparently, then, for Husserl such sense-bestowal is as much the essence of consciousness as is intentionality. Indeed, for consciousness to intend something *means* to impart a sense to it. The notion of sense here is wider than the linguistic sphere. It is a moment within all conscious acts whether they are verbally expressed or not.

If, up to this point, Shpet had followed Husserl's lead into a phenomenological idealism, his next move threatens such an accompaniment. Husserl's conception of the pure Ego is that it is present in all conscious acts. Indeed, Husserl characterized a large role for the pure Ego, saying that it "lives" in position-taking acts (Hua III/I, p. 214/225; Shpet 1991, p. 109). Shpet could not abide such a large sphere of activity for the pure Ego. Although Husserl's depiction of the Ego's "life" has merit, Shpet found it to be exaggerated. Senses are not "created" by the pure Ego, as though those senses were subjective or arbitrary. Although Shpet is quite guarded here, he feared such a move is decidedly a step toward a reductionism—what we may term a "transcendental psychologism," although Shpet did not introduce such an expression. For him, an object can retain its sense throughout changes in the Ego's attentional acts. An enduring intentional object, being the bearer of senses, itself possesses an "inner" sense. Shpet remained unconvinced that Husserl had provided the final word on sense-bestowal. Despite his detailed analysis of the noematic-noetic correlation, Husserl's notion of "sense" remains an abstract form, in the same way that mathematics is an abstraction. For Shpet, on the other hand, there is a distinction between the noematic "Object in the How," of which Husserl spoke, and an object's authentic sense, its intimate something, that which is inherent in the object itself (Shpet 1991, p. 116; cf. Hua III/I, p. 304/316). It makes the object an integral thing. That is, a concrete object has, in addition to the Husserlian senses and the bearer of those senses, something else that can be phenomenologically described leading to its actuality.

Admittedly, there is much here that needs a great deal of clarification. Whether Shpet's emendation of Husserl is warranted and whether, even more importantly, it is correct, is not our concern here. What is our concern is whether Shpet, with his talk of an "intimate something," had ultimately abandoned his earlier understanding of the phenomenological reduction, of the exclusion of actual existence from phenomenology, and thereby of its commitment to a form of idealism. Particularly troubling is Shpet's talk of obtaining an object's sense in its actuality by knowing how to reach actuality (Shpet 1991, pp. 117, 123). Was Shpet inquiring how cognition *reaches* actuality or how consciousness *constitutes* "actuality," i.e., the sense of

an actual object as a member of a distinct region of being? Husserl partially entitled §55 of *Ideen I* “All Reality Existent By Virtue of ‘Sense-bestowal’.” He wrote there, “Let us note in conclusion that the universality with which, in the deliberations carried out above, we have spoken about the constitution of the natural world in absolute consciousness, should not be found objectionable” (Hua III/I, p. 121/130). Statements such as this lead us to think Husserl identifies “constitution” with sense-bestowal.¹⁶ Yet Shpet wrote, “[...] which we do not think will happen—that ‘constituting’ itself is identical with ‘sense-bestowal’” (1991, p. 104). If, in light of this, Shpet did not identify the two, what did he see as the concept of constitution? On the other hand, we have seen that he does recognize that the epoché is an exclusion of the facticity of spatio-temporal being, and even after introducing his talk of attaining what he calls authentic actuality, he affirmed that it is thanks to the epoché that this is accomplished (Shpet 1991, p. 124).

4 From *Eidos* to Comprehension

Already in his “Introduction” to *Appearance and Sense*, Shpet cryptically mentioned that all philosophical problems appear centered around and connected with a single problem, out of which ever new controversies have historically sprung (1991, p. 6). This age-old dispute is that between nominalism and realism, i.e., the problem of universals, although we, in turn, must stress that Shpet was not particularly forthcoming in stating plainly either the general problem, as he saw it, or his particular one. However, by focussing on the question of *how* we “arrive” at something actual, Shpet believed we have before us the path to solving the problem of universals. Husserl’s phenomenology, concerned as it is with sense and sense-bestowal, has, he believes, shown the way forward. On the other hand, Kantianism, with its exclusion in principle of a cognition of the thing in itself, has slammed the door shut to actuality and, as such, represents a negation of the essence of philosophy extending from the Greeks. However, the positive answer provided by phenomenology needs to be looked at from a different angle in order to understand its broad, philosophical significance. It has shown through its analysis of the noema-noesis correlation the rationality of actuality. Husserl has accomplished this through the adoption of the phenomenological attitude, which among other things has cleansed our study of psychology. Now, we are faced with taking the next step of penetrating into the actual.

The very nature of Husserl’s phenomenology imposed restrictions on its procedure in investigating the problem of pure intentionality. However, Shpet saw his particular concern to be somewhat different than Husserl’s, though related to it. The former claimed that the analysis of the noema-noesis correlation pushed him into viewing his problem essentially from the same direction as did Husserl. The latter

¹⁶ That Husserl did not provide a clear elucidation of his concept of constitution is well known. Moran, undoubtedly, provides the best attempt, writing, “Husserl’s notion of constitution should perhaps be thought of as a kind of setting out or ‘positing’ (*Setzung*), as a giving of sense, ‘sense-bestowing’ (*Sinngebung*)” (Moran 2000, p. 165).

proceeds from simple experience to a penetration into the essence. Husserl was asking *how* we penetrate into the essence of the actual. The sense of the claim that something “truly exists” is eidetically equivalent to saying that that something is “adequately given.” On the other hand, a presentive intuition (*gebende Anschauung*) of something transcendent cannot yield an adequate givenness of this something (Hua III/I, p. 332/343; Shpet 1991, p. 128). But for any object of which we can say that it “truly exists” there must be, on the phenomenological grounds we have seen, the possibility of a consciousness to which that object is given originally and adequately. Even if we accept this, we can still ask how this object shows its “truth.” If we abdicate our responsibility here as philosophers to address this issue, we leave fundamental issues of metaphysics to either dogmatists or those like Kant, for whom both a thesis and an antithesis are equally legitimate.

We started with fact and essence and found their two corresponding species of intuition. Experiencing intuition yields individual objects, the *hic et nunc*, whereas ideal intuition yields pure essences. If we “bracket” everything factual, leaving the essential, how can we deal with the individual, actual thing before us? Is it the case that the essential cannot be individual? How can philosophy return to the things themselves? In viewing essences from within the phenomenological reduction, we have originally given essences that neither can be reduced nor can change into something else in another attitude. If that were possible, the “essence” in question would not be truly be an essence.

At this point, Shpet could have here turned for a solution to the correlation of the two species of intuition to the problem of expressing what is seen in each. Indeed, he hinted at a recognition of this, a problem that in the twentieth century led to the philosophy of language. In the years ahead, in fact, Shpet did turn to an examination of language. However, here in the final chapter of *Appearance and Sense* Shpet claimed that a deeper examination of the structure of an appearance reveals that it contains more than the two species can show. Although in any object we can find its concrete noema, we cannot locate its “authentic sense” in looking at it in abstraction. A concrete social or cultural object has an “internal something” or “internal sense”, i.e., entelechy. True, this can be seen in the natural attitude, but Shpet asserted that in the phenomenological attitude we can see this more clearly. In the latter, we are not distracted by the sheer variety of individual properties given in experiencing intuition. Thus, we find Shpet again affirming the *utility* of phenomenology. Moreover, in the natural attitude we often see or, better, posit entelechy where none exists in a physical thing. In this way, we attribute a “quasi-entelechy” to the object. For example, we can say we see a human face in the clouds or that the human nose was designed as a place to rest one’s eyeglasses.

If, in the case of entelechy, we have an originary givenness, we would have to accord a separate species of intuition to it and correspondingly that entelechy would be a given on the same level as the ideally given and the experientially given. Problems arise here, however. Earlier, we saw that for every experientially given there is an ideally given, i.e., an essence. But in a phenomenological description, we find that not all objects have entelechy. If it were otherwise, we would have to admit a third attitude alongside the natural and the phenomenological, and the Husserlian-Shpetian view of phenomenology as the fundamental science would be jeopardized.

However, unlike with essences, seeing entelechy does not require a separate attitude or a third originally giving species or genus of intuition. (Shpet 1991, p. 158) Indeed, the seizing of an object's entelechy does require a distinctive act that motivates the positing of belief, but this act that views the noematic sense as a sign of entelechy is hermeneutic. Whereas we can, in a phenomenological description, isolate the various moments of an experience (*Erlebnis*) given in an intuition, the same cannot be done with entelechy, since its recognition is a social act and as such is *essentially* intersubjective. To use Shpet's own example, the entelechy of an axe, viz., to chop wood, was told to me by my father. We certainly appear to be describing the axe from within the natural attitude, but conceivably a phenomenological analysis would yield much the same. Not for a moment did Shpet explicitly denounce the reduction and certainly not its efficacy (see Shpet 1991, pp. 158–159).

A social or cultural object has an *essential* purpose, one that we add to the physicality of the object. This purpose is not present "in" the object in the same way as is, say, its color or shape. We know its purpose through a communication from another, but that communication is not itself a property of the object. Whereas we can direct our attention to it, so that it itself becomes an object, communication is not a physical thing as is, say, the axe. For me to make *sense* of the communication, I must comprehend it. This requires reason on my part. Have we, with this turn to comprehension, departed or sundered the phenomenological reduction? Shpet continued to be reticent, though he uses phenomenological terminology throughout his exposition. He reaffirmed that there are only two species of intuition and a single genus, viz., intuition or experience in the broad sense. Comprehension is included here. Phenomenology, sufficiently broadened to include comprehension on the part of the intending consciousness, remains pertinent. We said at the beginning of our study here that transcendental phenomenology requires steadfast attention to the *cogitocogitatum* nexus within the conscious attitude that excludes any sense of transcendence, all existence apart from that of the *cogito*, the existence of which essentially cannot be excluded. Did Shpet adhere to this?

5 In the Aftermath—Remarks and Affirmations

Although *Appearance and Sense* must remain the definitive expression of Shpet's relation to transcendental phenomenology, Shpet did make a number of corroborative statements in other contexts around the time of the book's publication. After his return to Moscow, Shpet gave a lecture-course on philosophy at the private Shanjavskij University in 1914 and most likely repeated his lectures at the Moscow Higher Women's Courses, a higher educational institution parallel to the public universities, women being barred from attendance at the latter. In such an introductory context, we can hardly expect Shpet to have provided much insight into his own relation with phenomenology. Nevertheless, in the course of the lectures he did offer support for Husserl's positive affirmation of the rationality of reality as against those who simply rejected subjective idealism in the name of the existential reality of the perceptual object.

Of course, we must be careful not to read into Shpet's surviving lecture notes more than glimpses of his position. Nevertheless, he did write, "The correlativity of the contingent and the essence as a necessary relation. *An ideal intuition or the intuition of essence!*" (Shpet 2010a, p. 270) In this way, he at least suggested his reaffirmation of the Husserlian distinction between experiencing intuition and eidetic intuition. He also again stated the intentionality of consciousness and hinted to not only the eidetic reduction, but even the phenomenological reduction: "epoché in relation to the empirical. Pure essence as the remainder. The study of consciousness here—a new science—phenomenology! Intentionality as the object. Ideal laws and relations—in the real itself." (Shpet 2010a, p. 270) Whereas such brief declarations alone can hardly serve as the basis for attributing an elaborated philosophical system to Shpet—or to anyone for that matter—they do lend additional corroboration to his fuller statements in *Appearance and Sense*.

Yet even in these quite reserved remarks Shpet still ventured to express his criticism of Husserl's limited perspective, namely that it failed to discern a particular rational activity in which certain senses are originally disclosed to the subject. This activity is comprehension, which sees "reason in reality. The significance of interpretation as an answer to the question of the world. [...] Subjectivity does not exclude the possibility of objective interpretation." (Shpet 2010a, p. 271) In this way, Shpet saw reason as not just providing a rational description of what is given, but a rational comprehension. Thus, the world appears not as a house of cards about to collapse in an instant, but as a rationally connected whole. When we say something is real, we express that that thing is stable, that it remains the same despite our different perspectives on it.

Another often overlooked source of information concerning Shpet's views at this time is a lengthy review of a book, *The Problem of Psychic Causality*, by Vasily V. Zenkovsky, who later went on to become a famed émigré historian of Russian philosophy. In his review originally published in 1915, Shpet questioned Zenkovsky's contention that he, Zenkovsky, was actively employing Husserl's phenomenological method in his own psychological research. For Shpet, such a claim made no sense: "The phenomenological method can take place only in phenomenology, as the fundamental philosophical discipline. Psychology, as an empirical science, has its own methods." (2010b, pp. 102–103) Thus, Zenkovsky, in Shpet's eyes, misunderstood the very nature of phenomenology. It, unlike psychology, is not an empirical science, and its subject matter does not include anything empirically given. If we wish to designate the direct object of its concern as the "psychic," then we must bear in mind that an inherent feature of that object is intentionality and the object is given to us eidetically. Charging Zenkovsky with misunderstanding the phenomenological reduction, Shpet wrote that he, Shpet, saw it as "the path from the empirically given in the world surrounding us to pure consciousness as the object of phenomenology." (2010b, p. 107) Thus, again we have no reason to think that Shpet disavowed transcendental phenomenology, as he understood it at the time. However, he did add the proviso—which will loom ever larger in the coming years—that phenomenology does not and cannot alone solve every problem. It is the fundamental philosophical discipline, but not the only philosophical discipline. Nor do we need to develop phenomenology to the last iota in order to solve every single problem.

6 Shpet's Ostensibly Mundane Studies

In 1916, Shpet published and defended his huge thesis, *History as a Problem of Logic*. Despite its mammoth size, the work, dealing as it does with historical methodology, displays no overt indication, one way or another, of an allegiance to transcendental idealism. Nonetheless, Shpet did complete a second volume to his study, though it remained unpublished during his lifetime.¹⁷ In this second volume, Shpet allowed himself at times to venture beyond simple scholarship into short meta-historical reflections. Largely abandoning Husserlian terminology, Shpet, nevertheless, retained his belief in the efficacy of the fact-essence dichotomy. In the introduction to this second volume, he again affirmed that a “scientific” investigation of any object whatsoever can take one of two forms: concrete or abstract. However, even a concrete investigation needs a foundation, a foundation that cannot be a generalized study of the concrete. Shpet wrote, “Of course, there can be no corresponding ‘general’ concrete fundamental science, but this does not mean that the special concrete sciences are left, so to speak, ‘without a foundation’” (2002, p. 564). That foundation is a study of “being in general,” which is ontological but, above all, phenomenological. Were it not for Shpet’s qualification of the fundamental science as ontological, we could certainly infer that he remained within the orbit of transcendental phenomenology. Thus, it is most disquieting and perplexing when he writes further on that philosophy of history, taken as philosophy, is given the task of cognizing what genuinely exists, relying for this on what is given from the fundamental philosophical discipline, namely phenomenology, but which Shpet also characterized as “universal ontology” (2002, p. 574). Did Shpet still have in mind here the conception of essences that Husserl wrote of in *Ideen I*?

Clearly, despite the misgivings engendered by some of Shpet’s utterances, he remained throughout the period spent composing his *History* text—whenever exactly that was—committed in some sense to phenomenology. As in 1914, he viewed phenomenology as a pre-theoretical investigation that, as such, serves as the foundation of a theoretical study of any discipline. He remarked, “In this sense, phenomenology is the universal fundamental science” (Shpet 2002, p. 577). It accomplishes its goal through description, non-theoretical description. That is, phenomenological description is not interested in constructing a system or a science, but in finding the foundations of the objects themselves being studied. This, in Shpet’s eyes, means to separate by way of description what does and does not belong to the investigated object. The result of such an operation, which effectively amounts to the eidetic reduction, is a cognition of the thing in itself.

¹⁷ Shchedrina writes that, based on Shpet’s letters and diaries, he wrote this second volume in the period 1912–1913. While certainly the chapters on Dilthey, Wundt, Rickert, et al. may date from early in this period, Shpet’s remarks on phenomenology could not have been composed prior to the appearance of *Ideen I*. Yet even such a dating of those remarks leaves open the question why Shpet’s terminology in the *History* referring to phenomenological techniques bears a stronger resemblance to that found in his works of a few years later than it does to that found in *Appearance and Sense*. See Shchedrina (2014, p. 143).

Shpet returned to the concept of the “social” in the “Conclusion” to the second volume of his *History*. There, he says that it is with the help of pure description that we obtain the meaning of the concept of the social. But where in what is given to the senses do we find “the social”? “Contemporary philosophy,” Shpet alleged, in debt to empiricism and rationalism and developed further by Kant, holds that the immediately intuited content of a perception is limited to what is presented to our senses. The problem of “the social” arises from this artificial and misguided limitation of intuition. Thus, Shpet asked us to seek in intuition, in the immediately given, what allows us to speak of the social and to form a concept of it. What in some intuition of a thing allows us to call it a social object? What is it about this thing, this ashtay, to use Shpet’s own example, that allows us to see that it can perform a *social* function? Shpet’s further discussion is largely a repetition of what we already observed in his earlier *Appearance and Sense*. However, here in the second volume of his *History*, Shpet saw the social given chiefly in what he now calls “intellectual intuition,” although he quickly added the caveat that it would be incorrect to conceive the social as given only in such intuition (2002, p. 1062). Furthermore, he specifically mentioned Husserl as having displayed the presence of essences in intuition.

Granted, then, that during the writing of the *History* Shpet largely retained his position regarding the practical efficacy of the eidetic reduction, did he also maintain an acceptance of the phenomenological reduction—and concomitantly an allegiance to transcendental idealism, even if unacknowledged? Earlier, we found that for Shpet phenomenology is the *fundamental* philosophical discipline, but not the only such discipline. In a particularly pregnant passage, Shpet wrote,

If we take to examine the sphere of the sense data of intuition, we can say of this entire content that it “exists” as present to us, that it is an “actual” being. If we, then, state that this being is not “absolute” (in Berkeley’s sense), that we establish this only with respect to “consciousness,” this does not prevent us from examining it independently of consciousness. In terms of the position laid out here, the “objective” cognition of reality lies in this. The sciences act in this way. Moreover, in strict conformity with this there is a demand: We not only can but we must, if we want objective scientific cognition, examine the given independently of consciousness, as if this dependence did not exist (although, of course, such a dependence is not thereby rejected) (Shpet 2002, p. 1041).

On the face of it, then, Shpet retained his *ultimate* philosophical commitment, in effect, to transcendental idealism. However, that commitment did not preclude other disciplines from undertaking their respective investigations *as though* there were no inextricable nexus between the *cogito* and the *cogitatum*. In the grand scheme of human knowledge, transcendental phenomenology has its role, but so do other disciplines, such as the natural sciences and, for example, history.

Finally, turning to certainly one of, if not the last narrowly focused pieces of *philosophical* reflection from Shpet’s pen, namely his essay “Wisdom or Reason?” from early 1917, we find additional corroboration for our above points. This essay, unmistakably, demonstrates a wide variety of concerns, the most apparent being to trace the kernel of “philosophy as knowledge”—Shpet’s euphemism for

his conception of phenomenological idealism—back to Parmenides.¹⁸ However, in another distinction, namely, between philosophy and pseudo-philosophy, Shpet remarked that the latter conceives being “not through thought and not in thought, but as if it were in itself and as it would then be” (1917, p. 9). In other words, genuine philosophy—philosophy as knowledge—studies being but always in connection with consciousness, as it is given to and in consciousness. Such, as we saw, is, in part, Shpet’s understanding of the phenomenological reduction. The “other” task of philosophy as knowledge, indeed its first task, is “to distinguish what is illusory from what is real or essential in given reality itself” (Shpet 1917, p. 12). What remains after removing what “fluctuates” is the essential task.

Shpet took particular umbrage with Bertrand Russell’s early infatuation with the idea of making philosophy mathematical. Elaborating on remarks we saw in *Appearance and Sense*, Shpet in 1917 viewed mathematics as an *abstraction* from consciousness. Admittedly both yield eidetic knowledge. However, whereas transcendental phenomenology—in Shpet’s now preferred locution, philosophy as knowledge—and mathematics deal with essences, the latter is not concerned “with the thought directed toward this object, as such” (1917, p. 15). In other words, mathematics deals with essences apart from their direct connection, and thus not in conjunction, with consciousness, itself conceived essentially. As a result, mathematics is, in Shpet’s terminology here, ontological. Certainly, mathematics differs from the empirical sciences of facts, the objects of which are contingent, but both concern themselves with a “dogmatic givenness, and not a philosophical one in the rigorous and precise sense” (Shpet 1917, p. 28).

We can hardly be surprised to find Shpet reaffirming his commitment to the distinction between experiencing and eidetic (or intellectual) intuition. However, we must recognize that they are actually a single intuition, but with different degrees of penetration, or of seeing, owing to a different attitude of consciousness. The transition to philosophy as pure knowledge, the “fundamental science” in principle, is accomplished by divorcing our eidetic judgments of all traces of contingency including their relation to the consciousness of an empirical subject. “For this, we must stop considering experience itself as a ‘dogmatically’ given thing of the real world” (Shpet 1917, p. 36). And, as we saw above, just as we cease concerning ourselves with experience dogmatically, i.e., in the natural attitude, so in phenomenology we “take consciousness not as an empirical experience of an individual, not as data of ‘observation’ or of ‘self-observation,’ but as consciousness given to consciousness, consciousness in a reflection on itself” (Shpet 1917, p. 37). Taken essentially, consciousness is not a “thing,” and, consequently, causality, a concept from the natural attitude, does not apply to it. It neither acts on mundane objects nor does anything mundane act on it. Consciousness, as an *eidōs*, cannot *belong* to something mundane, just as ideas do not belong to me or to any real being in space and time.

¹⁸ The very title of Shpet’s essay, though, is an allusion to his dispute with a friend, Lev Shestov, who also was on friendly terms with Husserl but who was, one might say, a philosophical antipode of Shpet and Husserl.

7 A Non-egological Phenomenological Idealism

Shpet, undoubtedly, devoted little attention to the narrowly focussed philosophical problems that haunted his Western contemporaries. However, in arguably his only piece of technical philosophizing, his 1916 essay “Consciousness and Its Owner,” Shpet argued specifically against the neo-Kantian and Husserlian conceptions of the ego, or “I.” To be sure, I as an individual human being have a consciousness, but, for Shpet, it does not follow from this that within phenomenology, i.e., after the performance of the reduction and thus within phenomenological idealism, we can speak without qualification of a “transcendental ego.” We saw above that even for Husserl there is a corresponding essence for everything given contingently. On this basis, we can speak of the essence of a particular human individual. Those, for whom such a claim is self-contradictory, “accept a particular psychological theory, according to which concepts are formed through a process of ‘generalization’.” (Shpet 2016, p. 14) However, from the phenomenological standpoint, matters stand differently. We can speak of the ideal correlate of an “I.” Nonetheless, if we remove all that is contingent from the “I”—thereby conceiving it to be only a “unity of consciousness”—to speak of consciousness as belonging to this essential “I,” as its possession, makes no sense. (Shpet 2016, p. 29) In support of this position, Shpet mentioned that we can and do speak of a social consciousness, which is conceived as a unity but which does not belong to an “I.”

Shpet recognized that Husserl in *Ideen I* introduced the notion of a transcendental I. This, Shpet found to be indefensible. Husserl provided there no evidence, no originary givenness of an I beyond or “behind” the mere unity of consciousness. Husserl had betrayed his own “principle of all principles” and introduced theory where none is needed (Shpet 2015, p. 40). In excluding the contingency of the given I with the epoché, we obtain an ideal I, i.e., a pure consciousness but only as an object, not as the subject of consciousness. This eidetic I is not the possession of someone; it is no one’s. Husserl succumbed to the temptation of subjectivism in positing an “I” as the foundation of consciousness, making it a necessary condition of the unity of consciousness. But *if* we would say that a transcendental I serves as the foundation of a single consciousness, to whom or what would we say is at the foundation of a social or collective or national consciousness? We can say only that the unity of consciousness has no such foundation; it is not a “property” or “possession” (Shpet 2015, p. 48). Husserl, with his transcendental I or ego, has forsaken his own achievement, making phenomenology a hybrid idealism, partially transcendental, but also partially metaphysical.

8 Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the intellectual concerns of Shpet and Husserl sharply diverged after Shpet’s return to Russia in 1914. Whereas Husserl increasingly

committed himself to viewing his position as an idealism and, concomitantly, to its elaboration as a form of idealism, Shpet turned to philosophy of language, aesthetics and other studies far removed from Husserl's more narrow purview. We ourselves can only wonder whether Shpet himself wondered about Husserl's philosophical trajectory during the former's isolation in 1920s Soviet Russia. Husserl's name rarely appeared in Shpet's writings from this period.¹⁹ Thus, it is all the more amazing that Shpet in a 1932 Soviet encyclopedia entry on himself (!) remarked that Husserl provided the correct solution to the problem of cognition through his introduction of the concept of "ideation." Furthermore, "we actually can with the help of reflection and the method of the reduction [...] come to a philosophical analysis and critique of consciousness, having taken immediate experience as our starting point" (Shpet 1932, p. 379). In this way, we see that even as menacing storm clouds swirled around him, when it would have been expeditious for him at least to have invoked the hallowed names of Marx and Lenin and express unbounded allegiance to them, Shpet instead invoked the name of a German bourgeois professor.

Most importantly for us here, Shpet remained committed to an acceptance of the phenomenological reduction, understood as a reflection on the processes of consciousness in which the *cogito* and *cogitatum* are taken essentially, and therefore without regard to matters of fact, i.e., to contingent existences. This adherence to the reduction as "first philosophy" entailed, at least tacitly, a commitment in turn to transcendental idealism, although Shpet refrained from characterizing his own position so.

Still, the philosophical trajectories of Husserl and Shpet sharply diverged. Husserl probed ever deeper into the explication of sense that he saw as intrinsic to transcendental idealism. Shpet too saw the importance of the explication of sense, but he also would have thought that Husserl's battle with solipsism, based on the works published during his lifetime, was of his own making. From Shpet's viewpoint, Husserl's error lay in his refusal to recognize that such explication is not merely a matter of the consciousness of a single individual, but also includes communal or social consciousness, albeit taken eidetically. As a result, the Husserlian characterization of transcendental idealism stands in need of an appropriate supplementation and also does not preclude mundane higher-order investigations.

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¹⁹ That, however, some information regarding the philosophical climate in Freiburg reached Moscow during this period is clear from N. Volkov's "Letters from Freiburg." See Volkov (2000). Still in his 1918 *Hermeneutics and its Problems* Husserl's name appears only in the last pages, and then only curtly.

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