

HISTORICISM: SOME THOUGHTS ON *LIFE-WORLD*

More than three decades ago, Walter Biemel read a paper at the Third Colloquium of Philosophy at Royaumont on "The Decisive Phases in the Development of Husserl's Philosophy" that seemed to be definitive.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the great value of the facts and reflections that he provided, and the numerous studies devoted afterwards to the same problem, it is not easy to fix different stages in Husserl's work. This difficulty is increased by the lack of a strict synchrony between the works that Husserl himself published and those that remained unpublished after his death and have been laboriously recovered by his disciples. Actually, in manuscripts belonging to early moments in his life we find theories which would appear in much later publications. Thus, the problems concerning subjectivity, focusing on the study of the "living *sôma*" (*der Leib*) and its kinesthetic experiences, and the knowledge of the "alter ego" by means of "empathy" (*die Einfühlung*), that were made public in the *Cartesian Meditations* in 1931, are outlined in his lectures on *The Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology* of the Winter Semester of 1910–11.

This might make us think that Husserl's thought developed continuously, without any sudden changes in its successive stages. However, I am going to suggest the possibility that the problem of history was the cause of an important turn in Husserl's thought, and that, together with it, many other subjects underwent perceptible changes in his work. In particular, the concept of "world", conceived as "surrounding world" (*Umwelt*) in the first part of the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology*, became the "concrete life-world" in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations* and in *The Crisis of European Sciences*. And it is from this "world" that, as a result of the phenomenological investigation, the "original life-world" of *Experience and Judgment* and the "primordial world" also studied in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation are both derived. That is to say, they are "worlds" that have to be reached by the phenomenological reduction starting from the "concrete life-worlds" penetrated by the sediments of history. In this paper I will try to determine their fundamental structures, insofar as the products of history elaborated by

the activity of the human subject are deposited in them, and inasmuch as they stem from investigations that have started from "worlds" historically constituted.

But it is also proper to ask to what extent a positive assessment of the historical implied a modification in the scope that the *a priori* had for Husserl, since it is well known that historicism, together with psychologism, were the objects of Husserl's attacks in *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* in 1911, insofar as they both rejected the validity of logical principles that had an *a priori* value. That is to say, *a priori* had always meant for Husserl "universal and necessary validity". And that *necessity* of which *a priori* is valid as a rational ground for any objectivity also means its *universal* validity for any form of consciousness. It is inconceivable, for example, that there are people who speak about things without displaying forms of consciousness that unify their various appearances as aspects of the *same* object; people who do not perform processes of *identification* by which the *sameness* of what is in any case an object is constituted, thus obeying the requirements of the principle of identity.

That means that an *aprioristic* interpretation of consciousness or of its intentional objects implies a certain historical compromise or, at least, it favours an interpretation of history that, no matter what its eventful course was, would have to respect the *a priori* applicability of the ontological principles and the essential structures that have validity in consciousness and in its objective world.

It is, therefore, understandable that Husserl rejected Dilthey's historicism in *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, since – Husserl quotes Dilthey's own words

The formation of a historical consciousness destroys more thoroughly than does surveying the disagreement of systems a belief in the universal validity of any of the philosophies that have undertaken to express in a compelling manner the coherence of the world by an ensemble of concept.<sup>2</sup>

That is, Husserl adds a few lines later, "historicism, if consistently carried through, carries over into extreme sceptical subjectivism". In fact, "the 'idea' of science [ . . . ] is a supratemporal one, and here that means limited by no relatedness to the spirit of one time. [ . . . ] Science is a title standing for absolute, timeless values. Every such value, once discovered, belongs thereafter to the treasure trove of all succeeding humanity and obviously determines likewise the material content of the

idea of culture, wisdom, *Weltanschauung*, as well as of *Weltanschauung* philosophy".<sup>3</sup> World-conceptions can be different and antagonistic; they can shape the image of the world in the most various ways according to the beliefs and values that predominate in them. "*Weltanschauungen* can engage in controversy; only science can decide, and its decision bears the stamp of eternity".<sup>4</sup>

In his Introduction to the correspondence exchanged between Dilthey and Husserl on the occasion of Husserl's challenge to historicism in *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, Walter Biemel lucidly summarizes the key to their antagonism:

The opposition between Dilthey and Husserl's conceptions of the essence of philosophy lies in their different attitudes toward history. While for Dilthey, history is essentially the place in which the spirit develops, in which it actualizes its self-understanding, for Husserl, in this period, history is rather the place in which the idea only obscurely comes to appearance, and therefore must be purified through the seeing of essences, which abstracts from everything that is historically factual.<sup>5</sup>

One must admit, in fact, that up to 1931, the year when the *Cartesian Meditations* were published, history is absent from the scene of Husserl's phenomenology. Only the first part of *First Philosophy* – the manuscript of which belongs to the Winter Semester of 1923–24 – shows a serious concern for the history of philosophical thought, but, strictly speaking, the problem of history in a broad sense is not considered. Now, that absence of history is due not only to the fact that phenomenology culminates in the intuition of the *essences* that rule *a priori* the functions of consciousness or the constitution of the corresponding objectivities; it also depends on the fact that, in the panorama of the situations that were the "starting point" for the phenomenological investigation and that constituted a world, the historicity that might be granted to that worldly spectacle was of little consequence. The formal logic that is developed in the *Logical Investigations* and that has as its central subject the statement and the analytical principles which govern it, assumed that its own structure is invariable throughout history. From the point of view of the logic of statement, the *world* is hardly mentioned in relation to the legitimacy (*Verträglichkeit*) of judgments, on which no historical accident can make an impression: "It is absurd to doubt whether the actual course of the world, the actual connection of the world, can conflict with the forms of thought", Husserl says in his Sixth Logical Investigation.<sup>6</sup>

It might be expected that the situation should change in the *Ideas*

for a *Pure Phenomenology*, since that work deals more extensively with the problem of the “surrounding world” (*die Umwelt*) as a “starting point” of the phenomenological investigation given in the “natural attitude”. And it is evident that the consideration of the *world* – as the universe of objects, the correlate of the actual and potential totality of the activities of consciousness – should facilitate the possibility of paying attention to its historical course. Actually, for Husserl worldliness means fundamentally the totality of the experiences that flow within the temporal and spatial horizons in which any event occurs. However, the phenomenology of Husserl, in the moment when it is developed as a transcendental logic in the *Ideas*, still disregards the historicity that might affect its “starting point”, the *surrounding world* that is the ground on which to build any investigation about the functions of subjectivity that can institute the objective situations that fill that world.

Therefore, in the period between 1900 and 1931, in which the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology* were published (1913), history is absent from Husserl’s problems – except for his attack on historicism. And that is so not only because his methodology was oriented towards the finding of essences with an *a priori* validity, beyond any temporal or historical contingency, but also because the historical dimension that the state of affairs filling the *surrounding world* might have, had been suppressed from it. Attentive to the epistemological problems in their strictly logical aspect, Husserl thought that he could take as the “starting point” or “leading thread” of his inquiries a *surrounding world* in which the only thing that counted was the spatio-temporal character of experiences, as if it were an empirical field not affected by historical vicissitudes, not even by the theoretical constructions, either scientific or cultural, that have risen on it and have changed throughout history. That is to say, the *surrounding world* that opens thus to the phenomenological investigations forms a subsoil on which the historical cultural constructions rise, and, in its own constitution as such a subsoil, only consists of the experiences and the temporal and spatial horizons that are supposed to be indifferent to the variation in the cultural formations that they support.

The situation undergoes a profound change when the *Cartesian Meditations*, and more extensively *The Crisis of European Sciences*, introduce the problem of the *concrete life-world* as a substitute for the *surrounding world* of the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology*. Now we are dealing with a *world* that becomes present in human life in the

concrete forms of the various cultural creations that have paraded throughout history. Therefore, the *concretion* attributed to the new *life-world* assumes the historical character of its components. Strictly speaking, the *surrounding world* of the *Ideas* could not be a real "starting point" for the phenomenological investigation: it was an abstract world from which the true concretion of things had been eliminated, since it had been considered only as a spatio-temporal frame filled with vague experiences.

It is then important to notice that the *concrete life-world* is formed by the objective situations embodied in the most relevant historical products that have developed in previous times or in the present. It is the world of those things we deal with in our daily lives, which embody those interpretations of themselves that have been forged by the historical moment in which we live or by the former times whose achievements still prevail. In our *concrete life-world* we find a Sun that has represented the center of the Earth's orbit for five centuries; vehicles that were invented not much sooner than the beginning of the century now coming to an end, and temples that are the testimony of religious beliefs that were born in certain moments of history. Moreover, it is formed by a matter constituted by atoms, according to physical theories that, since their naive beginnings in Ancient Greece, have finally prevailed in the last centuries.

Therefore, the *concrete life-world* does not now only consist of experiences that are the substratum of the presence of corporeal things, nor is it framed by a space and a time merely formal: its *concretion* means that it is formed by corporeal things carrying all the cultural elements that have been deposited in them and have decided their meaning, that meaning which allows us to understand and use them. In other words, the *concrete life-world* always belongs to a certain cultural environment – that of the subjects who live it in a determined historical moment. It is in this way that it can be the "starting point" for the phenomenological investigation, which will have to inquire into the consciousness activities that have constituted its objectivity and also to record the different levels of its constitution: from the elementary experiences that decide the presence of material things, to the more complex functions of reason that determine the scientific objectivity and the applicability of the ethical, religious and aesthetic values that shape things and turn them into "goods" for those different forms of conduct.

In the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, Husserl already poses the problem

of the *concrete life-world* in these terms. In § 43 he says that “there belong to the world [ . . . ] objects with *spiritual* predicates that, according to their origin and meaning, refer to subjects and, in general, to extraneous subjects and to their active constituting intentionality. Such is the case of all cultural objects (books, instruments, all kind of works, etc.) that, at the same time, enclose the meaning of the experience of what *is-there-for-everyone*”.<sup>8</sup> Further on, in § 58, he insists that the *concrete life-world* belongs to the different human communities that live it, since the fact that this *world* can be the same for all humanity, i.e., that we live it as shared by all human beings “does not exclude, nor *a priori* nor factually, that men of one and the same world can live in an isolated cultural community, or even without one, and that, accordingly, they constitute different surrounding worlds as concrete life-worlds (*als konkrete Lebenswelten*) in which communities, both in an active and a passive way, live relatively or absolutely isolated. Every man understands, in the first place, his concrete surrounding world, that is, his culture, in its nucleus and with a horizon still undiscovered, and he does it precisely as a man of a community that shapes that culture historically. Every member of that community can reach, in principle, a more profound understanding, an understanding that will open the horizon of the past, which is co-determinant for the understanding of the present itself; and he does so with an originality that is possible for him only, and that is not allowed to a man of another community that comes in contact with the first one”.<sup>9</sup>

I wish to emphasize that in the above lines of the *Cartesian Meditations*, a reference is made to a “plurality” and a “diversity” of the *concrete life-worlds* belonging to different cultural communities. This is an aspect of the *concrete life-world* that is not dealt with in the *Crisis* with the same emphasis. But in this latter work, as well as in the Introduction to *Experience and Judgment*, he insists that the *concrete life-world* is constituted not only by the level of the elementary experiences that we have of things – which in *Experience and Judgment* he called the *original life-world* – but also by the cultural “sediments” (*Niederschlage*) that have been deposited in them and that carry with them ideals leading to a *telos* that must dominate in the history of humanity. It is interesting to consider, for example, that § 34-e of the *Crisis* is entitled “The objective sciences as subjective constructs (*Gebilde*) – those of a particular praxis, namely, the theoretical-logical, which itself belongs to the full concreteness of the life-world”. Indeed,

theories are not things, like stones, houses or trees. "They are logical wholes. [ . . . ] But this or any other identity does not change in the least the fact that these are human formations, essentially related to human actualities and potentialities, and thus belong to this concrete unity of the life-world (*zu dieser konkreten Einheit der Lebenswelt gehörig*), whose concreteness thus extends farther than that of 'things'".<sup>10</sup> That persistence in our *concrete life-world* of the ideas created by Greek philosophy and of the ideals that lead our existence towards a full rationality is precisely one of the most seducing aspects of *The Crisis of European Sciences*; it is what makes this work a dramatic plea in defense of the rights of the rationality which is part of the legacy of Greek thought.

Before making a global balance of what the *concrete life-world* means for the realization of phenomenology as a transcendental logic that inquires into the functions of subjectivity that constitute that *world*, I would like to point out two of its aspects. In the first place, as Husserl says in §§ 50 and 51 of *The Crisis of European Sciences*, the *concrete life-world* is – as was the *surrounding world* in the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology* – the "starting point" (*der Ausgang*), the "leading thread" (*der Leitfaden*), the "index" (*das Index*)<sup>11</sup> for the investigations that try to "dismantle" it, exposing the activities of consciousness that have decided its objectivation. In spite of the emphasis that Husserl puts on the description of its ideal structures, of its rationality, the *concrete life-world* is not the result of his phenomenological investigation, but only a spectacle that provides the materials to perform that investigation. It will only have reached its end when it reveals the functions of consciousness that constitute the objectivity of the concrete life-world. That is to say, when it discovers the fundamental structures of that world which betray the subjective activities that decide its presence and its subjective validity. Those structures form the empirical network that appears as the *original life-world* in *Experience and Judgment*, and forms the *primordial world* in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation. In those empirical fields operate the eidetic functions that think the essential principles in which lies the apriorism concerning the functions of consciousness that are necessary and universal for all subjective activity – the objectivities of the world that condition universally and necessarily every concrete state of things. The *original life-world* is constituted by the original spatiality and temporality that apply in every temporal remembrance or prevision or in every spatial localization, as well as by the

individual experience of things and of the "typical" forms of their empirical structures. And the *primordial world* adds the configuration that decides that it belongs to a living *sôma*, that of the subject that experiences it. But on both worlds operates the analytical legality that decides their primary ontological structure, the system of formal essences that decide the universal structures of every object. All this means that those worlds have an intentional linking with the subjectivity that sets their objectivity; that is, with the subjectivity that operates in the living body that is proper to every subject and which marks the horizon of the experiences that form the original life-world and the primordial world studied in *Experience and Judgment* and in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, respectively, and on which the intelligible objectivities valid *a priori* in every worldly state of things are constituted.

Therefore, in spite of the richness of Husserl's analyses of the concrete life-world in *The Crisis of European Sciences* and of his poignancy when expressing his support for the validity of the ideals shaped by Greek philosophy and that constitute the *telos* that has guided the history of Europe for two thousand years, it is important to take into account that the achievements of phenomenology are only reached when the reduction has operated on that world and has discovered the empirical configurations that form the original life-world and the *primordial world*, as well as the logical principles that rule the essential intelligible structures that decide their intentional constitution.

But, in the second place, I wish to emphasize that the *concrete life-world* is presented in *The Crisis of European Sciences* from a historical perspective which amply develops that outlined in the above-quoted passage of the *Cartesian Meditations*. In contrast to the suspicions about history that prevailed in *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*, now Husserl vehemently proclaims the historicity that dominates philosophy and that his own phenomenology fully assumes. From the first pages of the *Crisis*, he openly declares that "we gaze backward into the history of our present humanity. We can gain self-understanding, and thus inner support, only by elucidating the unitary meaning which is inborn in this history".<sup>12</sup> And this is so because "we as philosophers are heirs of the past in respect to the goals which the word 'philosophy' indicates, in terms of concepts, problems, and methods. What is clearly necessary [ . . . ] is that we *reflect back*, in a thorough *historical* and *critical* fashion, in order to provide, *before all decisions*, for a radical self-understanding".<sup>13</sup> And later, in § 15, he insists: "Only in this way can we, who not only have a



spiritual heritage but have become what we are thoroughly and exclusively in a historical spiritual manner, have a task which is truly our own".<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that this emphasis on the historical condition of philosophy is due in great part to his conviction that the spirit that gave life to Greek philosophy and that proposed for the first time an ideal of human life dominated by rationality is still alive in present day philosophy. His rejection of the irrationalisms that grew dreadfully in the thirties and of the pragmatist movements that raised the efficiency of technology to the level of an idolatry destructive of the true values of humanity, the spread of "objectivist" doctrines that made scientism a cult that impoverished the creative power of reason, all pushed Husserl to demand the restoration of a philosophy that would recover faith in the ideals of Greek thought directed towards universally valid tasks.

But this appeal to the rationality born of Greek thought could only play a role in Husserl's phenomenology insofar as it became part of its own methodology; that is to say, insofar as it entered somehow in the contents and in the tasks assigned to phenomenological investigation. And this could only occur if the *concrete life-world*, as the "starting point" of its investigations, recorded that historicity that included, as one of its fundamental ingredients, the rational heritage of Greek thought. In other words, just as our *concrete life-world* – that which belongs to us as men of the twentieth century – records Copernicus' heliocentrism or the atomic theory of modern physics, it also records the legacy of rationality that we have received from Greek philosophy and that has a concrete expression in Roman law, in the New Science of the Renaissance, and in the philosophical vocation which has been present in our history in many different forms.

Now, it is obvious that the appeal to the *concrete life-world*, with its evident historicity, introduced a new element in the phenomenological methodology that, as I pointed out before, had omitted the problem of history until the year 1931 and had openly rejected it in *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*. This makes us pose the problem of *apriorism* again. If it means a *universal* and *necessary* validity that, therefore, should prevail in the *whole* course of history, up to what point can it be affected by the appearance of historicity in the same materials that provide the "starting point" of phenomenology, that is, in the *concrete life-world*? Does there not exist the risk that the *apriorism* becomes a merely *historical* event, belonging to certain epochs, relative to their mentality

and, therefore, lacking an absolute validity for the whole history of humanity? In any case, the *a priori* would be reduced to the functions of consciousness and to the corresponding objectivities that are the foundation of consciousness and to the corresponding objectivities that are the foundation for the constitution of the *concrete life-world* from which phenomenology starts. But would this not open up the possibility that that *a priori* varied with history, although it continued to be the repertoire of ontological suppositions with which the philosopher faces the alien *worlds* and which are valid as criteria for their comprehension? Then, it would be fortuitous that in each case that *a priori* permitted a true intellection of the alien *worlds* when it was congruent with the one prevailing in them.

Indeed, the phenomenologist could always say, faithful to his principles, that historical facts – the concrete contents of history – belong to the level of contingency, that is to say, to what phenomenological reduction brackets and eliminates from its analysis, in benefit of what is essential in any objectivity. Thus, phenomenology could maintain that eidetic reduction – the intuition of what is essential in every object or in every activity of consciousness, that which has *a priori* validity – does not depend at all on historical vicissitudes or on the variable contents that any *concrete life-world* could show.

However, the difficulty reappears if we consider that any phenomenological reduction derives from the *concrete life-world* that is proper to the phenomenologist who performs that reduction, since that *world* does not only offer the materials for the phenomenological analysis but is also the “leading thread” or the “index” for its realization. Moreover, phenomenology was always respectful with the material provided by the phenomena that make up the *surrounding world* or the *concrete life-world*, that is to say, the objective situations that become present in the natural attitude. In the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology* Husserl had already affirmed that “what is bracketed is not erased from the phenomenological chart, but simply bracketed and affected by an index. But, together with this, it enters the main subject of the investigation”.<sup>15</sup> This “index” can be used to emphasize what is essential in that which has been enclosed in the phenomenological brackets or to reduce it to its strict phenomenity, dispensing with its pretensions of being an absolute reality transcending the consciousness that one has of it. But, in the end, the *concrete life-world*, with its particular historical contents, is retained as a “starting point” of the investigation or as a “leading thread”

in the search for its essential conditions. In the second of the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl insists that "by the universal *epoche* regarding the being or the not-being of the world, we have not simply lost the world for phenomenology, we preserve it *qua cogitatum*".<sup>16</sup> That is to say, we retain it as an object for consciousness, but with the peculiarities of its concrete historical contents and – what is fundamental – as the "starting point" and "leading thread" for the phenomenological inquiries that depend on it.

So, the rigour of phenomenology – which repudiates all speculation, any theoretical construction in the form of deductive inference or any hypothesis about presumed entities that go beyond the strict phenomenic presence – had to force it to affirm that any objective structure or logical function that was discovered to be essential had that validity, insofar as it was found starting from a *concrete life-world*, that which is proper to the phenomenologist who carries out that investigation. The *a priori* value of every essential objectivity or of every objectivizing activity that pretends to be universal and necessary could uphold that pretension as long as it is made clear that its findings had come from the *concrete life-world* that the investigator experiences and that, strictly speaking, it was an *a priori* whose validity was only guaranteed by its efficiency within that concrete world and by its ability to realize, from within it, the interpretation of other worlds.

It must be pointed out that the *a priori* essences display a universal validity, that is to say, a validity for *every concrete life-world* which we know of. The infinite divisibility of space, for example, is not only valid for the space that extends in the world in which we, people of the twentieth century, live, but we also project it on to the geometrical conceptions of other times and it serves us as a standard to judge their correctness. However, an elemental phenomenological wariness should make us acknowledge that the validity of what we judge to be essential for some particular objects is brought into play by us from the *concrete life-world* that belongs to us, and that we can only extend it to other conceptions or to other *worlds* from the perspective provided by our world, that of our historical moment.

It could also be argued that the ontological principles that are valid *a priori* in our conception of the world have been formulated in different ways throughout the history of philosophy. It is well known, for example, that the principle of contradiction has undergone very different formulations that greatly affect its sense, since the times it

was glimpsed by Parmenides as incompatibility between being and not-being, up to the analytical formulas that exclude the simultaneous truth of “*p*” and “not-*p*”. But I have avoided that argument because the apriorist could always contend that the versions that differ from the present one – or from the one that he considers to be correct – are erroneous and do not at all impair the rigorous formulation of that logical principle.

In order to avoid that discussion, which could be endless and which does not get to the bottom of the question, I have kept myself to something more elemental and decisive for a phenomenological consideration: to the warning that the *concrete life-world* that belongs to us at present – and that differs from other *concrete life-worlds* of other times or of other cultural environments because “idealizations” very peculiar to its own time were embedded in it – is the “starting point” and the “leading thread” for the phenomenological inquiries that show that which is essential. Therefore, the validity of the objectivities and logical functions that are thus credited as valid *a priori* will be unavoidably linked to the *concrete life-world* that has favoured their being found. Their apriorism means, then, that they are the foundations of the constitution of the world and that they are considered necessary for that constitution: even more, that they are posed “as if” they were valid for every *life-world* logically constructed.

This approach could be said to have a relativist flavour, since it holds that a phenomenology should acknowledge that the validity of what pretends to be *a priori* has to be linked to the *concrete life-world* that conditions its being found and makes the *a priori* be relative to the theoretical and practical constructions that have been deposited in that *world*. But *relativism* is only censurable when it contradicts itself and is formulated as disguised absolutism, that is to say, if it maintains that the principle of the relativity of every theory to a historical moment or to any perspective whatsoever has an absolute value as such principle. But I have not maintained this. In agreement with the assertion that everything that appears as essential is linked to the historical situation in which it is asserted – to the *concrete life-world* from which it comes – I must say that this relativist thesis is valid for a phenomenological perspective belonging to our own time, since it must be acknowledged that phenomenology is a philosophical movement characteristic of the twentieth century and must be taken as such in order to avoid any unjustified speculations and presumptions.

And finally, I want to point out – insisting on what has been advanced – that the historicist interpretation of the *a priori* that I have outlined does not mean its suppression in any way. On the contrary, I dare to say that *apriorism* is a transcendental condition of human thought in any of its manifestations. Every opinion, every thesis or every known objectivity are constituted in agreement with objective structures or with logical principles that pretend to be valid *a priori*. That is to say, that pretension is necessary for every form of objectivizing consciousness, or, using the words with which Husserl, in his Vienna Lecture of 1935 on “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity”, refers to the ideals that have constituted the spiritual *telos* of European humanity, we can say that it is a “vital presentiment” (*eine lebendige Vorahnung*)<sup>17</sup> that animates the principles that found every theoretical and practical construction made by man with pretensions of necessity. But any activity of consciousness could not be exercised or manifested unless it had the possibility of a universal communication, and this supposes that there exist not only meanings that can be shared, but also some essential ontological principles that pretend to be valid for everyone. I would not speak if I did not think it possible that my opinions could, at least, be understood by those who listen to me, and I have an even better reason to make use of ontological principles that, because of their fundamentality in respect to any objective situation, have an *a priori* formulation – are valid *as if* they were universal and necessary. Quite a different matter is that this pretension is confirmed by the facts or by the contingencies of human communication. And it would not be the first time that the difficulties to achieve the complete fulfilment of certain principles have forced their correction.

But from the point of view of a phenomenological argumentation, what I wish to emphasize is that this “presentiment” of the *a priori* validity of the ontological principles that mark the necessary and universal conditions of thought and of its intersubjective understanding is not trivial, although it is restricted by its link to the *concrete life-world* that belongs to it. It is a validity in respect to principles whose formulation and contents must be considered as relative to a concrete moment in history. This means that it is a validity that can be modified if the general coordination of those principles and their efficacy to account for new situations or experiences demand it. However, we necessarily resort to those principles *as if* their *a priori* validity were most firmly guaranteed. Thus this *a priori* validity of the ontological principles that mark

the fundamental conditions of the *concrete life-world* is a "presentiment" that cannot be rejected, since it necessarily promotes its use. Moreover, that *apriorism* is an unavoidable condition in order to establish dialogue with other people, with other cultures, *as if* their behaviour and their language were governed by the same *a priori*. Only the practice of dialogue or the interpretation of the theoretical or practical behaviour of other people will discover the limits of that *a priori*, its shortcomings and the possibility of its substitution by another *a priori*. It could be said that every *a priori* is provisional but that, in spite of that temporary character, a theoretical or practical behaviour cannot function without the "presentiment" that its principles are universally and necessarily valid. And "the fusion of worldly horizons" – using Gadamer's words – is only possible when there are systems of principles operating in different worlds that pretend to have an *a priori* validity in all of them in spite of their worldly diversity. Their congruence permits – from the perspective of each one of those systems and from the corresponding *concrete life-worlds* – a plausible translatability of the situations existing in the others, although sometimes this also reveals the differences that make them to be different *worlds* that have been constituted by historical vicissitudes on systems of divergent principles.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Cahiers de Royaumont: Husserl* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957).
- <sup>2</sup> *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, p. 324 in the edition of *Logos I* (1911). (I quote Peter McCormick's translation of this work.)
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- <sup>5</sup> In *Husserl. Shorter Works*. ed. by Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (University of Notre Dame Press and The Harvester Press, 1981), p. 201.
- <sup>6</sup> *Logische Untersuchungen* §66. p. 729/24 (*Husserliana* Vol. XIX/2).
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Book I, especially §§ 1, 27–30, 39 and 47.
- <sup>8</sup> *Cartesianische Meditationen*. p. 124/8 (ed. *Husserliana*).
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160/20.
- <sup>10</sup> *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, p. 132/18 (ed. *Husserliana*). I quote David Carr's translation.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175/38 and 177/34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, § 5, p. 12/26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, § 7, p. 16/6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, § 15, p. 72/9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. § 76, p. 174/26.

<sup>16</sup> *Cartesianische Meditationen*. § 15, p. 75/4.

<sup>17</sup> *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (Beilage: Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie), p. 321/11.