

NATURE, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE LIFE-WORLD

ELEMENTS IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON HUSSERL'S IDEAS II AND THE CRISIS

In 1913 Edmund Husserl published *Ideas I*,¹ which, as the subtitle tells us, is a “General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology.” Closely connected with this he was working on issues which were meant to “materialise” (or “substantialise”) that “pure” philosophy which *Ideas I* develops, by conducting analyses in the phenomena-regions of material and animal nature and the spiritual world. Those were to be published too, as the direct continuation of what had already been published, but they never were—not by Husserl himself. Nevertheless, “he worked on the pertinent manuscripts with some interruptions until 1928,” to take Alfred Schütz’s word for it.² Then in 1952, they were published from those manuscripts, as *Ideas II* and *Ideas III*,³ fourteen years after Husserl’s death.

There are, of course, interesting questions related to this history⁴ and the whole complex of the *Ideas* volumes, the internal relations, functions, etc., between those fields of investigation the three books explicate (the “pure” vs. the “material,” transcendental reduction and constitutional analysis etc.), but those are not the primary subject of this paper. The issue I will here treat concerns solely some aspects of *Ideas II*, and the *focus* of the (textual) analysis here will not even be on the main text itself, but on one of the *Supplements*, one which Husserl probably worked on in 1917.⁵ I will, however, present some main themes of the book quite generally and at the same time develop a *perspective* on its issues, one which is not (primarily) given by *Ideas I*, but rather will be grounded in the context of the *Crisis*,⁶ the work from Husserl’s last period that developed transcendental phenomenology—and *explicitly* made the *life-world* an issue with transcendental significance. (Then the title of this paper, “Nature, Subjectivity and The Life-world” may appear realisable with its intended sense.)⁷

Thus bringing those two texts, the *Ideas II* and the *Crisis*, together, let us give some clues, which only quite generally describe their contents. *Ideas II* is concerned with the *constitutional problems* of *material nature*, *animal nature* and the *spiritual world*, respectively, which then means concrete analyses investigating the meaning-functions and -formations grounding (the possibility for) our highly meaningful relation with our surrounding world,

these including (or being): a) the nature we experience, live in and know around ourselves that is material (Section One); b) the nature as we experience, know and live «in» (and, of course, «around») ourselves that is “animal,” i.e., our souls or psyches (Section Two); and c) the spiritual world, such as we know and experience in social, linguistic praxes, cultural objects, etc. (Section Three). In correlation with those we naturally also have the sciences that correlate to these realms, which sciences themselves belong in realm “C” and which are mainly grouped as the natural sciences, psychology and the humanities, respectively. These investigations “constitute” and go into the “originary” phenomenologically, concretely analysing, thus (as the reduction is functioning) acquiring their transcendental-constitutive character. The spiritual world has a sort of philosophical priority, and is basically characterised by the functioning of motivation, with which, of course, all normal human beings experience and have acquaintance with in their lives.⁸

The *Crisis* can then be compared with this work since it contains an analysis of nature, or better, a critical analysis of the modern scientific understanding of nature, as it was grounded by Galileo in the Renaissance (Part II, especially §9). Since the *Crisis* gives an analysis of psychology, it is also then related to the understanding of the psyche or soul (Part III B); but it also, of course, addresses the transcendental problem (Part III A, but also B), that being its core issue, which in this context (nevertheless) is then situated in a phenomenological understanding of tradition and the history of philosophy and science (Parts I and II), explicating something of what we might characterise as the spiritual, historical world. In the *Crisis* this is understood in terms of its «origin,» thus explicitly making the life-world the decisive grounding on which the whole project is built, and also relating it to the actual historical situation (Part I), as Husserl conceives it (in the 1930s).

On the one hand, the philosophic-scientific tradition embodies a deep-seated telos and a historical teleology that makes us what we have become as participants (even as “Funktionäre”) in a culture and civilisation profoundly marked by science; this constitutes a decisive motivation which is immanently functioning in history itself. And on the other hand, we encounter a deep-seated crisis which deeply touches both human beings as they are concretely living their lives, and the sciences as they have developed and are functioning in the actual historical situation. Explicating concepts for understanding this situation, the *Crisis* seems to establish a genuine philosophical motivation, one that correlates both the historical teleology and the actual situation, for going into and being a genuine participant in the very sort of a transcendental-phenomenological project which the *Crisis* is developing. But

all this, of course, is not without some relation to—even foundation in—that phenomenological project Husserl has been working on most of his life. You might then say there is an internal continuation on which at least Husserl himself insists⁹ and a sort of critique of science, or rather critique of philosophical thinking about science (objectivism, positivism, etc.), and above all, in a historical context, the life-world seems to be grounding the whole undertaking, even transcendental-phenomenologically.

Keeping in mind, trying to realise, this horizon of issues and perspective, let us then look into *Ideas II* in a more elaborate presentation. As already mentioned, it goes into the constitutional analyses of material nature, animal nature and of the spiritual world. But just what is constitutional analysis or “constitution”? That has not yet been made clear. It is, however, fairly obvious that those fields of investigation now presented reflect what people normally conceive of as “reality,” such that you also find the groups of sciences distinguished in accordance with them, they having their respective fields of objectivity. To Husserl then, these are the objective regions, now to receive constitutional analyses, which, of course, in the context of the whole complex of the *Ideas* studies, involves transcendental consciousness (so to speak “constituted” in/by/through the reduction explicated in *Ideas I*), thus making it possible to describe objects with their essential characteristics, for example, the regional genus the “real thing.” This then opens the way for material, concrete investigation to answer questions such as: How is the real thing perceived, conceived? What are the rules you have to comply with in doing so... which are thus possibly constituted along with the transcendental modes a thing has a priori?

The answers to these questions are really not surprising, echoing Kant’s (and natural science’s) ways of looking at the substantial characteristics of a real thing: It is necessarily extended, it is in time, part of causal connections, has its unity, and so forth. But there are more regions besides, and above all, the possible a priori characteristics you might assign in this procedure are arrived at phenomenologically out of the *positing-intuitional meaning* that the objects of each region appear with. Generally speaking, to put it in Schütz’s words, “Each region prescribes rules for the course of possible intuitions and serves, thus, as a guiding clue (*Leitfaden*) for the systematic description of the correlation between the determinate appearing object as a unity and the determinately infinite multiplicity of its appearances. The problem of constitution [. . .] betokens nothing further than the analysis of this correlation and its underlying rules by means of eidetic description.”¹⁰

Let us stick to this characterisation, which has its core in that correlation between the determinate appearing object as a unity and that infinite multiplicity of its appearances, then systematically describable, since this (also) complies with those rules each region prescribes. There are, however, questions that arise since neither are the different regions without interconnections nor is the experiencing subject without relation to other possibly experiencing subjects. To constitute (the meaning of) objectivity, you have to take intersubjectivity into consideration as well. And then this whole field of problems, i.e., how the regions may interrelate, along with the problem of intersubjectivity, has to be part of the constitutional analyses, even though this whole set of issues is to be ruled by transcendental consciousness or subjectivity, presumably conducting the analyses in accordance with essential determinations.

Then looking more closely at *Ideas II* itself, quite generally described, there are, it seems, two different tendencies or movements going on therein at the same time, and going, so to speak, in opposite directions: On the one hand, we may follow 1) the progression of the text, first constitutively grounding that “material nature” containing real things, governed by causality, etc., on which both “the animal” and “the spiritual” at first might seem to be grounded, along with, however, in due succession *their* constitutional grounding. On the other hand, we ultimately learn 2) that it is the spiritual which has priority when it comes to the ontological determinations of the whole issue. Then spirit, with motivation as its governing, fundamental law, is first—at last.

But, of course, conceiving of material nature as the foundation both for the animal (the soul) and the spirit is quite natural to the mind of secular cast, even though religious thinking might put it the other way around. But the analyses of *Ideas II* are conducted according to neither naturalistic, secular nor religious thought; they are constitutional analyses as indicated above, conducted following transcendental leading-clues, and they are philosophical. But as such, would not they have to comply with main turns and positions in philosophy, for example, idealism or materialism? As Husserl obviously is giving a kind of ontological priority to the spiritual, does *Ideas II* embody an idealism or a philosophy of spirit, besides determining the framework for realising this whole transcendental project?

I will only indicate an answer to these questions by pointing to the reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who in *his* analysis of *Ideas II*, says that phenomenology is neither a materialism nor a philosophy of spirit, since its main contribution (in the end) is the laying bare of the *pretheoretical* dimension (in which

those two idealisations come to be justified and are transcended at the same time), and also speaks of a third dimension, one in which the clear-cut distinction between the objective and the subjective becomes problematic.¹¹ Our context, that of now trying to establish a perspective that indicates a possible substantial motivation for a comparison between *Ideas II* and the *Crisis*, calls for the question of *how* these characterisations fit in with the conception of the life-world in the *Crisis* with this conception, or rather phenomenological horizon, then yielding the perspective for analysing the substance(s) of *Ideas II*, as concretely required in accordance with constitutional analysis.¹²

For the time being, just assuming some conception of the life-world, and then reminding ourselves of those two opposite tendencies (one proceeding from material nature, the other from the spirit) we mentioned in characterising *Ideas II*, let us, however, enter “the-middle-in-between,” i.e., the constitutional field for animal nature, for the soul or the psyche (Section Two). In the perspective of *Ideas I*, you very likely might now say that it is the Pure Ego which is constituting the soul, and the text does indeed, analyse the Pure Ego, also distinguishing the real Ego. But in fact, the analysis in *Ideas II* does not constitute the soul or animal nature, which is different from material nature, *immediately* from the Pure Ego itself, as its immediate creation, so to speak. The constituting functions rather seem to be integrated with, interwoven with, the structures of material nature, as naturally as those that were constituted before (in Section One). But they are integrated not only with nature as such; the analysis at the same time thematises the personalistic attitude (§ 34), even at the start (Introduction) speaking of the sense of ordinary speech about the “psyche” (§20) and “I as man” (§21), laying down some clues from which we might constitute or rather materialise something spiritual in a plain, life-worldly sense.

The impact of this, of course, is not at all clear, but it seems as though the analyses are conducted in-between the more general, undecided “spiritual” and the basic meaning-functions and-formations of nature, which were first laid down centred around a “thing” and are now extended to include animal nature. The Pure Ego that then, so to speak, objectifies itself as “soul” whilst constituting the meaning-formations making up a field for investigations in which the material content (senses) of real consciousness appears to be (“is”) *interdependent* and interwoven with the functions of pure consciousness. Husserl plainly puts it this way: “Es gilt also, den echten Begriff vom Seelischen ‘aus der Erfahrung zu schöpfen’ ”.¹³

Thus, what is specifically “animal” as distinct from “material nature” appears; the psyche or soul does not exist as a physical thing and is itself