Husserl’s philosophical influence has gone through high and low periods for over a century, but since his initial engagement with Frege in the 1890s he has continuously been a player on the cultural scene. There were times when he was overshadowed by some other figure or movement – he was somewhat eclipsed by Heidegger in the late 1920s and the 1930s, and by postmodernism in the last part of the 20th century – but each of these periods was followed by a substantial resurgence, and even now interest in his work is showing up in places where it had not been visible in the past. We can apply to his philosophical work the motto of the city of Paris, *fluctuat nec mergitur*; it is tossed about but it never sinks, and I think we all agree that Husserl’s phenomenology is now safely ensconced in the cultural firmament, far from the turbulence of our sublunar world, where authors devour or clamber over one another in the struggle for survival. Husserl’s philosophy did not just have its day in the sun; it has joined the celestial bodies. It has become something like a “separate intelligence,” a presence and a power beyond the vicissitudes of change.

1. Husserl and the perennial issues of philosophy

I would like to offer a specific explanation for the continuing attraction and influence of Husserl’s thought. It is not just that he provides a number of valuable analyses, such as his analytical descriptions of categoriality, perception, temporality, memory, corporeality, and logic. More fundamentally and more comprehensively, the reason his work endures is that it restores philosophy itself. Husserl clarifies what it means to enter into the philosophical life. He clarifies first philosophy, *prôti philosophia*, as a theoretic venture, and he used the name *Erste Philosophie* for a course he gave in the winter semester of 1923-24.\(^1\) Husserl recovers philosophy. He opens or revives a prospect that is always threatened by obscurity and always needs to be refreshed. As Thomas Prufer writes, “Philosophy is perennial, but it is also ephemeral; it is continually being blurred and destroyed and transformed into something not itself, and so if we wish to philosophize, we are continually faced with the task of rediscovering and restoring philosophy.”\(^2\)

Husserl shows how philosophy is a distinct form of thinking, and he shows how it differs from other forms, in particular those of the various sciences and world-views. He does this in his discussion of the transcendental reduction, in which he examines how we take up a stance that is different from all the partial and practical attitudes we have; in the epochê and reduction we stand back and look at the whole of things, including our own being as part

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of the whole. In his many efforts to define his transcendental phenomenology, Husserl has, in effect, been reconnecting with classical philosophy, which, in its Aristotelian formulation, theorizes being as being as it looks to the whole of things. Husserl’s treatment of the transcendental reduction and his description of the phenomenological attitude justify all his particular analyses; he is able to show how and why these analyses are not just empirical or psychological but philosophical, and he also shows that his analyses are apodictic. Through his work we can see why philosophy not only can be aprioristic, but why it must be such. Husserl explicitly defines the philosophical life, which is the life dedicated to truth in its unrestricted and most comprehensive form.

To more vividly define Husserl’s achievement, let us consider for a moment the development of ancient philosophy. The philosophical figures we study in the history of ancient thought are not a random collection. There is a unified progression through the Presocratics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Neoplatonists. They all develop philosophy as a way of knowing and as a way of life dedicated to knowing. They all recognize the being, the intelligibility, and the good of things. These thinkers do not all say exactly the same things; each of them brings out aspects that others may have neglected, but even as they bring out something original they usually let something else slide into obscurity; gains are accompanied by losses. This is the grand narrative of classical philosophy. Over against this narrative, however, we can also discern counter-philosophical pressures, ways of thinking that counteract philosophy and question its very possibility, and these counter-philosophical positions are not just Greek and Roman but perennial. They are as enduring as philosophy itself. Two of the most prominent “non-philosophies” of the ancient world are reductive atomism, found in the original Democritean atomists and in the Epicureans; and sophistry and historicism, found in the original sophists. The atomists were a kind of scientific substitute for philosophy, while the sophists represented a historicist or relativistic alternative. Philosophy always has to define and defend itself against these two opposing forces. The struggle to do so is endemic to the human condition. Because there is such a thing as philosophy, there also are counterfeits that are played off against it, things that only look like or claim to be philosophy.3

Husserl offers the possibility, in our day and age, of a return to first philosophy. In Aristotle, first philosophy is defined as the theorizing of being as being. It is also called metaphysics, even though it was not given that name by Aristotle himself. The book in which Aristotle carries out this first philosophy was entitled *ta meta ta physika* by its editors. They called it the study of issues that are “beyond” the physical things. Going beyond the physical things is often thought to be an effort to deal with separate, nonmaterial substances, but it does not just mean that. In fact, the study of separate entities comprises only a small part of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. His first philosophy spends most of its time examining things like predication, truth and falsity, contradiction, substances and accidents, definition, form and substrate, and the potential and the actual. Metaphysics theorizes truth; it is the *theôria têς alêtheias*, and the human attainment of truth is an achievement that goes beyond any physical process.

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3 In *Metaphysics* IV 2, 1004b17–b26, Aristotle says that both dialecticians and sophists try to appear to be philosophers. The implication is that they themselves could not be such a mere *show* if there were no true philosophy.
Philosophy goes beyond physics because logic, truth, contradiction, and predication, for example, and the grasp of definitions, are not among the motions, the *kinēseis*, that occur in simply material entities. They are beyond the physicals, *meta ta physika*. They belong to being as being and not to being as material and mobile, and so when Aristotle turns to the examination of being as being, he also turns to the study of intellect as intellect or mind as mind.

This is also what Husserl does. We could define his phenomenology as the study of intellect as intellect, mind as mind, or reason as reason. Perhaps it would be most appropriate to call it the study of truth as truth. In order to venture out on this study, Husserl needs to differentiate his inquiry from something less ultimate, just as Aristotle did. But Husserl does not distinguish his first philosophy from the study of physical things; in his day and age he needs especially to distinguish it from psychology, so a book containing Husserl’s first philosophy could appropriately have been entitled *ta meta ta psychika* or the “Metpsychics.” And just to round out this set of comparisons, we might also observe that Plato too moves into a first philosophy by contrasting it against a less ultimate science, and in his case it is mathematics. Plato’s first philosophy could appropriately have been called something like *ta meta ta mathēmatika* or the *Metamathematics*.

I would like to add yet another way in which Husserl moves beyond a lower science in order to move on to first philosophy. He himself does not highlight this approach, but I think it is present in his writings and that it deserves attention. It could be considered a distinct “way” to the transcendental ego, along with what Iso Kern has called the Cartesian, ontological, and psychological ways to reduction. Husserl goes beyond the world given to the natural attitude and he goes beyond psychology, but he also goes beyond what we could call the “apophantic” domain, the realm of meaning and propositions, which Frege calls the realm of sense (*Sinn*). In doing so, Husserl moves beyond logic as an apophantic science, which studies the structures of this domain. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, he distinguishes the apophantic domain and its formal logic from the transcendental subject and its transcendental logic. Husserl’s first philosophy, consequently, could be called the science of *ta meta ta logika* or *ta meta ta apophantika*. His science presupposes and examines the kind of truth we achieve in our experience of things, in the truth of correctness, and in the questions raised by formal logic. I believe that it is important to distinguish phenomenology from the kind of science that reflects simply on the apophantic domain. We have access to the apophantic realm through what I would call propositional reflection, which is radically different


5 Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik*, ed. by Paul Janssen, Husserliana XVII (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1974). Husserl distinguishes the apophantic domain from the ontological in chapters 2 and 4 of this book. He explains the difference between these two domains by his treatment of apophantic reflection in §§42–46. He admits that apophantic reflection is carried on in a prephilosophical manner; only in Part II of the book does he move “from formal to transcendental logic,” a phrase that is the title of Part II. It is very clear that the turn to the apophantic realm is different from the reduction to the transcendental domain.
from transcendental, philosophical reflection. The philosophical examination of truth is different from the logical analysis of meaning.

Husserl examines consciousness and psychological reality insofar as it enters into the activities of intellect or nous. He studies consciousness and psychological things insofar as they enter into truth. Just as Plato and Aristotle consider the natural, material world as inherently mobile and pervaded by change, so Husserl thinks of the psychological world as in perpetual motion; he sometimes calls consciousness a Heraclitean stream and he says that the world is given to us “ständig in strömender Jeweiligkeit.” Aristotle transcends the world of matter and motion by discovering substance, while Husserl discovers the identity of things, an identity confirmed and targeted by categorial intentionality, which is an activity of intellect.

Husserl also deals with the two classical counter-philosophical positions that I mentioned earlier, materialist atomism and sophistry. He differentiates his philosophy from the worldly science of mathematical physics, and he also differentiates it from the psychologism and historicism that were given an even more powerful form in our time by Nietzsche, even though Husserl did not explicitly respond to his work. Husserl achieves this definition of the special status of philosophy especially in his analysis of the transcendental reduction, in which he opens the dimension or the space in which philosophical language and discourse find their place. We can interpret his turn to the subject not as an innovation but as a return, in a modern vocabulary, to the perennial philosophical issue. This achievement is not a going back in time but a movement to what is always there as a human possibility.

2. Some remarks from Leo Strauss

I will use some quotations from the writings of Leo Strauss to confirm my interpretation of Husserl. Strauss is recognized as a major figure in the revival of classical political philosophy in the 20th century. There is practically no treatment of political philosophy in Husserl, but Strauss still acknowledged the importance of his work. In a letter to Eric Vogelin dated 9 May 1934, Strauss writes, “Husserl has seen withincomparably clarity that the restoration of philosophy or science . . . presupposes the restoration of the Platonic-Aristotelian level of questioning.” Strauss speaks not about any particular question but about a “level” of questioning. I would rather call it a “dimension” of inquiry, but the difference between the two spatial metaphors is irrelevant; the main point is that a particular kind of thinking is called for, that it differs from standard and partial thinking, and that Husserl is vividly aware of its distinctness. The kind of questioning introduced by Husserl will be of considerable significance for political philosophy. Strauss continues, “[Husserl’s] egology can be understood only as an answer to the Platonic-Aristotelian

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7 Peter Emberly and Barry Cooper, Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), p. 17. I am grateful to John C. McCarthy for bringing this letter to my attention.
question regarding . . . *Nous.*” In another letter written a few months later, Strauss repeats this observation concerning *nous* and mentions “the enormous difficulties of understanding *De Anima* III 5 ff.” He thus connects Husserl’s work more specifically with the issue of the active or agent intellect in the Aristotelian tradition. In another place, in an essay entitled “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” Strauss mentions the neokantianism of the Marburg School, which interested him during his student years, and he says that Husserl told him, “The Marburg school begins with the roof, while I begin with the foundation.”

These remarks of Strauss can help us discuss how Husserl revives the classical question of human knowing, the classical question of intellect or *nous*. It is true that Husserl says he wants to begin with the deepest foundations of consciousness, that he wishes to start with the foundation and not with the roof, but it seems to me that all his analyses already have the dimension of intellect in view. Even when he analyzes prepredicative experience, for example, he thinks of it as the foundation for categorial and predicative activity. His phenomenology is never a study of sheer sensibility but of sensibility pervaded by and leading to reason and intelligence. In fact, it is hard to imagine how anyone could analyze sheer sensibility phenomenologically. There would be nothing there to think about, nothing to grip.

If we consider some of the major themes in Husserl’s work, we will find that they each articulate some way in which intellect realizes itself within human consciousness. Husserl is concerned with what Thomas Prufer has called “the anthropology of *nous*. “ I would like to examine three instances of this presence of intellect in our experience as they are explored by Husserl.

1. Consider first the ideality of meaning, the fact that when a proposition or judgment or any other categorial entity returns in our awareness, it always recurs as exactly the same despite the difference in its location in our personal history. It also returns as the same when it is possessed by different minds. If a proposition did not recur as ideally the same, it could not serve as a premise in an argument, it could not be contradicted or confirmed by others, it could not be questioned or doubted. Without such ideality there would be no proofs or theorems, no rhetoric or dialectics, and no laws for political life. Furthermore, this ideality of a proposition occurs even across the difference between the states of vagueness and distinctness. If we achieve a judgment vaguely and then bring it to distinctness, which we do when we effectively carry it out after we have only passively and confusedly received it, one and the same judgment is there to be identified

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8 Ibid., p. 35, in a letter dated 11 October 1934.


in both modes of presence. Such ideality is the work of intellect; even vagueness is a state of intellectual activity.

2. Second, consider the act of remembering. Human remembering, as described by Husserl, is the recollection carried out by a rational agent. When we remember something we experienced in the past, we displace ourselves into the past situation and we recall not only the thing that we remember but also ourselves as experiencing it. We have a more or less explicit awareness of our own past selves. We thereby become more present to ourselves and our identity is enhanced. Our own personal identity comes into play in memory, and this kind of identification is the work of an intellect that has become involved in imagination and other forms of internal sensibility. It is an intellectual self that can possess itself in this remembered way, as well as in the kind of displacements that occur in phantasy and in anticipation of our own future selves. As intellectual beings we can live in the present and in the past and future, as well as in imaginary worlds; we transcend our present moment.

3. My third example is perhaps more controversial. Consider the form of inner time-consciousness. This is the deepest layer of consciousness, deeper than perception, reflection, memory, and imagination, and Husserl arrives at it by contrasting it with remembering. Such inner timing takes place in the living present, and it is articulated into impressions, protentions, and retentions. This elementary flow— as well as the form that orders this flow— is beneath everything; it is beneath the ego itself, it is pre-egological, and we might be tempted to think that it is common to all conscious creatures. We might want to think that it occurs even in animals, for example, and that it is merely the lowest, deepest level of sensibility. But I would suggest that it should not be interpreted in this way; I would suggest that inner timing is the awareness, differentiation, and flowing that is proper to the intellect in time. Just as human remembering is the intellect embodied in imagination, so inner timing is the intellect as simply embodied in matter and motion. My remarks are somewhat speculative; I have not run into texts of Husserl where he says whether or not this level of awareness is common to animals and men, but since inner time-consciousness is played off against human remembering and understood in relation to it, I would like to think that it is the elementary form of mind and not just the elementary form of sensibility. It is the space in which the most basic distinctions are made, where identity and difference, rest and motion, and presence and absence first come to light. It is the simplest form of “flowing and gathering.”¹¹ The more complicated versions of these forms, such as those found in science, rhetoric, and dialectics, find their origin here. Inner time-consciousness is the root for categorial activity.

I have briefly discussed three Husserlian issues, the ideality of meaning, the displacement of memory, and inner time-consciousness, and I have claimed that they are all instances of his analysis of intellect as intellect. Still

¹¹ The phrase is from Prufer, “Husserl, Heidegger Early and Late, and Aquinas,” in Recapitulations, pp. 84–85.
other topics could be listed and interpreted in this way. For example, our ability to see things as pictures, our *Bildbewusstsein*, is achieved by intellect and not by sensibility; to be able to identify something as an image of something else – in Husserl’s terms, to see a *Bildobjekt* as depicting a *Bildsujet*\(^{12}\) – and to see the image as conveying not just a reminder of that depicted object, but as presenting it under a certain angle and with a certain slant, to see it with a certain meaning, is the work of intellect and not just sensibility. This pictorial intentionality can well be elaborated in contrast with the kind of intentionality at work in the use of words, when we signify something but do not involve any particular similarity or picturing between the symbol and the thing. Also, Husserl’s analysis of corporeality explores the way intellect or reason works in regard to the body in which it is found: to hold sway, *walten*, within our own bodies is contrasted with the way we are involved with other material things that are outside our bodies.

Still another intellectual capacity that Husserl has explored lies in our ability to count and to calculate with numbers, to carry out the special kind of syntax that occurs in mathematics and in measurement. It seems to me that it would be very useful to compare the categoriality that occurs in counting and measurement with the categoriality that occurs in predication: in what sense does an enumeration articulate parts within a whole, and in what sense is it an assertion and a form of doxic belief? How does an equation differ from a sentence?\(^{13}\) And just to mention one more activity of intellect, consider the distinction that Husserl makes right at the beginning of *Logical Investigations*, between *Ausdruck* and *Anzeige*, expression and indication. This is an extremely basic distinction that works very deeply in human thinking. It is illuminating to think of the shifts between the two modes of intending associated with these two kinds of signs. It would also be valuable to play these two forms of presence off against pictures or images. Consider, for example, a picture that serves not really to depict its object, but merely to remind us of it, such as the silhouette of a famous person imprinted on a coin. As Husserl observes in his treatment of images, sometimes a very small picture might serve more as a reminder, and hence as an *Anzeichen*, and not as an image.\(^{14}\) All these forms can then be interwoven with names and thereby lifted into and mixed with categorial thinking or linguistic syntax. Tracing these filigrees of significatation and parts and wholes is an exercise in metaphysics as well as in the theory of knowledge. It describes the identity of things and shows how such identity is displayed. It is not epistemology in a pejorative sense, not an attempt to prove that we really do know things, but a contemplative, theoretic activity that resembles what is done in Aristotle’s *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, as well as in works like Plato’s *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*. It deals with truth and with the being of things, with how they exist and


\(^{13}\) This question (“How does an equation differ from a sentence?”) is, I think, a promising and precise way of inquiring philosophically about the nature of mathematics.

\(^{14}\) *Hua XXIII*, §§15–17, pp. 34–38; §25, p. 52.
how they are presented, and it enters into first philosophy, into a form of thinking beyond which no further kinds of questions can be asked.

I have another citation from Leo Strauss that can help us to clarify what Husserl’s work accomplishes. It comes from another one of his letters to Voegelin, dated 9 May 1943. Voegelin had objected to what he called the “egological” and epistemological focus of Husserl’s work, and had observed that Husserl’s thought seems somewhat Averroistic. Strauss replied, “I think it is impossible to call Husserl’s procedure Averroistical; there is no ‘ego’ of fundamental significance in Averroes.” As we know, according to Averroes we as human beings do not carry out intellectual activities. According to him and his reading of Aristotle, thinking is done by a separate intellect, which transcends us. We provide the imagination and the phantasms, which are bodily forms of consciousness, but the separate mind does the thinking in and for us. The thinking that takes place in us is not really our own.

This remark by Strauss is very perceptive. It indicates that Husserl does recognize an ego as an agent of intellectual activity; he usually calls it the transcendental ego. Husserl’s concept of ego is sometimes misunderstood; it is taken to be a kind of detached or at least detachable entity, an ego-pole, something pure and simple and beyond time and space, a kind of philosophical construct detached from history. But nothing could be farther from the truth. In Husserl, the ego is presented and analyzed with great subtlety and the many obscurities and special forms of absence that pervade it are acknowledged. For Husserl, the ego shows up most vividly as the agent behind categorial activities. It accomplishes judgments and measurements, and reflects on its own categorial actions. It also recognizes itself as the same in remembered, anticipated, and imagined situations; in fact, I would say that in the displacements that occur within inner time, the ego is not just the present ego that remembers, projects, or imagines, nor the past ego that is remembered, projected, or imagined, but the identity that is constituted between these two modes. And then, of course, there is the pre-egological level of inner time-consciousness, out of which the ego comes to stand, and at the other extreme there is philosophical reflection, in which the ego enhances itself even beyond the structures of categorial intending, and in which it takes possession of its own being and of the world as that which is presented to us. In differentiating all these dimensions, Husserl tries to bring to presence what we are as responsible agents of truth.

3. Husserl and the sciences

Husserl does not postulate or posit the ego. He does not fabricate it philosophically. It is not a hypothetical construct. He simply describes what we express or refer to when we say “I,” but he does more than just repeat our ordinary recognition of ourselves as agents of thinking. We are involved in reasoning and thinking before we engage in philosophy; we “are there” already as users of language, and what phenomenology does is to clarify and describe

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15 Emberly and Cooper, *Faith and Political Philosophy*, p. 17.

what it is for us to be this way. It brings out what we are as agents of truth, and it does so by describing structures and activities that are difficult to see and that call for subtle distinctions.

Could these distinctions be accomplished by any other science? Could they be made by physics, biology, psychology, sociology, or history? I would reply in the negative, and I would sharpen my argument by saying that no partial science, like any of those I have mentioned, can even account for its own status as a science. It cannot account for its own nature as a claim to truth; every partial science falls short of doing so. For example, to give a biological explanation of biology would be to explain the science of biology in biological terms; it would explain the science as a process like those that occur in the cells and organs of a living thing. Psychology and sociology might seem to be able to do more, since they seem to deal with consciousness and thinking more directly, but they too cannot establish themselves as claims to truth, only as the way we do and say things as a matter of empirical or historical fact. A psychologist or sociologist cannot establish himself as presenting claims that others ought to assent to if they want to recognize the way things are. He cannot provide a clarification of what it is to be a science, and he cannot clarify what we are as agents of truth, nor can he clarify the world and the things in it as amenable to thinking. He cannot examine being as being. For example, if we tried to clarify the principle of noncontradiction psychologically or sociologically, it would lose its force as a constituent in the truth of things; it would lose its normative character; it would be explained just as a habit of the mind or a way that some people happen to use language. It would cease to govern the way things are and the way they are said to be.

Even cognitive science cannot do what first philosophy does. Cognitive science is the combination of neuroscience, computer science, and logic that some people take to be a contemporary substitute for philosophy. Its major task is to correlate human cognitive activities with the activities of the brain and nervous system. It has valuable and interesting research projects, but in principle and conceptually it cannot deal with being as such, nor with truth and manifestation as such, nor with all the activities associated with truth, such as quotation, the making of distinctions, picturing, and the like, nor can it deal with the ego who says “I” and who is the responsible agent involved in such activities. I think that we can say of cognitive science what Leo Strauss says about naturalism: “Naturalism is completely blind to the riddles inherent in the ‘givenness’ of nature. It is constitutionally incapable of a radical critique of experience as such.”\(^{17}\) Only first philosophy can deal with such things, and it is the same first philosophy now as it was before and continues throughout the ages, whether the study of being as being, which is classical metaphysics, or the study of intellect as intellect, which is phenomenology.\(^{18}\)

Consider, for example, a phenomenological claim about picturing. A picture contains not something merely similar to its object, but the thing itself; it makes that thing pictorially present in its individuality. A picture of Napoleon does not just resemble Napoleon, but makes him pictorially present himself. In this respect, the picture is

\(^{17}\) Strauss, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy”, p. 35.

\(^{18}\) My phrasing takes its form from Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII 1, 1028b2-4: *kai to palai te kai nun kai aei zētoumenon kai aei aporoumenon, ti to on, touto esti, tis hē ousia.*

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different from the name *Napoleon*, which does not render him figuratively present, even though it does designate him, and thus makes him present to the mind in another way. We could then work out more fully the presentational logic of pictures, their presentational properties, and we could contrast them with those of names and signs. We could also contrast picturing and naming with perception. When we do this, we deal with the forms of intentionality and also with the forms of identity in things, in their presence and absence. We analyze the knower and the dative of manifestation, but we also analyze the thing known and given. We study intellect as intellect, and also being as being.\(^{19}\)

It is important to add that in making such statements we also deal not just with consciousness and intentionality but also with the issue of truth: we deal with the truth as achieved by us, as well as with the truth of things, with their manifestation in presence and in absence, a manifestation which can be done in many different ways. We carry out a *theoria tès alētheias*. It is quite in keeping with Husserl’s description of phenomenology to say that we describe what it is to be truthful and what we are as agents of such truthfulness or manifestation and the “owners” of science and knowledge. To describe phenomenology in this way is to bring out an aspect of ontological value or goodness, a sense of what Plato was getting at when he said that we understand the forms against the background of the good.

We should not limit our understanding of truth to the simple cases of the correctness of propositions and the givenness of things in perception. There is a truth in picturing, a truth in remembering, a truth in counting and measuring, and a truth in music, drama, and dance. There are also forms of truthfulness, with success and failures, in moral exchanges and political life. Identifications occur in all these things, in complex and interwoven ways. In all of them there are blends of presence and absence, and also appropriate forms of truth and falsity. In each of them there is distinctness emerging out of vagueness and obscurity. There is, for example, a truth in pictures: in one sense, we can ask whether the picture is accurate, whether it “corresponds” with what it depicts; but we can also ask whether it is truly present as a picture, or whether it is unsuccessful as such, that is, whether it is obscure, inept, and infantile: does the picture truly “apprehend” anything? If it does not apprehend anything, it is not really a picture but only a smear. As such it does not rise to the level at which the question of its “correctness” can arise. In the case of music the dimension of correctness is less obvious, but there is still the question of whether the composition is clumsy, bland, or boring, perhaps to such a degree that it becomes noise and not music any longer. Husserl gives us a stance from which we can contemplate or theorize such things, and it is his great contribution not only to have given us descriptions of various forms of “truthing” (*alētheuein*), but also an analysis of the stance itself. He differentiates the stance, the transcendental attitude, from our original, standard way of dealing with things in truth and falsity.

I would claim that when we operate within the stance that Husserl has so carefully described, our most elementary procedure is to make basic distinctions among these forms of intending and presentation, to work out *die

\(^{19}\) I think Husserl’s term *noema* can appropriately be used as a synonym for Aristotle’s *being as being*. 

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wesentliche Unterschiede, to use a phrase that he employed at the very beginning of his work. In first philosophy we work out the fundamental distinctions, and we also engage in dialectical refutation, as Aristotle does when he establishes the inevitability of the principle of noncontradiction in *Metaphysics* IV 4, showing that his antagonist cannot help but use the very principle he wishes to deny. Aristotle shows that if you are going to say anything, if you are going to engage in the most elementary exercise of truthfulness, if you are even to signify something let alone assert it, you must accept the validity of noncontradiction. I would also observe, however, that such refutation itself incorporates the making of distinctions, the claim that *this* is not *that*.

When we, or Husserl, carry out such investigations, our statements are apodictic. There is something self-evident about them, and they are reached not by means of proofs from more basic premises or by means of empirical investigation of facts and history, but by working out the way things have to be. First philosophy is and was and always will be apodictic precisely because it tries to present the truth about truthfulness. This sort of self-referentiality gives it a character that is different from other investigations. It does not mean that its declarations are dogmatic, doctrinaire, or arbitrary. They are not intellectually tyrannical. They need to be stated and argued, and questions must be asked, but the kind of argument behind them is distinctive. It does not appeal to simple intuitions, which might seem ideological; rather, it appeals to distinctions, to the differentiation, for example, between perceiving and remembering, picturing and naming, measurement and predication, and to the various kinds of identifications and identities that occur in these forms. By working each of these off against another, we bring all of them to light, and we do so through discursive speech. Socrates, in the Platonic dialogues, argues with other speakers, and Husserl also, despite the apparent solitariness of his manner of writing, still has to speak to his students, to us, and even to himself (but even here we intrude, through the archival material, on his soliloquies).

### 4. The modern subject: political and epistemological

There are some problems in Husserl's argumentation, some things we might wish that he had done differently. We each probably have our own favorite examples. To my mind, some of the most questionable relate to his extreme focus on the solitary subject. I think, for instance, that his reduction to the *Eigenheitssphäre* is problematic. He seems to assume that we would still have categorial intentionality within that domain, but how would that be possible? How can we imagine ourselves even predicating features of things if other minds were not part of what we are examining? I also think that his Cartesian way to reduction is misleading as a way of escorting the reader into the phenomenological attitude, and of course late in his career Husserl acknowledged as much. The isolation of the single ego in this argument, as well as the apparent disqualification of the world as given to us,

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20 The phrase serves as the title for the first chapter of the first of the *Logical Investigations*. The emphasis on distinctions occurs often in Husserl's subsequent works.


22 See *Hua VI*, §43.
distract the reader from what is really important in this procedure, namely, the shift of focus from things to the correlation between things and the datives to whom they are given. What is important is the transcendental turn or the turn into first philosophy, not the arguments that lead into it, and especially not the Cartesian argument, leading as it does to the solitary ego.

These problems in Husserl’s thought are made more understandable and more excusable if we consider the way that modern philosophy as a whole has centered on the subject. An essential element in the philosophy of the last five hundred years has been a radical turn to the subject. In fact, it would be better to call it the construction of the subject, not the turn toward it, and it has been the construction of the subject in two different forms: the political subject and the epistemological subject. This distinction and pairing of the political and the epistemological subject has been formulated by Francis Slade. The political subject was first invented by Machiavelli, who calls it the prince, and it was theoretically articulated by Hobbes, who calls it the sovereign. The political subject is the modern state as opposed to the ancient polis. The political subject is not something we find but something we construct by philosophical thinking. The epistemological subject, of course, is the Cartesian cogito. Modern thinking is not the establishment of just one of these subjects, but of the subject in these two forms, which must be distinguished but never separated from one another. To use Slade’s words, both the political subject and the epistemological subject “are inventions of thought, ideal constructions effected by thought.” Concerning the political subject, Slade says, “The state is not visible to the eyes. It does not exist outside of thought, and, therefore, it does not exist until it is thought. But being thought, and being a thought, it possesses brilliant clarity, an idea that can be ‘conceived very clearly and distinctly’.” He also says, “The political subject, the sovereign, the state, an artificial person, is something that comes to be in thinking. The sovereign is a thought, for only in thought can something like a sovereign make an appearance and be seen.” These attributes of the political subject also belong to the epistemological subject: the cogito is not visible to the eyes, and it does not exist outside of thinking or until it is thought. Once thought it possesses brilliant clarity and distinctness, and only in thinking can something like the cogito make an appearance. The political subject is the expression of what Slade calls decontextualized rule (which governs over deracinated individuals), and the epistemological subject is the expression of disembodied thinking or the disembodied intellect. In both cases we find ourselves not discovering things but inventing them, in sheer freedom and autonomy.

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 10.

It is important to keep in mind both these forms of the subject, the political and the epistemological. The epistemological taken just by itself might seem to be little more than an absurd conundrum that interests nobody but philosophers; but if it is taken as the Gegenstück to the political subject, its ominous significance for our cultural and political life becomes much more visible.

This modern sense of the subject was the background for Husserl’s thought. If Husserl was to turn to first philosophy, he had to do so within the setting given him by his day and age. He had to think through the turn to the subject. He has nothing directly to say about the political subject, but he does have a lot to say about the epistemological subject. His philosophy is, I claim, an attempt to embody and “mundanize” the cogito, to put mind back into the world, to introduce receptivity and corporeality, as well as absence and obscurity, all of which serve to change the Cartesian cogito, the disembodied intellect, into someone who says I and speaks with others in a human conversation about things. Husserl’s transcendental ego is someone who is visible in the natural and public order, not just in thought. The publicness of the transcendental ego is shown by the fact that the initial distinctions Husserl makes in his analysis of consciousness at the start of the Logical Investigations deal with linguistic signs; the ego first shows up as a user of language. Husserl thus gives us resources by which we can unthink modern philosophy insofar as it rejects classical philosophy. What he does with the epistemological subject can have an impact on the political subject as well.

To conclude, I wish to call to mind Husserl’s honesty and generosity as a thinker. His writings bear witness to his relentless effort to clarify the issues he addresses. He was willing to correct what he had said before, and ready to subject any and all of his positions to new scrutiny. He wanted most of all to “get it right” and to let things speak for themselves. He has influenced philosophy for over a hundred years. There have been very prominent beneficiaries of his thought – Heidegger, Gadamer, Edith Stein, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre – and there are countless scholars and philosophers like ourselves who have been deeply shaped by his writings. Intellectual achievement is a highly personal thing, and we need to be grateful to those who have shared their gifts with us. But if Husserl’s thinking was to exercise such an influence on others, it had to find its place in the Lebenswelt. There needed to be something tangible that would serve as the vehicle for his thought. His greatest impact has always been through his writings, even from the beginning of his career, with the Philosophy of Arithmetic, which provoked an important response from Frege, and his Logical Investigations. As it turned out historically, after Husserl’s death the material embodiment of his thought found its place in the world in and through the Husserl Archives. We can hardly remember Husserl without thinking of the Archives dedicated to him.

For this reason, let us take a moment during this commemoration of Husserl to mention the person and work of Father Herman Leo Van Breda, O.F.M., and to recall what he did to keep Husserl’s philosophy present as a resource for all of us. I recall a conference many years ago during which Walter Biemel spoke about Van Breda, shortly after his death in 1974. Biemel extolled what he called Van Breda’s “ungeheuere Energie.” Energetic he was, and he was also courageous and astute; he saved Husserl’s manuscripts, institutionalized the Husserl Archives here at Leuven, and found financial support for the Archives and their publications Husserliana and
Phaenomenologica. He was generous in sharing the Archives with other universities. He knew that in intellectual matters to give something away is also to enrich oneself. Van Breda understood the importance of Husserl’s work, and his understanding was not only theoretic; it had a wonderfully practical side. Our conference commemorates the life and work of Edmund Husserl, but by its very location it also recalls the qualities of Herman Leo Van Breda, as well as those who have succeeded him in the leadership of the Archives, Samuel IJsseling, Rudolf Bernet, and Ullrich Melle, who have faithfully continued the work of this center in the spirit of both Husserl and Van Breda. All these achievements and all these people have left us a rich legacy of philosophical life.


