

Introduction

In this paper, I have two motives: first, to introduce and argue for the central importance of the concept of the attitude [*Einstellung*] in understanding the concept of the reduction and the phenomenological project; and consequently, second, to emphasize the theoretical and practical implications of conducting the phenomenological reduction.

1. Introduction to the Relationship between Reduction and Attitude

The concept of the reduction, since its introduction and its connection with the so-called transcendental turn by Husserl, has been, and still remains as a controversial theme (Luft 2012; Zahavi 2017). The fact that this misreading of the reduction was a central issue for Husserl is evident from his multiple attempts to provide a defense and a clarification of the concept throughout his numerous writings, both published and unpublished. The success of this endeavor, however, is debatable, considering how his followers, both directly and indirectly related, have critiqued this concept of the reduction as problematic and have branched out into their respective developments from Husserl's phenomenology. Following this trend, the critical reception towards Husserlian concept of the reduction has continued down to the contemporary scholarly scene (Zahavi 2017, especially 51ff.).

Before we make any claims about the reduction, it is important that we first clarify what it means. At a glance, and I think this is the general agreement among scholars, that the reduction is a method that one has to conduct in order to be able to view the complex engagement between the transcendental subject and the World. Husserl does seem to introduce the reduction in such a manner in multiple occasions. For example, in *Cartesian Meditations*, he describes of the phenomenological reduction as the establishing of the position of a “disinterested onlooker” by the phenomenological Ego in against the position of a “naïvely interested Ego” (*Hua I*, 73). In *Ideas I*, Husserl describes transcendental reductions as that which “purify” the psychological phenomena of what lends them reality and thereby any fit or classification in the real “world” (*Hua III*, 5-6 [5]). What is less noted, however, is the subtle nuance that Husserl introduces by the state of

being 'interested'. In the same passage from *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl connotes being 'interested' as being in a certain directional mode of experiencing and living [*hineinerfahrende und ... hineinlebende*]. In other words, having a certain interest or being interested in something may be reworded as being engaged in a certain mode of relationship with the object in question that is currently available to the Ego in its ongoing process of lived experience. This applies equally to the state of being disinterested, in the sense that being disinterested is also a mode of interest but in a different way. This concept of the Ego being generally found in a certain mode of engagement (either active or passive) towards some object is what Husserl means by intentionality, and the description of being in this certain specific directedness [*Gerichtetsein*] in our lived experience is what Husserl means by the word 'attitude' (*Hua VI*, 106f., 154f.). In this context, the phenomenological reduction, which is about the establishment of the Ego in a "disinterested" position as I cited above from *Cartesian Meditations*, is about forming a new kind of relationship with the object of interest—i.e., to adopt a specific directionality, or a way of looking or appreciating, or an attitude, in relation to the object in question. This specific orientating of the Ego to look at the object "disinterestedly" for the interest of securing "absolute freedom from prejudice" in transcendental reduction hence refers to nothing other than the adoption of the phenomenological attitude, which Husserl proceeds to describe in the following passages of the *Cartesian Meditations*.

This approach of trying to understand the reduction through the concept of the attitude, or at least the appreciation of its importance in Husserl's phenomenology, has been raised by a certain number of scholars, although it remains largely under-researched (Luft 1998, Staiti 2009, Lee 2012, Jacobs 2013, Majolino (forthcoming)). As Lee argues, however, this is partly due to Husserl's fault: while having extensively reiterated and reexamined his concept of the reduction, however, Husserl did not produce a similar level of research work on the concept of the attitude (Lee 2012, 95ff.). Nevertheless, as Husserl presents as such in his critical notes collected in the appendix XX of *Erste Philosophie* that the phenomenological reduction is in fact nothing other than the change of attitude—i.e., the adoption of the phenomenological attitude from the natural attitude (*Hua VIII*, 436; cf. *Hua III*, 3 [1]). In this sense, the reduction is not merely an instrumental thought-experiment that one plays out in a moment but, as I've argued above, it is about adopting a specific directionality of engaging objects and the world—a "new attitude" that is differently oriented from the natural attitude, in which one now "direct[s] (one's) focus (the focus that apprehends and

investigates things theoretically) on pure consciousness in its own absolute being” (*Hua III*, 91 [94]; cf. *Hua XXXIV*, 204ff., 245). Consequently, the attitude also informs us of the intent and the limits—the definition—of the reduction: the phenomenological reduction is nothing but the means to attain the pure region of beings—i.e., the constituting activity of the universal transcendental Ego—at which one arrives by bracketing, or putting out of action, the general positing or the general thesis of the world via the *epochē*, i.e., a specifically phenomenological *epochē* which should not be confused with the universal doubt of the skeptic tradition (cf. *Hua III*, 55-6 [56]; cf. *Hua VI*, 243; *Hua XV*, 366).

In this sense, the goal of phenomenological reduction is not the description of the reduced phenomena themselves, but the constituting activity of the Ego and its intentional correlates, i.e., the *Sachen selbst*. Hence, Husserl explains throughout his works that the main overarching problem-interest of phenomenology is not the world but intentionality itself (*Hua III*, 290 [303], *Hua VI*, 159; *Hua XXXIV*, 58). This constituting activity of the Ego, which is an ongoing process in lived experience, can only be observed via an equally ongoing reflective activity that does not involve any position-takings other than that of the specific phenomenological attitude that embodies the radically ideal interest to clarify the fundamental properties of the relationship between the transcendental Ego and the world (*Hua III*, 305 [319]; *Hua VI*, 184; *Hua XXXIV*, 245).

2. Attitude as the Theoretical-practical Guide towards the Goal of Phenomenology

Approaching the concept of the reduction through the concept of the attitude has deep theoretical and practical implications. Husserl claims in *Ideas I* that the phenomenological reduction is a matter of our “freedom” (*Hua III*, 53 [54], *Hua VI*, 154), and more profoundly, an “inner transformation” that can finally perform as the “fertile soil” towards a proper “working philosophy” [*Arbeitsphilosophie*] (*Hua VI*, 103-4). However, to appreciate the full radical sense of such statements, one must first understand what it means by the attitude—especially the natural attitude—that we practice in our natural living.

As Luft observes in his article, natural attitude is perhaps the most important “operative concept” in Husserl’s phenomenological project which provides the basis and the motivation for this

scientific endeavor (Luft 1998, 154; cf. Luft 2002, cf. Staiti 2009). This seems partly convincing at first because phenomenology by its essence must begin from what is given in our natural experience to understand the activities and the eidetic laws of constitution by consciousness. However, if this is about the natural world and its givenness, what about the natural attitude?

In the first few weeks of his winter lectures of 1910-1, which is now collected in appendix VI of *Hua XIII* and has been translated into English under the title *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Husserl begins his class with an introduction to what it means for an Ego to be in the natural attitude. According to Husserl, the natural attitude is a “general thesis” in which the “I” is always already found there in its natural lived-experience as the center, or the zero-point, to which everything else is engaged to (cf. *Hua VI*, 326). To reiterate, the “I” is always already in engagement with the always existing world [*immer daseiende Welt*] “as experiencing this and that ... [having] such and such dispositions and acts” (*The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 8 [118], cf. *Hua III*, 52 [52-3]; cf. *Hua Mat 8*, 70). This account of the natural attitude is something basic and familiar to anyone who has or had interest in Husserlian phenomenology. What is often overlooked, however, is how our natural living in our natural attitude, as the most basic phenomena of the constituting activities of the Ego, already lays out the core fundamental question in phenomenology of consciousness—i.e., the unity-forming function of the transcendental Ego in both egoic and non-egoic (i.e., hyletic) realms—as a phenomenon-in-appearance, albeit not yet in the form of a reflective question [*Rückfrage*] (cf. *Hua XV*, 131).¹ Nevertheless, the discovery of this natural mode of life where the Ego is already engaged in such a relationship with the world as a kind of an attitude is itself radical precisely due to how natural—i.e., how indubitable and absolute—this “general thesis” is. By describing our “natural, waking life” as a kind of a directed life engaged in a thesis, or a positing, or an attitude, Husserl indirectly makes the claim that there are other kind of attitudes than this natural one, and thus lays out the possible grounds or the motivation for the change of attitude, i.e., the phenomenological reduction itself. Furthermore, by describing this attitude as the “general thesis,” Husserl is positioning all other attitudes in a certain relation to the natural attitude—a kind of a hierarchical order of attitudes—where all attitudes including the

¹ This concept of being-in-the-world [*in-der-Welt-sein*] is perhaps more widely recognized as pioneered by post-Husserlians like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but it is also a very important and present concept in Husserl’s works on intersubjectivity, lifeworld, passive constitution, and inner time-consciousness. Furthermore, according to Husserl, the transcendental constitution of the world is by no means an individual affair, but must be an intersubjective one (cf. *Hua XV*, 371).

phenomenological attitude must always be understood under the general background of the natural world which is always found as a world of practical values, goods, and meanings, such that the natural world would always remain ““on hand” ... undisturbed ... by the new attitudes” as the persisting background “for my act of consciousness” (*Hua III*, 50-1 [50-1]).

Despite the prevailing presence of the “general thesis,” however, Husserl argues that we must “alter” this attitude radically (*Hua III*, 52 [53]). This is not to be understood as to somehow annul or reject the prevailing natural world and its existence, but merely to adopt a new attitude—i.e., a new way of looking at things—in the sense of being directed to a new theoretical interest while yet living in the natural world of practical values and goods. In that sense, there may be multiple kind of attitudes according to the type of theoretical/practical interest that one is directed to: for example, as Husserl presents in his winter lectures, one may have an empirical attitude or a nonempirical, a priori attitude. In an empirical attitude, one may pursue certainty and truth in one’s natural world-living via empirical means, while in an a priori attitude, one may seek securement of knowledge via the “objectivities of essence” [*Wesengegenständlichkeiten*], which are grasped purely and solely through “intuitive ideation” (*The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 16ff. [126ff.]; cf. *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, 336). In this way, a natural attitude, or in this case more precisely the naïve-naturalistic attitude, is a way of understanding things [*Sachen*] in the unreflective mode of the “general thesis,” whereas the phenomenological attitude is the way of perceiving the world-knowledge in the transcendental-phenomenological perspective (cf. *Hua XXXIV*, 225ff.).

However, an attitude can be more than just a momentary ‘interest’. As I tried to explain the influential nature of the natural attitude in our natural living, the attitude is something that is persisting over a “duration.” Husserl writes in *Ideas I*: “[The general thesis] is, indeed, something obtaining persistently during the entire duration of the attitude, i.e., during the natural, waking life directed toward it” (*Hua III*, 53 [53]). In other words, the attitude is something that is perpetually practiced or held in effect by the intentional Ego; and furthermore, the attitude must also be in harmonious unity with the person’s theoretical and practical position-takings [*Stellungnahmen*] or norms (*The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 17-8 [127]; *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, 336; cf. *Hua VI*, 326ff.).

3. Practical enactment of the reduction as an ethical, self-responsible life

But before we get to the discussion on attitudes and its more practical and ethical implications towards personal identity, however, one more aspect of the attitude, and one especially of the phenomenology attitude, must be explicated. The question that we must pose is: if the phenomenological attitude is indeed a directed life, to what is it directed to? In the 1910-11 *Logos* article titled as ‘Philosophy as rigorous science’, Husserl gives a critical account on the natural empirical sciences and introduces philosophy as the way of doing genuine science and rigorous theory that can possibly revive the true value and mission of the scientific enterprise in general. This philosophical science, while having its own history and traditions, is to be distinguished from a mere study of its history; the way of philosophy, or the philosophical life, or the “impulse to research must proceed not from philosophies but from the things and from the problems connected with them . . . [that it] must from every point of view be radical itself in its procedure” (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, 196; *Hua VIII*, 320). This is also echoed in the *Cartesian Meditations*, where Husserl writes: “Philosophy [...] is the philosophizer’s quite personal affair. It must arise as his wisdom, as his self-acquired knowledge tending toward universality, a knowledge for which he can answer from the beginning, and at each step, by virtue of his own absolute insights” (*Hua I*, 2 [44]; cf. Miettinen 2016, 63, 67). It is quite evident that Husserl had envisioned phenomenology to embody this philosophical spirit or attitude as one can observe from his positioning of phenomenology in relation to the history of philosophy in various texts, among which it is especially prominent in the *Crisis* and the 1935 Vienna lectures where he describes the habituation of a theoretical attitude, or “the attitude of *thaumazein*” within Greek philosophical culture. This “theoretical attitude of the philosopher, then is his constant and prior resolve to dedicate his future life always, and in the sense of a universal life, to the task of *theoria*, to build theoretical knowledge upon theoretical knowledge *in infinitum*” (*Hua VI*, 286 [332]). It is in this sense that Husserl regards phenomenology to be burdened with and directed towards an “infinite task” [*unendliche Aufgabe*], which is in a sense completely “unpractical” only precisely because it is not a means to anything but itself. This is why Husserl partially relates this infinitely-directed theoretical attitude with a “vocational attitude” [*Berufseinstellung*], or a “vocational life” [*Berufsleben*], which carries a characteristically passive tone of being “called” to be in such and such a way (*Hua VI*, 72, 328f.; cf. Miettinen 2016, 67; cf. Steinbock 2016).

Then the question arises: is it possible to live such an “unpractical” life, and even if it is somehow possible, how do we come to live one? Such a purely theoretical attitude that has no interest but pure *theoria* would imply that one should suspend all other personal interests in natural world-living—and perhaps even the general thesis of the natural world—for the sake of a true radical science. However, that would simply be impossible to be performed unless one were to leave the world itself—a critical argument that is often made by the critics towards Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. Right after introducing the “unpractical” character of the theoretical attitude, however, Husserl clarifies himself:

Yet it must be said immediately that this is still not a matter of a definitive “severing” of the theoretical from the practical life or of a division of the theoretician’s concrete life into two life-continuities that sustain themselves without any interrelation ... For yet a third form of universal attitude is possible ... namely, the synthesis of the two interests accomplished in the transition from the theoretical to the practical attitude, such that the *theoria* (universal science), arising within a closed unity and under the *epochē* of all praxis, is called ... to serve mankind in a new way, mankind which, in its concrete existence, lives first and always in the natural sphere. This occurs in the form of a new sort of praxis, that of the universal critique of all life and all life-goals ... and thus it also becomes a critique of mankind itself and of the values which guide it explicitly or implicitly. Further, it is a praxis whose aim is to elevate mankind ... into a new humanity made capable of an absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights (*Hua VI*, 283 [329]).

Two important points can be gathered from this: first, Husserl’s theoretical attitude, despite its “unpractical” character, is not practically meaningless because it does not “call” humankind to comply to its logically impossible demand but instead is “called ... to serve” humankind as a guide for humanity to develop a “new sort of praxis”—i.e., a universally critical attitude towards its norms, values, and life-goals [*Lebensziele*] of its past, present, and future that we have established and continually practice in our natural world-living; and second, despite the continued existence and pregiven validities of the natural world, the theoretical attitude must remain uncompromised in its directedness towards a pure and absolute *theoria* in order for it to act as a proper guide for the realization of this ideal humanity.

Therefore, the goal of philosophy as embraced in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is to pursue a practical life guided and informed by a theoretical interest that is directed towards a pure *theoria*, which can only imply a practical living that intuitively apperceives and also practically aspires towards the actual accomplishment of the infinite task (cf. *Hua VIII*, 14). Also, this newfound vocational attitude is not a completely unnatural one despite its rather "artificial" [künstlich] character, because as we have seen above through the natural attitude and the general thesis, we are always already living in a certain directed way of life—i.e., an attitude—that provides us with the grounds for justification [*Rechtfertigung*] towards what we do and see regardless of whether we are conscious of doing it or not (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, 336; cf. Luft 2002, 107ff.). In that sense, while this change of attitude—or the phenomenological reduction—is truly radical in its nature and its demands, it must also be stated here that it is not completely inaccessible or alien to our way of living but is something that everyone is potentially capable of doing (*Hua XXVII*, 4).

However, this still does not resolve us of the question: how does one actually preserve the purity of *theoria* while living in the natural world of pregiven norms and values? For Husserl, this sense of personal aspiration (or the ethical vocation) which embodies the infinite task in its purity and infiniteness is what that allows the philosopher to disregard the past historical successes and failures of philosophy and rationality and to simply appreciate the given task as a kind of a personal categorical imperative—which is grounded in "the faith that sustains us"—that one "can and must" adopt and follow (*Hua XXVII*, 5f., 119). This idea of "faith" that provides us with the assurance of the unexperienced (i.e., the pure *theoria*) not merely as an ideal *Ding-an-sich* but as something possibly experienceable—and even further, as something intuitively and effectively 'sensible' in the horizon of intentionality—along with our natural rational drive towards justification and evidence, gives itself as a sufficiently 'real' and practical motivation for the phenomenologist in the directed life lived in the transcendental-phenomenological attitude (cf. *Hua III*, [101ff.]; cf. *Hua VIII*, 434; cf. *Hua XXXVI*, 78).

Moreover, for Husserl, this "infinite task" is not impossible as long as it is co-intended intersubjectively by individuals participating as members or co-workers [*Mitarbeiter*] of the ongoing tradition of genuine philosophy by picking up the philosophical strivings of their past predecessors and making sure that they are continued by their future generations. Hence, this notion of an ever-expanding community of rigorous philosophers that each engage in establishing the highest form of

self-reflection and self-consciousness was to Husserl the singular agent that can fully bear the “infinite task” of achieving “universal knowledge” (*Hua VI*, 339; Zahavi 2017, 125f.). However, this does not mean that one can simply rely on the efforts of others or a Hegelian spirit to do the infinite task; rather, as a community that exists not only as an abstract entity but by virtue of each individual, the accomplishment of this communal imperative is only possible via the continuous practice of the personal imperative at each individual level (*Hua I*, 44; Miettinen 2016, 72). In this sense, Husserl, in his writings on intersubjectivity, argues that transcendental objectivity is granted only via the mutual intentional acts of each individual that are “alike in kind and each independent in the same sense” (*Hua XIII*, 243-4; *Hua I*, 138ff.).

In a reconsideration to his insistence towards individual responsibility which I cited earlier from the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl clearly leans towards a historical-communal responsibility in his writings on social ontology and ethics, such that philosophy as the pursuit towards absolute *theoria* now becomes a task for universal humankind in which each individual in the same transcendental-phenomenological attitude finds its own philosophical pursuits and fulfillments coinciding under a “unitary telos” of reason across communities and generations (*Hua VI*, 72ff., 513; *Hua XV*, 17; Miettinen 2016, 63f., 72ff.; cf. Steinbock 1994, 452ff.).² In that sense, despite its inherently relative nature, the strivings of the individuals and communities towards universal science find unity in philosophy as what that is “becoming” [das Werden] a pure *theoria* for all humankind—a “becoming” that is made evident only through the persistent practice of responsible self-critique (*Hua XXVII*, 55, 119; Miettinen 2016, 72; cf. Steinbock 1994, 453ff.; cf. Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxvii-lxxviii [14-5]). Therefore, ironically, it is through the fully responsible recognition of one’s relativity and various other possible pre-given inclinations (e.g., personal interest, will, attitude, historical-cultural associations, etc.) via the rigorous reflecting act that one finds oneself evidently aligned in the teleological direction of doing universal rigorous science and intending absolute pure *theoria* (*Hua VI*, 142).

Conclusion

² This relationship between transcendental subjectivity and transcendental intersubjectivity is discussed in various places, but most prominently in the intersubjectivity volumes and *Hua VIII*.

By approaching the reduction from the perspective of the attitude, I argued that the reduction is not merely a momentary thought-experiment but that it involves deeply theoretical and practical implications. This is because phenomenology as an “infinite task” that aims at rigorous science and absolute *theoria* can only be grasped as a necessarily ongoing project that is to be brought into being via the directed vocational life [*Berufsleben*] of the self-responsible and self-conscious individual. Furthermore, the universal character of the infinite task demands that this rigorous reflection towards self-responsibility is not an individual effort but a communal trans-generative project. This means that it is equally important that the other individual is also practicing such a philosophical life as much as one is pursuing it, so that an “ideal humanity” may be brought about under the unitary telos of reason through continuous practice of mutual critique and self-responsibility in the transcendental-phenomenological attitude.

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