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# Husserl's Project, Critique, and Idea of Reason

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**Abstract:** The present study seeks to accomplish three goals: to shed light on the problem of reason in Husserl's co-inherited philosophical *project*, to elucidate his transcendental critique of reason, and to present Husserl's idea of reason in its distinctive features. A historical excursus first provides a frame to understand the necessity of a critique of reason, its proper subject-matter, and its function for the project of genuine philosophy. In particular, this historical reflection identifies the form that a critique must assume in order to fulfil its philosophical-scientific task. The focus is then directed at Husserl's methodological recalibration of the problem of reason. Husserl's 'prinzipielle Kritik' is elucidated in his transcendental reassessment of the headings 'reason' and 'unreason,' and is thought in connection to the concept of Selbstbesinnung. Lastly, Husserl's idea of reason is reconstructed in relation to, and in disambiguation from, the concepts of self-evidence, logos, synthesis, fulfilment, positing, etc. Reason, as teleological rule and structural form of transcendental subjectivity, is clarified in its dependence on, and irreducibility to, the problems of constitution and in light of the question of its objective/subjective character.

**Keywords:** Husserl, reason, project, critique, transcendental philosophy

"Nur der selbst um den Anfang einer Philosophie Ringende wird sich hierin anders verhalten, da er sich sagen mu: *tua res agitur*" (Hua V, p. 162).

As Plato reminds us, 'philosophy begins in wonder' and unexpectedly finds its way into the life of those who philosophize. For Husserl, however, if the encounter with a philosophical discourse in any of its forms is a contingent event in the personal history of an individual, the task of pursuing a critique of reason represents, instead, a necessary demand for those who truly desire to identify themselves as philosophers and, in a radical scientific spirit, treat their

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own philosophy as a prejudice.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in a personal note of 1906, Husserl expresses the urge of an investigation that he deems ineludible for his righteous entitlement to the philosophers' community and participation in its cognitive-theoretical heritage: "In the first place, I mention the general problem which I must solve if I am able to call myself a philosopher. I mean: *A critique of reason*, a critique of logical and practical reason, of normative reason in general" (Hua XXIV, p. 445/493).<sup>2</sup>

Husserl's considerations are the opening of a reflection (*Besinnung*) that is not directed toward any discrete set of philosophical problems.<sup>3</sup> Rather, this reflection concerns the meaning, scope, and defining task of philosophy itself. It takes the shape of a critique of reason conceived of precisely as necessary for an authentic philosophizing and, consequently, it discerns the conditions under which one can truly qualify oneself as a philosopher. Husserl not only identifies reason as a vital element for the normative unity of science, the lawfully regulated system of values, and the formation of a true humanity in communal life, but also thinks of the *critique of reason as central for the possibility of philosophy in its rigorous scientific form, most radical self-understanding, and true beginning*.<sup>4</sup> In Husserl, one might say, the centrality of reason and its critique acquires a scientific, eminently philosophical, and historical dimension.

The present study seeks to accomplish three goals: (i) to shed light on the problem of reason in Husserl's co-inherited philosophical *project*, (ii) to elucidate his transcendental *critique* of reason, and (iii) to present Husserl's *idea* of reason in its distinctive features. A historical excursus first provides a frame to understand the necessity of a critique of reason, its proper subject-matter, and its function for the project of genuine philosophy (Sect. 1). In particular, this historical reflection identifies the form that a critique must assume in order to fulfil its philosophical-scientific task. The focus is then directed at Husserl's methodological recalibration of the problem of reason (Sect. 2). Husserl's *'prinzipielle Kritik'* is elucidated in his transcendental reassessment of the headings 'reason' and 'unreason,' and is thought in connection to the concept of *Selbstbesinnung*. Lastly, Husserl's idea of reason is reconstructed in relation to, and in disambiguation from, the concepts of

<sup>1</sup> In the *Krisis*, Husserl contends that "anyone who seriously seeks to be a philosopher [must] begin with a sort of *radical*, *sceptical epochē* [...]. Once in his life every philosopher must proceed in this way; if he has not done it, and even already has 'his philosophy,' he must still do it. Prior to the epochē 'his philosophy' is to be treated like any other prejudice" (Hua VI, p. 77/75–76).

**<sup>2</sup>** Cf. Schuhmann 1973, p. 20. Here I follow the English translation in Husserl, E. 1994. *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, trans. D. Willard. Dordrecht: Kluwer. All passages cited with no reference to an English translation are my own.

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of 'Besinnung' and 'universale Selbstbesinnung' is elucidated in Sect. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Hua VII, pp. 11-17.

self-evidence, logos, synthesis, fulfilment, positing, etc. (Sect. 3). Reason, as teleological rule and structural form of transcendental subjectivity, is clarified in its dependence on, and irreducibility to, the problems of constitution and in light of the question of its objective/subjective character.

# 1 The *Project* of Genuine Philosophy and its Radicalization: Reason in Husserl's Philosophical Narrative

For Husserl, any serious attempt to reconnect oneself to the philosophical tradition requires a clarification of the conditions and possibilities of philosophy itself, as well as the identification of the supra-temporal and supra-personal defining *task* that gives unity to the transgenerational community of thinkers who call themselves 'philosophers.' Husserl indeed conceives of himself not as an isolated thinker, but as the carrier of a distinctive *project*, that is, as belonging to a trajectory of thinking that pertains to the history of universal philosophy. In his narrative, this project is inherently rational, goal-oriented or teleological in nature. At the same time, it demands a renewal of its original theoretical motives by means of a radical, transcendental critique considered necessary for the true commencing of philosophy and its definitive foundation.

This section reconstructs some salient moments of Husserl's narrative with an emphasis on the *essential function* performed by the critique of reason, in both its germinal and more refined forms. More specifically, framing the problem of reason into a historical-philosophical perspective sheds light on the discovery of its enigmatic status. It also enables us to recognize the subject-matter of the critique, to assess the diverse failing attempts of its realization, and to understand the philosophical urgency of its full development. By reflecting upon Husserl's historical considerations, one can finally outline the radical form a critique of reason must assume in order to fulfil the project of genuine philosophy.

In the *Krisis*, Husserl's attempt is explicitly oriented to rescue the *idea of philosophy in its absolute, rational foundation* from its crisis and modern falsification. What Husserl envisions is, in particular, a renewal of an unfulfilled promise, namely, the *project of Platonic/Socratic origin of a truly and thoroughly rational life*. In accordance with its Greek roots, this project conceives *'genuine philosophy'* (*echte Philosophie*) as embracing the ideals of pure knowledge, theory, and science, as encompassing everything that is and can be legitimately known, as securing the objectivity of knowledge, values, and practical goals through the clarification of its ultimate sense and the exhibition of its ideal, essential laws, and

as grounding itself in self-evident, a priori principles that provide a rational justification for its beginning and procedures.<sup>5</sup>

This project, however, first, and constantly, ought to face the threat of sophistic scepticism. The sophists contest the possibility of pursuing an authentically rational life, both practically and theoretically. From a practical perspective, these sceptics negate a fixed, objective system of guiding normative goals. From a theoretical perspective, they instead intend to prove that in no cases can a stable possession of truth be adequately guaranteed or the existence of any transcendent being can be pertinently demonstrated. The sophists develop a *dogmatic form of scepsis* that rejects any claims of legitimacy of knowledge in general and leads to a dissolution of any kind of objectivity into the plurality of merely subjective appearings.

What Husserl finds remarkable about this first form of scepticism is that sophistry does not simply threaten the project of a theoretical and practical life in its ideally rational character by refusing the cogency of rational argumentations. Rather, the sophists are the first who directly engage reason's ideas, goals, and possible accomplishments by casting doubt on the rational character of thinking itself. Albeit in a playful way, sophistry challenges the fundamental relation of rational, subjective thinking with transcendent, objective being in itself, and renders transcendence and objectivity in itself matters of dispute. Thus, with a specific reference to Gorgias, Husserl comments: the sophist "is the discoverer of the critical-rational problem of the possibility of transcendent knowledge" (Hua XXV, p. 136).

The sophist discovers the proper *subject-matter of a critique of reason* and, as Husserl later develops, of a 'phenomenology of reason.' The latter arranges itself around "a set of problems that is directed at neither truth and being, nor theory and science in the sense of a theoretical system, but at *rational consciousness itself*" (p. 135; emphases added). This critique concerns the essence of reason itself: it aims at a rigorous understanding of "the sense and claim of legitimacy of reason" and seeks "*to be able to bring*—so to speak—*reason to reason*" (Hua XXIV, p. 239). In particular, in the theoretical sphere, a phenomenological critique of doxic reason presents itself as a *clarification (Aufklärung) of the sense and possibility of 'objective truth' (objektive Wahrheit)* in its twofold meaning.

On the one hand, when 'objective truth' stands for 'truth valid in itself' (Wahrheit an sich gilt), the critique of reason ought to investigate the evident

**<sup>5</sup>** Cf. Majolino 2017, pp. 170–171.

**<sup>6</sup>** I am particularly thankful to Claudio Majolino for allowing me to read his excellent unpublished manuscript titled *Gorgias' Shadow and Plato's Light. The meaning of Sophistry in Husserl's account of Greek philosophy on the Manifold 'Beginnings' of Philosophy.* 

principles by means of which the knower can legitimately recognize her own judicative performances as valid. On the other hand, 'objective truth' can also indicate that 'something objective' (Objektive) is rightly apprehended in consciousness. Here lies the critical-transcendental question: how can immanent consciousness, in its purely subjective operations, correctly and legitimately grasp something other than itself, namely, something that is transcendent and objective in itself such as the world that we constantly experience? This question most profoundly concerns the "enigmatic essence of the knowing consciousness" (p. 137) and the radical problem of transcendent objectivity.

Husserl's critique of doxic reason is therefore structured around both the question of 'truth valid in itself' and the problem of 'something objective' as subjectively given to consciousness in the way it is in itself. Then, Husserl's phenomenology of reason sets out to shed light on the necessary correlation between objective 'truth' and 'being' by first critically enquiring into the ordinarily presupposed "harmony between the world itself, or the truths that are valid for themselves, and our acts of knowledge and structures of knowledge" (Hua VII, p. 245; emphases added). Put differently, in order to account for the correlation between the objective system of truths and the objective allness of everything that actually is, one must first clarify the radical problems concerning the relation of consciousness with being and truth. The harmony between subjective immanent thinking and objective transcendent being, first questioned by sophistic scepticism, is the core problem, or the *enigma*, of the critique.

Notably, in their self-undermining arguments, sophistic theories evidently contain a logical and practical countersense. Their arguments show "reason's inner conflict with itself" (Hua XXIV, p. 184) and, accordingly, "cannot be seriously held" (p. 182). What nurtures these sceptical theories is rather "the unclarity about the sense and possibility of knowledge with regard to its objective validity and accomplishment" (p. 181). Generally considered, the true import of any form of scepticism consists in neither its argumentative coherence, nor the rigour of its theories or conclusions, but in what the sceptic unmasks: "the desperate unclarity regarding the sense of this knowledge and its claims of objective validity" (p. 182; emphasis added). Husserl's crucial intuition is that, in exposing this desperate unclarity, sceptical theories do not just pose an obstacle for the development of philosophy and science. If understood in their authentic sense, these theories can perform a crucial *function* paving the way for a critical scepsis, which reveals itself to be necessary for both philosophy and science. What are the function and sense that Husserl attributes to sophistic scepticism?

First, the "essential function" of sophistic theories "consists in creating the most palpable expression of the tremendous embarrassment in which the intellect is already involved in the first reflection upon knowledge" (p. 182). Sophistic

scepticism playfully expresses the profound embarrassment of consciousness in exhibiting its own rational character, that is, in reaching clarity about the ultimate sense and possibility of its rational operations and, accordingly, in legitimately discriminating between the rational and the irrational. In testing knowledge's inherent pretence of objective validity, for the first time rational consciousness is called to reflect upon knowledge and its claim of legitimacy, namely, its possibility to truly reach something that is transcendent to consciousness and objective in itself. This reflection directly concerns the sense and justification (Sinn und Rechtfertigung) of all putatively rational forms of evident grounding and binding truth, and it casts out anyone who seriously seeks to pursue a thoroughly rational life "from the paradise of epistemic innocence" (p. 186). Sophistry, therefore, advances a first and anti-philosophical form of critique that, however, shows to anyone still seeking to truly philosophize that objectively valid knowledge and transcendent true being can no longer be taken for granted.<sup>7</sup> The legitimacy of knowledge shows itself to be a *problem*. "The most self-evident fact of the world, presenting, knowing, suddenly becomes the most wondrous, the How of its accomplishment becomes a riddle" (Hua Mat IX, p. 19). The sense, function, and possibility of what rationally claims objective validity can now become new themes of inquiry.

Second, "the authentic sense" of sceptical theories is "to establish the problem of knowledge as the *most fundamental philosophical problem*, as decisive for every definitely valid clarification and evaluation of science" (Hua XXIV, pp. 182–183). In its attacks on the ideas of truth and objective being, scepticism strikes at the core of reason's own accomplishments and ideas as "the denial of the rational substructions of a 'philosophy' which, with its supposed truths-in-themselves, assumes a rational in-itself and believes itself capable of attaining it" (Hua VI, p. 78/76). *The sophist shows the inanity of philosophy itself in its rational, scientific pretense*—a pretence that can no longer be assumed. In this manner, *sophistic scepticism threatens the whole scientific project of a genuine philosophy* in its absolute, rational foundation and, at the same time, *uncovers the ineludible task that ought to be fulfilled for philosophy's true beginning*.

<sup>7</sup> Following Husserl's narrative, one should discriminate 'anti-philosophical' (contrary to philosophy *tout court* as in sophistry) from 'philosophical' (as in Descartes, Hume, Kant) forms of critique. Among the latter, in the present study I also deliberately qualify the critique of reason as 'genuine' (i. e., methodologically aiming at fulfilling the idea of genuine philosophy) and 'radical' (in its orientation towards subjectivity and attempt at freeing philosophy from any dogmatic presuppositions). Accordingly, Hume's critique is not genuine, but more radical than Descartes' and certainly Kant's. In addition, all pre-phenomenological forms of critique are considered by Husserl to be somehow 'inauthentic.'

Again, both the threatening, potentially lethal force and the philosophically awakening function of sceptical sophistry do not rest in the denial of truth, existence, or what is objectively valid. The significance of its critique rather consists in the showing how fundamental, critical-epistemological questions—such as "what is objective validity and how does it manifest itself?" (Hua XXIV, p. 184)—remain obscure and unclear. The profundity and true import of this scepticism remain, however, overlooked for centuries.

If the twin-star Socrates/Plato inaugurates the project of a philosophy in its ideally rational form, Husserl traces the "original motif" (Hua VI, p. 100/97) of transcendental philosophy back to Descartes' pioneering meditations. For Husserl, Descartes is the first philosopher who appropriates the attack of reason's ideas pursued by the sceptics. Then, he transfigures the sceptical, dogmatic attack into a first philosophical critique: a critique that seeks to overcome the sophists' "paradoxical, playful, frivolous subjectivism [...] by means of a new, serious subjectivism, a subjectivism to be absolutely justified in the most radical theoretical conscientiousness, in short, by means of transcendental subjectivism" (Hua VII, p. 61). If the sophists' dogmatic scepticism intends to prove the impossibility of knowledge, critical scepsis is now oriented to a different goal. Critical scepsis is animated by the goal of fixating "the necessary beginning of the theory of knowledge," and determining "its ground in a lasting manner" (Hua XXIV, p. 180).

Descartes' gesture can be read as the first attempt to fulfil the Platonic idea of genuine philosophy by embracing the transcendental-critical impulse of sophistry and, at the same time, fighting against its sceptical results. 8 In accordance with the sophist, "the real, whole-world (Weltall), and subsequently the totality of possible objectivity in general, is considered 'transcendentally' as the object of possible knowledge, of possible consciousness in general" (Hua VII, p. 60). In contrast to the sophist, Descartes' critical scepsis does not deny either knowledge in its unconditional validity, or the rationality ascribed to the sciences. It does not culminate in showing the embarrassment of consciousness in its reflection upon knowledge. Instead, the discovery of the necessary relation between the world and the transcendental functions of consciousness now effectively becomes "a theoretical fundamental theme" (p. 62), which is systematically investigated in order to secure the one world that is valid in itself and can be the subject-matter of truths. Descartes grasps the necessity of a critical scepsis for the true commencing of philosophy, and tentatively proposes a philosophical critique that, in its genuine form, "is not a theory, but a position-taking (Stellungnahme) and a method (Methode)" (Hua XXIV, p. 180). Descartes is the first who adopts scepticism as a part of a method and assumes a critical position towards knowledge by turning its

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Majolino 2018, p. 176.

legitimacy into a problem, an enigma. Most remarkably, then he seeks to ground any truth and objective being by means of *self-reflection*.

Descartes attempts, "with a radicalism unheard of until then, to discover the absolutely necessary beginning of philosophy, thereby deriving this beginning from absolute and utterly pure self-knowledge" (Hua VII, p. 8). His turn to the *ego cogito* is indeed a self-reflection on what is unquestionable and ultimately undoubtable since it is necessarily presupposed for the possibility of calling anything whatsoever into question or doubt. Notably, Descartes not only carries on "philosophy's uppermost purposive idea" of a thoroughly rational science (p. 5), but his scepsis also gives a *new orientation* to the Platonic/Socratic project, thereby performing a radicalization of the European project to give shape to philosophy in its "essential form of final validation (*Wesensform der Endgültigkeit*)" (p. 6). Through a critical self-reflection Descartes orients the analysis to subjectivity as the origin of all cognitive activities and the source from which rational operations can exhibit their objective legitimacy. As Husserl writes:

"The Cartesian radicalism of *presuppositionlessness*, with the goal of *tracing genuine scientific knowledge back to the ultimate sources of validity* and of *grounding it absolutely upon them*, required *reflections directed toward the subject*, required the *regression to the knowing ego in his immanence*" (Hua VI, p. 91/88-89; emphases added).

In this way, Descartes paves the way for a new *transcendental sense of philosophy*, which Husserl defines precisely as:

"the motif of inquiring back into the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge, the motif of the knower's reflecting upon himself and his knowing life in which all the scientific structures that are valid for him occur purposefully, are stored up as acquisitions, and have become and continue to become freely available" (pp. 100–101/97–98).

Remarkably, an awareness of the *distinctive task of philosophy* vis-à-vis the tasks of the positive sciences arises with Descartes. In Husserl's narrative, if philosophy begins as a science in general, doubts and critical-theoretical problems only emerge throughout its historical development. They become eminently philosophical questions, which remain unthematized by the positive sciences. These questions call any serious philosopher to a clarification of the self-evident principles grounding any science and form of thinking that advances a pretence of legitimacy. Cast out from the paradise of epistemic innocence, *the philosopher is called to reflect upon the sense of validity of her own subjective operations, to question even her own philosophy, and realizes that she ought to be guided by a method and the ideal of absolute self-justification.* 

However, Descartes fails to perform an 'authentic' philosophical critique, and transcendental philosophy only appears in the *Meditationes de prima philosophia* 

as an "idea in germinal form" (Hua VII, p. 284). His failure is twofold. First, while isolating the field of *cogitationes*, Descartes fails to reach its complete purity: he continued to uncritically operate with the metaphysical Scholastic notion of substance and "neglected to apply the consideration of doubt beyond the sphere of external transcendences, to the transcendence of the 'soul' and the personalempirical subject" (Hua XXV, p. 138). Second, what is peculiar to Descartes' scepsis is individuating the "Archimedean point" of a strictly cogent system in the evidence of the ego cogito ergo sum, that is, the axiomatic foundation of a "critically secured knowledge [that] develops as a single, ideal, universal mathematics, a single universal science of absolutely ideal rigour (absolut idealer Stringenz)" (Hua XXIV, pp. 188/189). Although Descartes aims at the goal of a genuine critique, he mistakes this goal with the ideal of rigor. Upon critical reflection, however, nothing prevents one from conceiving of this rigor as being itself merely factual, and nothing is actually clarified by Descartes with regard to the sense of knowledge. Thus, Husserl observes, Descartes simply assumed the validity of scientific deductive reasoning and, "by an inner attachment to his mathematical ideal of knowledge, he let himself be immediately deflected in a direction of thinking that helped the ominous idea of rational science to a supposedly absolute normative dignity" (Hua VI, p. 436). Descartes' failure then leads to the modern scepticism of Hume and his 'distorted' radical scepsis.

Hume's philosophy is, emphatically put, a radicalization of the Cartesian radicalism that lacks a reflection on the method of grounding and loses sight on the guiding idea of genuine philosophy, thereby relapsing into scepticism. Hume rightly deprives the ego-cogito from its mundane significance, and delves deeper into the cogitans-cogitatum relation by investigating the subjective genesis of any sense-formations, which includes the real world and its fundamental and allegedly objective categories. In a most radical form of subjectivism, Hume's problem is "the world-enigma in the deepest and most ultimate sense, the enigma of a world whose being is being through subjective accomplishment, and this with the selfevidence that another world cannot be at all conceivable" (p. 99/96-97). The immanent laws regulating all phenomena are now identified as "the true radical laws of all being" (Hua VII, p. 159). Thus, Hume sees the constitutive problems disclosed by a radically immanent attitude, and is "the first to grasp the universal concrete problem of transcendental philosophy" (Hua XVII, p. 226/256), fully understanding the demand of grounding philosophy and theory of knowledge in pure, immanent consciousness. In this way,

"Hume's psychology is the first systematic attempt at a science of pure givennesses in consciousness, [...] the first systematic and universal layout of the concrete constitutive problematic, the first concrete and purely immanent theory of knowledge. We could even go so far

as to say that Hume's *Treatise* is the first layout of a pure phenomenology, but in the form of a purely sensualist and empirical phenomenology" (Hua VII, pp. 156–157).

Here Husserl's praise to Hume ends with a pronounced devaluation, since Hume's psychology also represents a pernicious 'distortion' of the Cartesian turn to subjectivity. This distortion consists in tracing back the merely psychological origins of belief, and reducing the legitimacy of natural-scientific judgements and theories to habitual associations and custom, that is, to a form of blind regulation that lacks any rational justification. In Hume's scepsis, reason only rightfully ranges over only the self-enclosed and a priori domain of relations of ideas that, however, remains itself unduly investigated by Hume due to its obvious (and yet critically unclarified) validity.

Hume's distortion of the Cartesian self-reflection fatally leads to a radical fictionalism. Now "the whole world with all the objectivities is nothing but a system of semblance-formations, of fictions, which necessarily arise in subjectivity according to immanent psychological laws; and science is a self-illusion of subjectivity, or an art to usefully organize fictions for the goals of life" (p. 159; emphases added). Hume's fictionalism therefore represents "a kind of bankruptcy of philosophy" in its scientific pretense (Hua Mat IX, p. 419) that, in Husserl's narrative, risks closing off the project of an ideally rational philosophical science.

It is important to emphasize that, for Husserl, the bankruptcy of philosophy is always conceived of in comparison to the *project* of genuine philosophy that guides the teleology of European history. Thus, when Husserl confronts himself with the present crisis, he writes: "In order to be able to comprehend the disarray of the present 'crisis,' we had to work out the *concept of Europe as the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason*; we had to show how the European 'world' was born out of ideas of reason, i. e. out of the spirit of philosophy" (Hua VI, p. 299). Some commentators have recently claimed that for Husserl the "crisis is a crisis of *reason*" (Moran 2019, p. 19; Nenon 2003, p. 63). However, what is in crisis or what the crisis is ultimately about is *not* reason. Exegetically considered, Husserl never uses this exact sequence of words and, conceptually, the talk of a 'crisis of reason' prevents one from understanding what is actually in crisis for Husserl, which is rather the *idea of a rationally regulated and autonomous life*, namely, the *European project of genuine philosophy* that leaves nothing unaccounted, including all rational-scientific operations and its own sources of validity.

As Husserl argues in 1935, this distinctively philosophical enterprise is presently occluded by the naiveté of objectivism and naturalism that unreflectively ascribe autonomy, rationality, and objective validity to the natural sciences. They

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also 'la crise de la raison' (De Warren 2008, p. 23) and Trizio 2016, p. 209.

do so by eclipsing the authentic ground of all sciences as cultural, spiritual formations (Geistesgebilde), that is, by reducing human spiritual life to a mere causal appendage to nature. Blind to the intuition of the spirit qua spirit (Geist als Geist) and of the world as spiritual accomplishment (Welt als geistige Leistung), objectivism and naturalism deprive all sciences from their genuine rationality and ultimate scientificity. They deprive sciences from a thoroughly rational and radically scientific foundation, since "the spirit, and indeed only the spirit, exists in itself and for itself, is self-sufficient; and in its self-sufficiency, and only in this way, it can be treated truly rationally, truly and from the ground up scientifically" (Hua VI, p. 345/ 297).<sup>10</sup> Objectivism and naturalism also prevent humanity from reaching clarity about its existence, infinite tasks, and the inherently rational goals that animate the teleology of European history, thereby determining Europe's "estrangement from its own rational sense of life" (p. 347/299).

Again, this crisis of European existence is not the crisis of reason itself. By contrast, Husserl explicitly affirms:

"The 'crisis' could then become distinguishable as the apparent failure of rationalism. The reason for the failure of a rational culture, however, as we said, lies not in the essence of rationalism itself but solely in its external manifestation (Veräuerlichung), in its entanglement in 'naturalism' and 'objectivism'" (Ibid.; translation modified; emphases added).

The expression "crisis of reason" is therefore wrongly attributed by Husserl scholars to a crisis of rational thinking itself. At the most, it may more specifically serve as an abbreviation to indicate that modern, naïve, and inauthentic conceptions of reason have obscured the authentic notion of reason (Nenon 2009, p. 181). More generally, the expression 'crisis of reason' may refer to the "dissolution of the idea of universal philosophy [...] characterized also as the failure of philosophy, and specifically of its most important part, metaphysics, to become a science," that is, a crisis that affects the sciences in regard to their unity and "their scientificity in the deeper sense involving the authentic rationality of their task and method" (Trizio 2016, p. 209).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The passage continues as follows: "As for nature, however, in its natural-scientific truth, it is only apparently self-sufficient and can only apparently be brought by itself to rational knowledge in the natural sciences. For true nature in the sense of natural science is a product of the spirit that investigates nature and thus presupposes the science of the spirit. The spirit is by its essence capable of practicing self-knowledge, and as scientific spirit it is capable of practicing scientific self-knowledge, and this in an iterative way. Only in the knowledge belonging purely to the science of the spirit is the scientist not open to the objection that his own accomplishment conceals itself" (Hua VI, p. 345/297; emphases added).

<sup>11</sup> I will set aside the crucial role played by the project of an a posteriori metaphysics as being able to provide the ultimate interpretation of the truths of empirical sciences. I limit myself to refer to the illuminating and compelling analyses in Majolino 2020 and Trizio 2016.

Hume does not carry out the genuine critique necessary to fulfil the project of "a definitely valid, truth in itself philosophy" (Hua VI, p. 442). His scepsis questions the legitimacy of any knowledge concerning matters of facts and sets out to find its foundation in the immanent laws of subjectivity. However, devoid of an adequate method, Hume sinks into scepticism. His modern scepticism is no longer the sophists' playful exhibition of reason's embarrassment. Rather, in Hume's post-Cartesian, serious attempt to face critical-transcendental problems, scepticism now means "nothing other than *despair* about the possibility of understanding the objective accomplishment and validity of the sciences of matters of fact" (Hua XXIV, p. 184).

The thinker who, after Descartes, attempts to develop a "system of scientific transcendental philosophy" (Hua VII, p. 280) and produces a critique of rational thinking is Kant. In *Ideen I*, Husserl's praise to Kant's theoretical endeavour specifically refers to the sections of the first edition of the *Kritik* (1781) dedicated to the transcendental deduction. In opposition to post-Cartesian forms of rational dogmatism, the aim of the transcendental deduction is to show the legitimacy of the pure use of the concepts of the understanding in cognition. As Kant concisely puts it, this form of deduction addresses the problem of "how *subjective conditions of thinking* should have *objective validity*" (*KrV* 222, A 89–90/B 122). Kant does not intend to restate the canonical question of whether or not there could be a correspondence between our subjective modes of thinking and the given forms of objectivity. By contrast, the axis of Kant's Copernican revolution rests on the insight that "the representation alone makes the object possible" (224, A 92/B 125). Pure, conceptual representations do not determine the existence of the objectivity, but rather institute the a priori procedures for its recognition as an object.

For Kant, "reason determines its object wholly a priori" (107, B x) since its principles prescribe a priori the form in which any object can be experienced and cognized. Reason performs its legislative function precisely by instituting the a priori conditions under which any object must appear in order to be known and experienced as an object. In conjunction with the understanding and the transcendental synthesis of imagination, reason therefore determines the form of objectivity in general. Reason is the faculty of the unity of the a priori rules of the understanding under principles.<sup>13</sup> Pure concepts are precisely the a priori rules of the understanding under which the manifold of appearances is unified into one cognition, the pure normativity presiding over the power to produce objectivity.

The task of the deduction is therefore to clarify or, in the Kantian juridical language of the *quaestio juris*, to exhibit the legality, the "entitlement" or "lawfulness" of

**<sup>12</sup>** References to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* are cited first according to the Cambridge English translation (Kant 1998) and then in accordance with the original editions (A: 1781/B: 1787).

<sup>13</sup> KrV 389, A 302/B 359.

the categories as employed in the formation of knowledge (220, A 85/117). Its 'critical' goal is to show how a priori concepts, which are not drawn from experience, can be valid and legitimately range over objects of possible experience and cognition. This clarification specifically concerns the justification (Rechtfertigung) and a priori objective validity (Gültigkeit) of the concept-object relation, which rests on the spontaneity and law-giving power of reason. Thus, regarding our experience of the objects of nature, as Husserl observes, Kant discovers through a "regressive procedure" that "reason has a twofold way of functioning and showing itself" (Hua VI, p. 97/ 94). On the one hand, reason functions in "its systematic self-exposition, self-revelation in free and pure mathematizing, in the practice of the pure mathematical sciences" (Ibid.) in which reason explicates itself in normative laws. On the other hand, Kant retraces a second way "of reason constantly functioning in concealment, reason ceaselessly rationalizing sense-data and always having them as already rationalized" (*Ibid.*). In this way, despite the 'things in themselves' being "in principle inaccessible to (objective-scientific) knowledge" (p. 98/95), a scientific discourse on the world of sensible-intuited objects is possible and legitimated by means of the 'deductions' of the constant functioning of transcendental faculties.

As Husserl would put it, it is by means of a critique of reason that Kant attempts to show "the sense of legitimacy (Rechtssinn)" (Hua VII, p. 247) that structures our theoretical-scientific life, namely, the legitimacy of any accomplishment of science claiming to be valid in itself or objectively true. However, Husserl writes:

"The tremendous significance of Kant for the living philosophy of our times lies not in the Kantian theories, as Kant himself has understood and taught them with such suggestive force, rather in what he has seen as the content of its powerful intuitions before his conceptual imprints and theoretical formulations" (Hua Mat IX, p. 468, note 2).

As the next section will make clear, Kant's ingenuous intuitions do not prevent him from failing to produce a radical critique of rational thinking.

Before turning to Husserl's own critique of reason, which will be set in contrast with Kant's reflection, it is important to stress the philosophical contribution of the ante-phenomenological series of 'failing' attempts to elaborate a critique of reason. This historical excursus has shown us what a critique of reason must be in order to fulfil the conditions for a true philosophizing: *a genuine, radical critique of reason must present itself as an answer to the sceptical challenge* that rescues the philosopher from embarrassment and despair. Guided by the ideal of genuine philosophy, it must overcome scepticism and, at the same time, must fully embrace its transcendental impulse. It must be a *position-taking* on the 'sense' of objective validity, on the 'justification' of all forms of rational and evident grounding that become now thematic as problems. It must also provide their philosophical clarification, which is *methodologically* obtained by means of a universal suspension

of any unaccounted form of validity and through a radical self-reflection on subjectivity.

# 2 A 'prinzipielle Kritik': The Enigma of Reason in a Transcendental Conversion

Husserl's systematic attempt to outline a *phenomenological critique of reason* can be found in *Ideen I*, in which he portrays Kant as glimpsing the field of phenomenology before turning his analysis into a psychological falsification. <sup>14</sup> In 1924, Husserl also declares "an apparent essential affinity between this phenomenology and the transcendental philosophy of Kant" (Hua VII, p. 230). "However," Husserl continues, "to see him with phenomenological eyes also means to understand him anew" (p. 235). Although Husserl's critique of reason echoes Kant's criticism, when Husserl expresses the need of a "critique of reason," he also emphasizes that "the Kantian word must not be here understood in the Kantian way" (Hua XXV, p. 189).

Husserl's reception of Kant's criticism therefore marks his departure from Kant. This departure represents the starting point of this section, which aims at identifying the distinctive nature of Husserl's critique of reason. Husserl's recalibration of the question of reason operates in different contexts. At first, one should emphasize that Husserl's reflection no longer operates with a notion of reason as faculty. Husserl imputes to Kant a naturalization of the functions of subjectivity, which is latently conceived of as a compartment of a psycho-physical subject. According to Husserl, this leads Kant to a psychologistic account of rationality, to a mystification of the A-priori, and to "his mythical concept-formation" (Hua VI, p. 117/215). Kant's subjectivism fails to disclose the *authentically transcendental* ground of analysis on which the question of reason can be adequately investigated.

As discussed, Kant elaborates a reflection on the extension and the conditions of possibility of our a priori knowledge. This reflection is the exercise of *reason's self-scrutiny*, that is, a self-examination on reason's unity and inner articulation by tracing out its a priori grounds and limits in the synthetic formation of cognition and experience. <sup>16</sup> Kant's critique of reason is therefore a *transcendental form of self-knowledge*. It is the attempt of tracing the subjective conditions for objectivity back to reason's *pure* normativity, namely, its rules and principles that are

**<sup>14</sup>** Hua III/1, pp. 133-134/114.

<sup>15</sup> Hua I, p. 92/57. Cf. Pradelle 2012 and Staiti 2015, pp. 5-6.

**<sup>16</sup>** KrV 652–653, A 758-759/B 786-787. Cf. Ferrarin 2016, pp. 8, 14.

independent from experience but a priori produce the realm of possible experience. 17 This attempt is propaedeutic to a science: metaphysics. Metaphysics according to one of the many ways in which Kant defines it—exhibits the systematic connection of all the forms in which reason a priori determines its objects as produced in accordance with its own projects.

Instead, Husserl recognizes that any scientific-critical discourse on rational thinking first requires an understanding of thinking itself. 18 No certainty of objective being in the sense of science can be granted without a clarification of thinking itself that, broadly conceived, includes all the subjective operations leading to the constitution of sense. Hence, phenomenology must first disclose the subjectivity in its latent sense-constitutive function, must systematically explicate the intentionality of subjective operations, and, correlatively, must grant philosophical visibility to the world as an intelligible structure of pure phenomena. This 'purity' is not reached through the demarcation of principles that are autonomous relative to experience, but rather obtained by a reflection upon experience itself. 19 What is needed, then, is a new, utterly radical, and methodologically guided orientation of philosophical reflection that opens the space in which the question of reason can be authentically addressed.

More specifically, the problem of reason assumes its genuine transcendental significance by means of the radicalism of the epochē and the phenomenological reduction. This radicalism is guided by the eminent goal of genuine philosophy: its scientific task to reach absolute clarity concerning, first, its true beginnings (wahre Anfänge) and, second, the ultimate origins (letzte Ursprüngen) of every sense and being. 20 The radicality of philosophical goals indeed first demands the radicality of its beginning and procedure. Thus, "what is peculiarly proper to the essence of the incipient philosophy of this phenomenological-transcendental radicalism is that [...] rather than having a ground of things taken for granted and ready in advance, [...] it excludes in principle a ground of this or any other sort" (p. 185/181). This exclusion of any sort of presupposed conviction is nothing but the *absolute epochē*: the theoretical standpoint of "putting-into-question (Infragestellung)" that pertains to a critique that "confesses that it does not understand knowledge" (Hua XXIV, p. 194). If, as Husserl emphatically expresses, "the Moloch of dogmatism devours the one who has sacrificed to him only once and be it even unconsciously"

<sup>17</sup> KrV 100-101, A xi-xii; 282, A 156-157/B 196.

<sup>18</sup> Hua XVII, p. 17/19.

<sup>19</sup> In opposition to Kant's conception of 'pure' reason, Husserl's reason is the reason of experience (Ferrarin 2015, p. 176). Obviously, the word 'experience' no longer signifies our natural experience of the world or the experience of ourselves as being part of world.

<sup>20</sup> Hua XXV, p. 61. Cf. Majolino 2018.

(p. 188), only the absolute epochē is the antidote against any form of dogmatism and the possible opening of a rigorous critique.

In a Cartesian spirit, the epochē is a methodological procedure for a critical scepsis. <sup>21</sup> However, only with Husserl does critical scepsis embrace the whole scope of experience and knowledge. Only Husserl's 'absolute' epochē is the first authentic expression of the "radicalism of cognitive autonomy (Radikalismus der Erkenntnisautonomie)" (Hua V, p. 151/418; translation modified, emphases added). Indeed, only the phenomenological epochē is the radical abandonment of any forms of naiveté, merely instinctive or uninvestigated certainty. It is the "universal subversion (*Umsturz*)" (Hua VIII, p. 23) of the natural attitude, which still characterizes Descartes' mundanization of the ego as 'mens, sive animus, sive intellectus.' It is the self-induced abstention from any presuppositions, including those that are still operative in Kant's impure notions of 'faculty' and the 'thing in itself.'

The subversive force of the epochē, however, leads to neither the ontological disruption of the world nor the negation of the possibility of objective knowledge in general, as is the case with dogmatic scepticism. *The epochē* rather *consists in the 'impossible' disruption of the obviousness or self-evidence of the world's manifestation as actually existing*. Along with the disruptive force of sophistic scepticism, this phenomenological subversion can be discarded in its laughable pretension if it is incorrectly understood as the merely speculative or playful gesture of putting into question that which is constantly experienced as evident and exhibits its validity at any moment of our lives. However, following Husserl, this subversion acquires a serious, if not dramatic tone as the desperate attempt to reach clarity on something which is uncontested, certain, and yet philosophically incomprehensive.

As an essential step of his critical scepsis, Husserl's epochē turns what is non-problematic, self-evident, and obvious into a problem, since it questions precisely all the sources of legitimacy that ordinarily grant evidence and validity to knowledge. In an utterly unnatural orientation of thought, *the epochē turns self-evidence into a riddle*. In a non-Cartesian manner, one cannot even ascribe certainty to any minimal forms of knowledge (e. g., *ego cogito ergo sum*). The only certainty that remains at one's disposal is the certainty regarding the enigmatic status of knowledge, which now becomes a truly philosophical problem. Therefore, the epochē is uncompromised, unmotivated, and free from any practical interests, yet phenomenology *must* begin with a universal subversion, which presents itself as a *philosophical necessity*.

**<sup>21</sup>** Contrary to dogmatic scepticism and in line with Descartes, Husserl's critical scepsis is a *position-taking* and a *method*, the epochē being an essential part of this method. See Sect. 1.

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The radicalism of the cognitive autonomy, indeed, acquires its significance only in conformity with the Socratic/Platonic ideal of epistēmē, the ideal of thoroughly rational evaluation in the axiological sphere, and the ideal of legitimated ethical life guided by rational practical principles. In other words, it is only in light of the idea and original driving-force (*Triebkraft*) of genuine philosophy that the epochē becomes a demand (Forderung) for 'anyone who seriously seeks to be a philosopher.' If in the natural orientation of thinking and rational proceeding of the sciences "one lives in evidence but does not reflect upon evidence" (Hua XXIV, p. 164), a radical critique is a call for the philosopher who desires to pursue a thoroughly rational life and, accordingly, preliminarily turns evidence itself into an enigma. This critique is meant to fulfil the defining task or authentic goal of any genuine philosopher, that is, "critical grounding and definitive evaluation (kritische Begründung und endgültige Auswertung)" (p. 163). It is precisely the attempt to realize this goal that righteously entitles Husserl to the philosophers' community. This goal cannot be accomplished by any positive science, as it refers to the distinctive task of philosophy. Indeed, contrary to the sciences, philosophy provides no explanation about the world and elaborates no theory. Philosophy "reaches into nothing, and yet its 'critique,' its clarification of sense (Sinnesklärung), concerns each and every thing, because it concerns all foundations in principle, all systematic steps, all the acts of thinking that claim legitimacy in accordance with the essence of their accomplishments" (pp. 165–166).

Striving towards the ideal of definite evaluation, the validity of all the rational operations that ground, account for, and bind truths cannot be left unaccounted for or conceived of as exclusively subordinated to the extrinsic goals and norms of their practical use. Rather, a phenomenological critique of any rational operation demands a critical grounding in the specific sense of the self-clarification, namely, the self-understanding (Selbstverständigung) and exhibition of its being itself valid (an sich gilt). To overcome the unphilosophical character of positive science, the critique requires the self-justification (Selbstrechtfertigung) of both any rational-scientific procedure and, more importantly, any rational grounding that has to be legitimated as being valid according to its own self-evident principles, that is, principles that do not rise or wane, form or dissolve, but are instead ideal forms whose legitimacy requires no further clarification. One must gain, Husserl writes, an "insight into the ratio (Einsicht in die ratio)" of the accomplishments carried out in the scientific praxis and, in particular, one must trace back the "rootedness in principles (prinzipielle Verwurzelung)" (Hua XVII, p. 7/3) of sciences as their ultimate foundation.

The function of Husserl's critique is therefore to bring rational consciousness itself to self-clarity as operating in conformity with its inherent goals. Husserl's critique of reason is distinctively a 'prinzipielle Kritik' that demands a "radical selfnormalization by principles (radikalen Selbstnormierung aus Prinzipien)" (Hua XVII,

p. 8/4; translation modified, emphases added). This *prinzipielle Kritik* is the elucidation of the 'ultimate sense' (*letzter Sinn*) of any form of objectivity by tracing back its roots, origins, and sources of legitimacy. It is the *clarification of 'objectivity itself' by exhibiting its sense and being valid in conformity with self-evident principles*. Then, one may ask: what are the principles of Husserl's critique, the exhibition of which provides a clarification of the sense of objectivity? In what sense are these principles the foundation for any rational accomplishments? How can this *prinzipielle Kritik* be possible after the absolute epochē? How can a theory of knowledge be carried out after the suspension of evidence and validity?

To begin with, this critique is made possible by the *transcendental reduction*. As Husserl remarks, "the epochē is not itself a method, it is at best a component of a method" (Hua XXIV, p. 193). Oriented towards a distinctive goal, the epochē is one preliminary methodological step that renders possible a critique of reason only in conjunction with the transcendental reduction, which directs the analysis towards pure phenomena. By means of the epochē, one can put into question any science, any form of knowledge, in fact, the legitimacy of anything whatsoever. However, even in this state of absolute uncertainty, it would be an absurdity to doubt that 'something' manifests itself in consciousness. Indeed, one could universally question the possibility of any subjective operation to provide evidence for its performance and to guarantee the objectivity of its accomplishment. One could systematically question how perception could grant legitimacy for the actual being or existence of the perceived object, or one could even doubt about the justification of mathematical demonstrations in providing us with a priori truths.<sup>22</sup> However, the phenomenon, the being of whatever appears in any subjective act, remains indubitable and, Husserl claims, "I can freely have this world of phenomena at my disposal: the phenomenon is as phenomenon and can be considered according to its content and sense" (p. 199).

As *pure phenomenon*, every form of objectivity is not only divested of its unaccounted validity and participation in the actual world, but, more generally, every transcendent unity is also re-duced, or traced-back, to the *ideally infinite manifolds of lived-experiences and modes of appearances* in and through which something necessarily *appears to us*, acquiring its intelligibility, its sense (*Sinn*), its being suchand-such (*Sosein*), and its validity of being (*Seinsgeltung*) in *pure subjectivity*.

"As soon as one has grasped this pure subjectivity, one also becomes aware that, in its pure conscious lived-experiences, this subjectivity is *the original source of all sense-bestowal*, *the original place in which every objectivity* that has to mean something for the knowing *Ego* and has to be valid as being *receives its meaning*, *receives its validity*" (Hua VII, p. 167; emphases added).

<sup>22</sup> For Husserl's account of perception and its existence-claim, allow me to refer to my study Cimino 2019.

The reduction is therefore the philosophical shift from the fixed identity of metaphysical and ontological unities to the transcendental, constitutive variety of unityof-multiplicity: a variety in which everything that manifests itself to us can show itself in the constituting flow of consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

The form of objectivity in general is reconsidered. "Every object (*Objekt*), every object whatever (Gegenstand überhaupt) (even every immanent [object]) indicates a structure of rules (Regelstruktur) of the transcendental ego" (Hua I, p. 90/53; translation modified). The ontological unity of being experienced in the natural attitude is neither fragmented nor dispersed in a chaotic stream of appearances, as argued by the sceptics. Every form of objectivity is a unity, but a unity conceived of as the index for a regulated multiplicity of actual or possible experiences in which something can appear as one and the same in the flow of consciousness. Every objective unity can be transcendentally clarified according to the principles presiding over the lawful, synthetic connection of its corresponding manifold of appearings.<sup>24</sup> These transcendental principles regulate all the subjective operations that bring into appearance something objective in consciousness, including what manifests itself as evident and valid in itself. These principles are precisely the origins of every sense, truth and being that genuine philosophy first pursues to investigate: they are constitutive rules of synthesis that govern the variety of modes of experiencing consciousness through which every objectivity is constituted.

That said, one should *not* identify the question of reason with problems of synthetic constitution tout court. One should duly recall that Husserl's phenomenology of reason concerns neither the truth nor the being of world, nor does it regard any theory or science about the world.<sup>25</sup> Rather, it sets out to clarify the validity (Gültigkeit) of this truth, of this being, as well as the validity of any theory and science that pre-supposes the transcendent objectivity of the world. The critique specifically concerns "the enigma of all enigmas (das Rätsel aller Rätsel)", that is, the link between reason and being, between "reason as giving, of itself, meaning to the existing world and, correlatively, the world as existing through reason" (Hua VI, pp. 11–12/13). The relation between rational consciousness, truth, and being now truly becomes enigmatic in the sense of becoming the thematic object of a critical inquiry that in no way assumes the validity of this relation as a premise for its judgements but treats it exclusively as a problem.

Once having performed the reduction, even 'truth' and 'true being' can be found as occurrences in pure consciousness and, more specifically, can be rigorously treated as only intentional correlates of rational operations. Every rational

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Majolino 2012 and 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Majolino 2017, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup> See Sect. 1.

accomplishment-including all the sciences and their objectively valid achievements—manifests itself in consciousness as a phenomenon and, in particular, as a phenomenon of validity (Geltungsphänomen): "as an appearance of validity (Geltungserscheinung), an appearing claim of validity (erscheinender Geltungsanspruch)" (Hua XXIV, p. 199; emphases added). Thus, a critique of reason specifically aims at the first, irreducible principles that regulate not only any form of sense-bestowing (Sinngebung), but also the validity of any theoretical truth and the validity of being (Seinsgeltung) of anything claiming to be objective. These are not psychological laws as in Hume, but rather immanent principles of pure subjectivity. These are the ideal rules that regulate the nexuses constituting objectivity and, more precisely, the laws of essences (Wesensgesetze) presiding over the validity of different kinds and manifolds of subjective conscious operations and the being-valid of their objective accomplishments. Indeed, every unity of multiplicity constituted in strict conformity with these principles not only manifests itself in the flow of consciousness as being such-and-such, but also constantly validates itself as a unity that is truly objective in itself.

The reduction is therefore vital for the critique since, as Husserl emphasizes in *Erste Philosophie*, it is nothing but "the pointing back to 'transcendental' subjectivity as the *field of origin of reason and all rational forms*" (Hua VIII, p. 28; emphases added). This "method of questioning back (*Methode der Rückfrage*)" (Hua V, p. 139/406) does not aim at establishing axioms, logical-formal conditions that universally bind the validity of all acts of knowledge, or any 'Archimedean point' for a science of absolutely ideal rigor as in Descartes. Indeed, even the sense and justification of deductive reasoning are turned into problems by a radical critique. Husserl's method of questioning back does not even 'deduce,' in the Kantian meaning of the expression, the transcendental faculties and structural operations of subjectivity by means of a 'regressive' and ultimately 'constructive' method. It rather serves to fulfil the authentic goal of a critique by tracing back the *self-given* immanent, transcendental sources of legitimacy that sever authentic knowledge, true epistēmē from mere opinion, doxa and, more generally, discriminate reason from un-reason.

Under philosophical scrutiny, even all sciences, which unreflectively first appear to be the most rational endeavours, show since their very origins a profound *lack of authentic rationality*. This original deficiency does not concern their progress or productivity, which successfully fulfils the practical goals of the positive sciences (i. e., discovering and theorizing in order to master and predict worldly phenomena). Rather, it regards their sources of legitimacy, sense, and evidence. Accordingly, any rational accomplishment must be *transcendentally grounded* in the sense that its objectivity must become intelligible by means of a self-evident comprehension of the principles regulating its validation in consciousness. In an idealistic vein, "the sense of objectivity must be interpreted

legitimately as a rule of immanent phenomena (Regel immanenter Phänomene) that arranges itself in the knowing subjectivity according to the standards of reason" (Hua Mat IX, pp. 18–19; emphases added).

The analysis conducted in this section has then elucidated how and why, after the reduction, 'objective truth,' 'true being,' and 'objectivity itself' refer only to specific rules presiding over pure phenomena. They correlate to regulated immanent acts of consciousness through which objective sense-unities are not only constituted but receive legitimacy. In the phenomenological attitude, 'reason' (Vernunft) and 'un-reason' (Unvernunft) are distinctive "titles for transcendental operations, aimings and attainments or also failures" (Hua VIII, p. 168; emphases added), which can be brought into full clarity in accordance with their own self-evident principles and structural nexuses. What is now required is a transcendental and eidetic inquiry that exhibits the essential connections ruling over different types of Geltungsphänomene. Indeed, the reduction not only finds the origins of any validation and verification in the pure field of subjectivity, but, since the latter presents itself "as an original field of directly intuitable invariable structures" (Hua VI, p. 436), the reduction also opens the domain for an investigation that aims to show the laws of essences specifically regulating all rational operations and accomplishments. By means of a transcendental repositioning of the problem of reason and an eidetic description of its a priori structures Husserl elaborates a new conception of reason, which is the subject matter of the next section.

Before proceeding with our analysis, however, it is important to understand that Husserl's critique of reason is a form of self-reflection (Selbstbesinnung) in a very distinctive sense. Indeed, what Husserl considers an "absolute requirement (absolut Erfordernis)" (Hua V, p. 147/415; translation modified) for the realization of genuine philosophy is nothing less than a *philosophical conversion*. If the epochē is a "radical alteration" of the natural attitude (Hua III/1, p. 61/52), the reduction determines a "phenomenological" or "transcendental conversion (Umstellung)" that Husserl deems as decisive "for the being or non-being of a philosophy-a philosophy that in radical scientificity knows what is required by its peculiar sense, to be grounded in ultimate self-responsibility, and knows which ground, which method is required" (Hua V, pp. 147-148/414-415; translation modified). Here, conversion indicates a "thoroughly unnatural orientation of thinking" (Hua XXIV, p. 165): a turning into one self (se convertere) that leads to the discovery of the experiencing subject as that 'transcendental I.'

However, Husserl's entry into the 'transcendental' is not Kant's inward movement of reason by means of a faculty's self-investigation on its 'pure' principles, projects, and limits. It is instead an entry into the field of consciousness that leads "back to the things themselves" (Hua XIX/1, p. 10/168), the very aim of phenomenological reflections since the Logische Untersuchungen.

phenomenologist turns to subjectivity in order to secure scientific truths concerning the one, actual world: the world now examined in immanence yet experienced as transcending consciousness, as existing and objectively valid in itself. In a moment of radical self-understanding, *subjectivity becomes conscious of itself* as "the source of all reason and unreason, all right and wrong, all reality and fiction, all that is and is not valuable, every deed and misdeed" (Hua III/1, p. 196/ 169).

With the reduction, the radicalism of cognitive autonomy finds its second expression in this philosophical conversion, that is, in the "firm resolution" in which consciousness recognizes itself in its "pure ownessentialness (Eigenwesentlichkeit)" (Hua VII, p. 254), traces back the validity of objective-formations to the breadths and depths of its synthetic function and constitutive principles, and assumes absolute self-responsibility on its own operations. Husserl emphatically expresses the radicalism of the transcendental conversion by writing: "I must lose the world by epochē, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination (universale Selbstbesinnung)" (Hua I, p. 183/157). Again, the world is 'lost,' but not in the sense of vanishing into nothing or as not-existing. Through the epochē the world rather loses its naively assumed validity of being, yet it can be regained by means of the philosophical Besinnung opened by the reduction.

What Husserl indicates with the expression 'Besinnung,' when "radically understood," is the "original sense-explication, which transposes, and first strives to transpose the sense in the mode of unclear meaning to the sense in the mode of full clarity or essential possibility" (Hua XVII, p. 13/9, translation modified). 'Universale Selbstbesinnung' is therefore nothing but the sense-explication in which subjectivity clarifies its own sense and immanent, essential principles. It is the self-reflection by means of which consciousness 'makes sense of itself' (sich besinnt) not as merely empirical-psychological ego but as the transcendental ground for any forms of objectivity, for any truth and being. It is by means of a transcendental conversion that consciousness can explicate the eidetic structures of its own acts bestowing sense and objective validity, thereby exhibiting the ideal principles that a priori allows one to discriminate reason from non-reason.

In a more general sense, 'universale Selbstbesinnung' can also be conceived of as a kind of philosophical awareness: namely, a self-clarification that emerges in the writings in which Husserl confronts himself with the very *idea of philosophy*, as well as *its possibility, real existence, and history.*<sup>26</sup> This awareness is ultimately

**<sup>26</sup>** This explains both the absence of the expressions 'Besinnung' and 'Selbstbesinnung' in a systematic work such as Ideen I, and their recurrence in Husserl's 'critical-historical' writings such as Erste Philosophie, the Krisis, and his multiple 'Introductions to Philosophy.'

philosophy's concrete "self-understanding of its authentic vocation (echten Berufes)" (Hua VI, p. 445) and infinite task. Indeed, Husserl claims that:

"a transcendental philosophy is the more genuine, and better fulfils its vocation as philosophy, the more radical it is and, finally, that it comes to its actual and true existence, to its actual and true beginning, only when the philosopher has reached a clear understanding of himself as the subjectivity functioning as original source" (p. 102/99; translation modified).

Since philosophy is never a private matter, an 'universale Selbstbesinnung' is inherently connected with "the clarification of the abiding identity of the philosophical task throughout all its own transformations, as they historically manifest themselves in the multifarious philosophical systems" (p. 442). The phenomenological conversion is not only originally motivated by the project of genuine philosophy, but is also historically enacted by the new awareness of a philosophy that ought to be conceived of in strict conformity with its ideal criteria of realization. Accordingly, this universal awareness can be characterized as "'teleologisch'-historischen Selbstbesinnung" (p. 437) that urges to the concrete realization of a truly radical foundation of philosophy: the definite institution of a transcendental philosophy that fulfils its most proper sense. A methodological *Besinnung* serves the scope of a radical, genuine critique, and pertains to the teleologically oriented course of universal philosophy that, since its historical origin,

"[...] required methodological Besinnung: Besinnung-the word is excellent-it required reflection upon the 'sense' of the striving for knowledge in general, i. e. upon the sense of accomplishment, at which the striving for knowledge aims, upon the sense of truth, which has to be elaborated there, and of true being, which has to be determined by it" (Hua Mat IX, p. 100).

Accordingly, *Ideen I*, in which the epochē and the reduction are discussed and a 'phenomenology of reason' is introduced, occupies a crucial place in the historical development of philosophy as rational-scientific enterprise. *Ideen I* is Husserl's systematic attempt to fulfil "the great task of our time, to carry out a radical reflection (radikale Besinnung), in order to explicate the genuine sense of this idea of philosophy and to demonstrate the possibility of its realization" (Hua V, p. 139/ 406).

### 3 Idea: Reason as Teleological Rule and Strukturform of Transcendental Subjectivity

The previous section has shown how the riddle of reason only acquires its full intelligibility in the form of a radical transcendental question. Husserl's critique

addresses the problem of reason as a *prinzipielle Kritik* and demands the self-normalization of rational consciousness according to its own immanent principles. The clarification of the sense of objective validity can only be conducted by means of a *Selbstbesinnung*, that is, by a radical self-understanding and final self-justification. The only viable path to overcome the positivism of the sciences is indeed the transcendental grounding of their objective accomplishments in the subjective operations of the consciousness that thinks, judges, and knows. That said, one could still ask: what distinctively is reason in Husserl's phenomenology?

By opening the pure field of consciousness, the reduction directs the focus on the *original givenness* and *evidence* of the objects themselves. Since the breakthrough of phenomenology in 1900-01, Husserl's motto—'back to the things themselves'—is indeed a call for *self-evidence*, that is, a demand for justification and exhibition of the legitimacy of what is originally given in experience and, in particular, a demand to regain the idea of knowledge in its most authentic sense. Husserl's re-articulation of the problem of knowledge rests on the intersection of the concepts of truth, evidence, and reason, and, starting from their interconnection (and distinctions), the following analysis is an attempt to elucidate Husserl's *idea of reason*.

"In knowledge", Husserl affirms, "we possess truth" (Hua XIX, p. 29/17), and a possession of truth assumes its scientific value only when endowed with the character of evidence. However, Husserl rejects both mystical-dogmatic and psychologistic conceptions of evidence as an "index veri" (Hua III/1, p. 46/39) or an inner mark of consciousness that signals the correctness of certain predications by means of an either innate or merely subjective 'felt' connection to the truth.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, "evidence", Husserl stresses in the Cartesianische Meditationen, "is, in the broadest sense, an *experience* of a being and a being-as-such" (Hua I, p. 52/12; translation modified). Here, the problem of evidence is the universal problem of givenness. In a general sense, it regards the clarification of the manner in which something objective can be given through subjective acts. In a narrow sense, instead, the problem of evidence indicates the distinctive character of those subjective acts that do not simply intend their correlate as being such-and-such, but also grasp it in its *objective being* with certain degrees of certainty. Evidence is the process of experiencing a truth-self or true-being, that is, an experience that occurs when one has a direct insight (Einsicht) of the coincidence (Deckung) between the empty intending of the object meant and the intuition of the thing itself (die Sache selbst).

<sup>27</sup> Hua III/1, p. 334/287.

"This insight", Husserl specifies in 1917, "is the original production of rational functions, in which the truth becomes originally conscious" (Hua XXV, p. 129). This insight exhibits and renders one conscious of the legitimizing grounds (Rechtsgründe) that motivate the validity of what is intended by means of an intuitive form of apprehending or seeing (einsehen). Hence, rationality (Ver*nünftigkeit*) should be linked to the question of evidence as self-giving. However, it specifically concerns the synthesis of unification of the way in which the object is subjectively intended and the way it objectively manifests itself in intuition.

Thus, reason is a distinctive type of logos. Semantically considered, reason originally belongs to the constellation of meanings related to the word 'logos.' It refers to one of the many senses of 'holding together' that can be generally expressed by the term logos in its unifying, connective function.<sup>28</sup> Reason and logos are not only semantically related, but also structurally connected, as both possess a structure of synthesis. Qua one distinct form of logos, reason relates to the theme of constitution, that is, to the set of problems of how multiplicities are held together by means of unifying modes of synthesis. However, reason should not be equated with logos. Reason does not relate to synthesis tout court, so that it can neither be identified nor generically associated with the question of constitution. It concerns only *specific* kinds of synthetic operations endowed with the character of evidence in a narrow sense.

Accordingly, in *Ideen I* Husserl addresses the question of reason and evidence in strict connection with distinctive modes of positing (Setzung) and, more specifically, with their corresponding possibilities of verification (Bewährung) and confirmation (Bestätigung). Husserl also restates this position in the Cartesianische Meditationen by affirming: "Reason refers to possibilities of verification; and verification refers ultimately to making evident or having as evidence" (Hua I, p. 92/57). Rational functions refer to the exhibition of evidence that occurs in the continuous synthesis of coincidence (Deckungssynthesis) concerning the 'posited'

**<sup>28</sup>** 'Holding together' is one of the more original significations of λέγειν, from which the word 'logos' arises. "The word logos, from which the name logic is derived, has a great many significations, which, by easily understood metaphors, arose from the more original significations of λέγειν-namely: 'to hold together' (zusammenlegen), 'to set forth' (darlegen), and then, to set forth by means of the word, by means of speech" (Hua XVII, p. 22/18; translation modified). Although in this passage Husserl does not speak about 'constitution' at all, one could be tempted to push the argument forward and claim that the general idea of 'holding together' encompasses the problems of synthetic constitution. The latter are indeed structured by the broader question of unity and multiplicity. However, it is important to stress that the problems of constitution only concern specific modes in which multiplicities are held together. Hence, the concepts of 'synthetic constitution' and 'holding together' cannot simply be juxtaposed. For a painstaking analysis of the relation between the concepts of 'constitution' (Konstitution) and 'multiplicity' (Mannigfaltigkeit), see Majolino 2012.

(gesetzte) objectivity—i. e., the object 'taken to be something' and 'to be so-and-so'—and actualized by means of the intuitive givenness of the object itself.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the sense or posit is also 'fulfilled' (erfüllt) and, more importantly, the object meant can also be 'verified' (bewährt), 'confirmed' (bestätigt) according to its true-self and true-being, and ultimately known.<sup>30</sup> In other words, in the theoretical attitude, rationality is anchored into the problem of knowledge, evidence, and truth as a constant justification (Berechtigung) via fulfilment. Here, reason operates as an intuitive confirmation of the true-being of objectivity, namely, the constant being valid in itself of something objective posited to be such and such.

Notably, the phenomenological solution to the problem of cognition through the synthesis of fulfilment dispels the Kantian problem concerning the accordance between intuition and concept. Moreover, reason does not institute the world-consciousness correlation, but—to use a Kantian vocabulary in a non-Kantian framework—it instead exhibits the justification and validity of the correspondence between 'sense' and 'objective true-being.' The world is not merely thought in consciousness; it does not only have a meaning for consciousness. The world appears and has significance for consciousness in the way it actually is, namely, as truly in itself and valid in itself. The world is no longer naively assumed (natural attitude), nor is it simply considered in its essential relation to consciousness (intentional correlation). The world can now be rightfully determined in 'objective truth,' that is, its objective being can thus be *legitimately claimed* in accordance with its own evidence. The world can be justified, verified, and confirmed in consciousness *in the whole series of concordant syntheses*. This latter point allows us to identify two essential traits of reason.

First, reason does not operate 'locally,' that is, it does not pertain to a single or a discrete series of experiences. Accordingly, isolated configurations of positings, disconnected syntheses of fulfilment, and modes of evident confirmation that refer to partitions of experience cannot be strictly qualified as rational. The function of reason is to bring the true-being of objectivity into a consciousness of evidence as constantly validated in the *harmonious*, *total unfolding of experience*. Reason relates to the synthetic functioning of consciousness in its demand of true-objectivity and, more eminently, in the *continuous confirmation and legitimacy* (*Rechtmäigkeit*) of what is meant and posited *within the whole texture of experience*. In this regard, to posit is already to demand the object's placement in a general system of rational validation and, ideally, the objective sense and true-being of

**<sup>29</sup>** In general, the process of rational validation is rendered by the German verb '*ausweisen*,' which encloses the meanings of authenticating, identifying, demonstrating in the sense of discerning or recognizing something by showing its true nature. Cf. Dahlstrom 2015, p. 274.

**<sup>30</sup>** Hua III/1, p. 314/270.

what is intended has to be verified and maintained in an unruptured fashion. It is only the harmony among concordant and mutual supporting syntheses that renders our subjective experience of objectivity rational, and it is only this harmony that leads to the formation of a rigidly bound form of allness (Allheit). In other words, the ultimate, objective correlates of reason are higher-order, harmonious unities of multiplicities.

Second, the idea of harmony confirms that reason is not generically logos. It is not a 'holding together' that one can, at best, specify by connecting reason with Husserl's concept of unifying synthesis. Reason is a telos, a directionality towards ideally complete objective unity and the unconditional true being of what is intended and fully harmonized in the whole frame of experience. Reason is the teleological direction of consciousness in constituting certain harmonious manifolds of pure phenomena. Reason is a telos that, if phenomenologically investigated, clarifies the sense of 'objectivity' or 'objective validity,' the subject-matter of a genuine critique.

A salient character of Husserl's doxical reason is indeed its entelechy towards the exhibition of truth and, in this way, reason assumes the title of a distinctive teleological orientation of transcendental constitution towards complete fulfilment, final verification, ideal evidence, and total harmony. To recall, integrate, and slightly modify an already cited passage: reason is the 'title for transcendental operations, aimings and attainments' that strive for a final form of objective validation grounded in self-evidence, arranging themselves in totally harmonious configurations of consciousness.31 Thus, in the theoretical sphere, a specific kind of synthesis—namely, rational synthesis—is always guided by the ideal of a universal, unconditionally valid, absolute truth which, for Husserl, remains "an idea, lying in infinity" (Hua XVII, p. 245/277). Put differently, rational consciousness operates here in the form of the perpetual striving of knowing towards the ideal realization of objective truth and, most eminently, objective science.

How can one make sense of the teleological-ideal character of reason and, correlatively, of the teleological form of allness produced by rational operations? Noetically, how does reason's teleology relate to the intentional striving of conscious acts without being reduced to that intentional striving? Noematically, how do the objective unities of rational consciousness differ from what is constituted by consciousness in general?

On the one hand, the question of reason is essentially nestled within the transcendental problems of the object-constitution, that is, the problems of the appearing of a sense-unity in consciousness. As discussed, every manifestation is essentially regulated by transcendental principles that rule over the horizon of

<sup>31</sup> See Sect. 2. Hua VII, p. 168.

possibilities in which a sense-unity is constituted. Thus, Husserl writes: "In pure consciousness, 'object' and 'reason' signify a layer of ideal possibilities indicated by the essence or sense of consciousness" (Hua XXV, p. 192). Generally considered, *all* consciousness' constituting functions are teleologically oriented. In the constitution of any possible sense-unity, a subjective manifold is regulated in accordance with a drive for unity: *the teleological striving of intentionality that permeates the whole life of consciousness in all its constitutive performances*.

On the other hand, the process of intentional constitution forms sense-unities that ought to be legitimized as 'objectively' valid. If intentional directedness is itself "a striving, it is from the very beginning 'driving at' a satisfaction" (Hua XI, p. 83/126), one should further specify that only some sense-formations actually exhibit themselves with evidence and, as already seen, it is only evidence that provides the ground for any confirmation of the object posited as actually being in the way it is intended to be. This paves the way for the more restricted question of the identification and re-identification of what is now intuitively apprehended with self-evidence, and this ultimately leads to the scientific problem of the formation of a harmonious order of stable syntheses. Indeed, only at this higher level can something objective be universally decreed as valid in itself with absolute necessity. Thus, rational teleology 'most authentically' concerns higher-order objective unities as the harmonious systems of fixed, concordant syntheses of validation that *render science possible*.

Hence, the "phenomenology of reason presupposes the universal phenomenology throughout" (Hua III/1, p. 333/ 286), and relies on the systematic explication of the intentionality proper to different subjective operations. Despite being inherently related to each other, however, *the question of reason does not collapse into the transcendental problem of sense-constitution*. Nor does it seem correct to assert that, "for Husserl, reason is the historical manifestation of transcendental constituting life" (Manca 2019, p. 55). Husserl could not be clearer in asserting that: "Rational consciousness is not [...] consciousness in general" (Hua XXV, p. 147). Indeed, the formation of unstable, discontinuous, non-rational worlds—such as fictional, merely phantasied, and oneiric worlds—produces no contradiction in the constitutive performance of transcendental consciousness. Not every constitutive accomplishment is *eo ipso* rational. Rather, consciousness' transcendental function presides over the formation of any sense-unity, including both the rational and the irrational. This is why Husserl states that "in pure consciousness, 'object' and 'reason' signify *a* layer of ideal possibilities indicated by the essence or sense

**<sup>32</sup>** Consciousness also embraces both the negative concept of 'irrationality' or 'non-reason', on the one hand, and the sphere of neutrality and phantasy, on the other, as respectively opposed to and detached from reason in a positive sense.

of consciousness" (p. 192; emphasis added). In its universal form of an idea, reason demarcates only the space of pure possibilities in which different modes of validating-consciousness and verifying synthesis can be actualized in correspondence to their proper objects and can arrange different forms of harmonious unities of manifolds.

That said, reason does not 'emerge' from an a-rational or pre-rational constitutive ground. Reason 'co-exists,' so to speak, with what is constituted in and through intentional operations in consciousness. It is a telos that performs a regulating function in the flow of consciousness. Reason is the teleological 'rule' (Regel) that strictly regulates the formation of the being in itself (an sich sein) in pure subjectivity—that is, the being valid in itself (an sich gilt) of transcendent objectivity -and exhibits a constituted sense-unity in immanent consciousness according to essential noetic-noematic laws and evident principles.

In the theoretical sphere, reason is precisely a teleological binding rule that presides over free, possible courses of experience by rigidly determining the correlated domains of 'truth' and 'actual existing object.' Qua telos, reason gives order, it 'produces,' so to speak, an order. "Reason binds the free will," "the freedom of experiencing and thinking" (pp. 148-149) by instituting a harmonious, ideal system in which the pure possibilities of consciousness' operations are strictly fastened together, and their intentional accomplishments are rigidly ordered. Reason teleologically orients consciousness' constituting strive towards the formation of forms of multiplicity in which sense-unities are strictly interconnected into a system by means of binding relations. In turn, these relations co-determine the Sinn and Sosein of each sense-unity belonging to this ordered multiplicity.

On the one hand, reason regulates the ideal system of objective truths in accordance with the teleological "ideal of the conceived allness of truths cognizable ad infinitum, which relate to all objects of actual and possible experience" (Hua VII, p. 276). On the other hand, reason also exhibits the objective unity of the world itself, that is, the allness or strictly regulated multiplicity of what truly and actually is. This is the objective world continuously valid in itself and confirmed by the operations of consciousness in a process of increasing perfection: the actual world that is strictly separated from the non-worlds constituted through discordant and not rationally fastened together phenomena. Thus, only by means of rational, validating syntheses, Husserl writes, "the actual being of the world itself proves itself, namely as a telos, lying at infinity, of this process of ever more perfect realization, which at all times freely continues (in the consciousness of the 'I could, 'anyone could, or could have')" (Ibid.).

This confirms that Husserl's critique of doxic reason is a clarification of the possibility of 'objective truth' in its twofold significance: as ideal 'truth valid in itself' (Wahrheit an sich gilt) and as 'something objective' (Objektive) manifesting

itself in consciousness. Equipped with a new understanding of reason, one can now assert that, transcendentally considered, the allness of the actual, objective world and the allness of objective truth are nothing other than higher-order, intentional unities of multiplicity teleologically regulated by rational consciousness. These higher-order unities are rationally fastened together only as teleological forms of unity, namely, distinctive forms of objective allness that can only be sustained through subjective, rational operations. 'Truth' and 'actual being' do not precede or are pre-given to consciousness, but they refer to "a universal conformity to the structural laws of conscious life in general" (Hua I, p. 94/59; translation modified). 'Being objective' is not only conceived of but also descriptively proven to be an intentional achievement of immanent rational consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

Husserl's discourse on reason can now elucidate what the sophists intend to deny. *Husserl's phenomenological of reason renders philosophically intelligible the old (Platonic) correlation between objective truth and objective being*, which are now both understood as ideal intentional correlates of rational consciousness. It clarifies the *correlation between the allness of objective truths*, as the system of interconnected valid truths produced through subjective and intersubjective cognitive operations, *and the objective world*, as the allness of which the actual existence is constantly fulfilled and validated in the theoretical life of consciousness that organizes itself "subjectively and intersubjectively into a universal relation of harmony" (Hua VII, p. 274).

Is one entitled, then, to read this transcendental rootedness of objectivity itself into subjectivity as a 'subjective' conception of reason? Put differently, does Husserl somehow relapse into a transcendental subjectivism when he concretely accounts for reason? Defying any (Kantian) 'subjective' interpretation, in the *Cartesianische Meditationen* Husserl states:

"Reason is not a contingent de facto faculty, not a title for possible contingent matters of fact, but rather a title for a universal and essential structural form belonging to transcendental subjectivity in general (eine universale wesensmäige Strukturform der transzendentalen Subjektivität überhaupt)" (Hua I, p. 92/57; translation modified).

Reason is not a faculty, a specific disposition or *dunamis* of an empirical subject, concrete ego, or mind. Reason is neither an act, an inherent or extrinsic property of certain acts, nor can it be construed as a particular kind of thinking or reflection. According to its "*more pregnant concept*" (p. 91/56), reason is a *Strukturform*: the most universal, regulative structure for a teleological constitution that

**<sup>33</sup>** In addition, reason renders it possible to recognize what is *not* objective in itself and what is constituted as invalid, irrational, or absurd. It is by means of the teleological function of reason that the 'irrational' and what simply lacks of rational justification can be identified as such.

encompasses a strictly regulated variety of objective accomplishments independently from their specific content. In this regard, it remains utterly unclear how reason, as a structural form inherent to transcendental subjectivity, could be 'in crisis' in any meaningful sense.<sup>34</sup> Reason is a teleological regulative in the transcendental constitution of objectivity and it must be clarified in accordance with both its formal essence and the manifold of its essential material determinations.

In its upmost universality, Husserl contends: "Reason itself, including theoretical reason in particular, is a form-concept" (Hua XVII, p. 25/29). As a Formbegriff, reason can elevate itself above both the 'empirical contingency' of what is merely factual, and the 'a priori contingency' of all regional, material ontologies that, although ideally regulated, possess a material connotation. In this way, reason also concerns the unity of rational consciousness itself and the total life of subjectivity as unified and regulated by reason. "Consciousness in general is a unity and a unity under the title reason" (Hua XXV, p. 197). 35 Thus, a transcendental theory of reason must investigate all the subjective acts that carry a pretence of objective validity, and must provide a systematic elucidation of all the forms of rational positing, verification, confirmation, and validation that belong to one and the same consciousness.

Husserl's insight is that reason is a unity which is innerly articulated. Reason displays an inner plurality of forms and stratifications that can be ordered primarily according to the spheres of theoretical, axiological, and practical reason. The ideal of rational life embraces all the general attitudes and reason becomes "the explicit theme in the disciplines concerning knowledge (i. e., of true and genuine, rational knowledge), of true and genuine valuation (genuine values as values of reason), of ethical action (truly good acting, acting from practical reason)" (Hua VI, p. 7/9). It is precisely the question of the unity and inner structure of reason that reveals its objective character.

First, for Husserl, reason obtains its unity according to its objective correlate. Concrete rational operations are indeed unified as noetic operations relating to the same object, namely, to an objective sense-unit that—in the theoretical sphere, for instance—is continuously validated as actually existing or legitimized as truly being valid in itself.

Second, reason structures itself in accordance with the material domains towards which consciousness is intentionally oriented. Rational operations can be diversely classified according to the essential classes of their correlate objectivities. The inner articulation of reason is not formal, but it proceeds according to the eidetic ontological differences of diverse material regions. Thus, Husserl contends, "all modes of rational positing, all types of immediate or mediated evidence, are

<sup>34</sup> See Sect. 2.

<sup>35</sup> However, as discussed, this does not make consciousness utterly rational.

rooted in phenomenological connections, in which fundamentally diverse regions of objects diverge from one another in noetic-noematic fashion" (Hua III/1, p. 335/288; translation modified). In this way, the essential laws, which universally determine the systematic and eidetic morphology of all the possible noetic-noematic configurations in which objects are constituted, a priori prescribe all their rational connections and harmonious unifications. Hence, Pradelle cogently comments: "What gives unity to reason is therefore no longer of subjective order" (2012, p. 253). Rational operations are both unified and ordered in virtue of reason's objective intentional accomplishments.

As a rule, reason demarcates a space of pure and absolutely necessary possibilities that are prescribed by unconditionally valid laws and inscribed with the fixed order of an a priori formal-material system. Hence, reason must be clarified in the rigorous sense of being scientifically tested through a methodological practice. In this manner, the phenomenologist identifies the range of ideal possibilities in which rational accomplishments can be described in diverse fields of experience, apprehends them in their essential and objective structure, and formulates eidetic laws accordingly. Thus, the unity of reason is described not only from the standpoint of its formal universality. To clarify reason also means to show the whole ideal articulation of its absolutely necessary possibilities, that is, the materially differentiated kinds of rational functions as operating under a priori, self-evident principles. In other words, to clarify reason means to exhibit the diversified laws and domains of "reason's jurisdictions (Rechtsprechungen der Vernunft)" (Hua III/1, p. 312/269) and produce eidetic judgements concerning this rational form of legality. Now the a priori, rational structure of experience seized in eidetic intuition is not only an invariable (inter) subjective structure, but is also itself objective. Husserl's eidetics thus stands in opposition to the subjective and psychologically contaminated system of formal regularities of the Kantian A-priori, as Husserl interprets it.

That said, from the point of view of a radical critique, this objective reason *cannot* be considered to be 'a-subjective.' As demonstrated, reason is the structural form of transcendental subjectivity and its inner articulation receives a critical elucidation only on the phenomenologically purified ground of consciousness and its immanent principles, at which Husserl's *prinzipielle Kritik* is directed. Pure subjectivity is the source and origin of every objectivity, sense, and being in which all rational operations, scientific theories, and disciplines, as well as their correlated ontological domains obtain their *transcendental foundation* and acquire philosophical clarity.

In addition, the exhibition of validity of what is objectively in itself is an operation of subjectivity, and it requires a self-reflection upon consciousness. Accordingly, Husserl's discourse on the self-responsibility and autonomy of a theoretical or practical life that is thoroughly rational loses its significance without a reference to subjectivity in the form of a transgenerational community of

philosophers. The exercise of radical autonomy and absolute responsibility is a subjective response to values and, as this study has demonstrated, it is the collective, free, and active adhesion to a universal project. It is the ideal of philosophy in its genuine and radical rational-scientific form that exercises a pull and becomes a demand to those who seriously seek to philosophize and are thereby called to provide a self-understanding and justification for their own philosophizing.

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