Book Review

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Nobili's book *The Perspective of time. Husserl's phenomenological idealism as the self-explication of transcendental subjectivity* is a rich, well-documented and inspiring work. Nobili deals with one of the most crucial and challenging aspects of Husserl's phenomenology, providing both a detailed reconstruction of Husserl's investigations on time throughout his career (1893–38)—in chapters 1–3—and a comprehensive view of their main systematic implications—mainly in chapter 4. The leading idea of Nobili's monograph is that time is not to be regarded as just one subtheme among the others, but as an essential key to understanding Husserl's transcendental idealism, and hence his entire phenomenological project.

In Chapter 1 ("The irruption of time and the transcendental phenomenology"), Nobili tries to provide some initial evidence in support of this thesis by reconstructing the first development of Husserl's theory of time, from its beginning up until the transcendental turn around 1908. As Nobili persuasively argues, it is precisely the increasingly deeper understanding of time-consciousness that enables Husserl to overcome the limits of his Brentanian inheritance, and to build the scaffolding of his future transcendental phenomenology. The first step in this direction is Husserl's criticism of those theories that interpret time as consisting of discrete now-points (*Jetzt–Punkte*)—i.e., as "mathematical and non-extended point[s]" (p. 47)—and the perceptual apprehension as "momentary consciousness". Indeed, during the first years of the twentieth century, Husserl realizes that, far from being discrete units, the acts of perception and the perceptual contents are rather *continua*. In Husserl's view, the now always entails its halos or horizons, and as the perception goes on, it becomes ever more thickened by past experiences. In the same way, on the side of the act, the perception of a temporal object is not made up of momentary and discrete acts, each apprehending a now-point, but of "embracing or encompassing acts [*übergreifende Akte*]" (Husserl 1969, p. 227) that apprehend the whole perceptual unity across *continua*. Thus, in the years leading up to 1905, Husserl comes to conceive of perception as "an apprehensional *continuum* of objectual phase-*continua*", or "as a *continuum* of second degree" (p. 59).

The next crucial steps highlighted by Nobili are the discovery of the mechanisms of objectification (based on time-consciousness) and the rethinking of the concepts of *reduction* and *constitution*. According to the author, in the following years this will lead Husserl "to radicalize the idea of intentional constitution", by including in it "the problem of transcendence" (p. 61), thus turning phenomenology into a transcendental project. As Nobili points out, Husserl then rejects the previous understanding of phenomenology as limited to investigating only the real (*reell*) components of lived-experiences, and elaborates a new notion of "phenomenological immanence", corresponding to "the phenomenal givenness in its entirety" (p. 85), which includes both the lived-experience and the object that appears. In this new framework, a crucial notion is that of *correlation*, by means of which Husserl attempts to rethink the relation between consciousness (immanence) and reality (transcendence) which are no longer conceived of as two independent entities, but as *a priori* related to each other.

Thus, the new task of phenomenology becomes to systematically investigate the constitution of any kind of objectivity from consciousness. What Nobili emphasizes at this point is the relevance of the temporal structure of consciousness to accomplish this task. As Nobili writes, time-consciousness turns out to be the foundation of any further constitutive process and "the *bearer* (…) of the *a priori* of the correlation" (p. 141).

This point is further illustrated in Chapter 2 ("The form of time. The correlative fundament of constitution"), with reference to Husserl's mature analyses, from *Ideas 1* to the last manuscripts from the '30s. In this regard, Nobili's main claim is that temporality provides Husserl with the tools to conceptualize the twofold functioning of the constitutive process, which is concerned with both objectivity and consciousness itself. In other words, by virtue of temporality, consciousness becomes able to synthesize not only the multiplicity of sensory contents into an objectual unity (what Husserl labels as *Quer-intentionalität*), but also the multiplicity of its life into the unity of a flow (*Lang-intentionalität*).

Of the two, the latter is by far the more complex and puzzling aspect of Husserl's theory, both from a hermeneutical and systematical point of view. Indeed, Husserl's texts on this issue (mainly unpublished) provide different solutions and even seem to be inconsistent at some points. Addressing this subject, Nobili recalls the debate surrounding both the self-constitution of the flow, and in particular the relationship between the flow and singular acts of consciousness. Regarding this issue, the main interpretative divide has been between scholars who conceive of acts as internal objects constituted by the flow of consciousness (see Brough 1972, 2010), and those who ascribe them a pre-reflective self-awareness, rejecting a constitutive relationship between flow and acts (see Zahavi 1999, 2003, 2011). All in all, the author seems to lean more towards Brough's

interpretation; indeed, even though Nobili is sympathetic to Zahavi's assertion regarding the self-reflectivity of acts, he takes Zahavi's position to be ultimately incapable of accounting for "the overall unity" of consciousness "above its various self-manifestations" (p. 150). However, Nobili's solution diverges from both interpretations and is rather an attempt to find middle ground. In brief, Nobili's idea is that acts and lived-experiences are discrete and detached from the flow, but at the same time dependent on it—like the waves of a stream, to use Husserl's imagery. Therefore, rather than two entities (one constituting, the other constituted) we have two "facets" or "functions" (p. 153) of the same process. Accordingly, self-consciousness is neither the result of the reflection on single acts (Brough), nor is it an immediate property of those acts (Zahavi). Rather, it is "a self-consciousness that is temporally spread across the phases of the flow" (p. 178) and results from the self-fulfillment engendered by the complex "weave between retention and protention" (p. 161)—which Nobili reconstructs in § 2.3.2.

As is known, however, time-consciousness alone is not sufficient to account for the constitution of objectual unities, for it only organizes the sensory contents according to a *form*, i.e., the temporal structure, regardless of the *material* peculiarities of the contents. The constitutive analyses are therefore incomplete until they deal with the *passive syntheses* of association. The relation between time-consciousness and hyletic passivity is addressed in Chapter 3 ("The matter of time: the integration and concretization of the fundament"). Nobili first illustrates the role of hyletic passivity, then he focuses on the emergence out of passivity of a first egoic level, and on the problem of the unconscious and affective forces. In my opinion, more interesting is the second part of the chapter (§ 3.2), where Nobili elucidates the most complex mechanisms of intentional life, such as the instauration of meanings, their sedimentation and implication and their possible reactivation. Finally, Nobili attempts to clarify the relation between the pre-egological (*vor-ichlich*) dimension highlighted by genetic phenomenology and Husserl's late concept of an "arch-ego" or "proto-ego" (*Ur-Ich*). Nobili contends that Husserl's notion of *Ur-Ich* aims not so much to reinterpret the passive genesis in egological terms—as held by some scholars—as it does to thematize the "noetic centralization" of experiences, which prefigures the awakening of an active ego.

Chapter 4 ("The perspective of time: phenomenological-transcendental idealism") is perhaps the most ambitious and original in Nobili's monograph. In light of conclusions from previous chapters, Nobili offers a very interesting illustration of Husserl's idealism. The author starts out by exploring the role of "intentional implications" (*intentionale Implikationen*) in Husserl's philosophy, especially after the '20s. Intentional implications are the precipitates of the processes of meaning-constitution, and make sense of all the potentialities of consciousness (its systems of apperception, its horizon-consciousness etc.). To put it

in Nobili's own words, they amount to "the set of sense-validities that govern subjective life as a sedimentary complex of synthetic-constitutive accomplishments" (p. 315). Here, the temporal mode of intentional implications is once again relevant. Indeed, as Nobili highlights, Husserl characterizes them as being *simultaneous*, in contrast with the diachronic dimension of the constitutive process that gives rise to them.

Now, if consciousness is ultimately a complex of implications, then the task of the phenomenologist is to systematically unravel or explicate them. *Auslegung* (usually translated as "explication") is the German word that Husserl ever more technically adopts to describe this practice and to epitomize "phenomenological philosophy in its entirety" (p. 324). More significantly, Nobili asserts that therein lies Husserl's idealism.

Nobili's line of reasoning can be summed up as follows. He firstly illustrates the features of intentional explications vis-à-vis (i) a simple re-activation (*Reaktivation*) of sedimented meanings and (ii) a case of explication (*Explikation*) in its usual meaning, namely as a mere description of the components of an object. Thus, *Auslegung* turns out to be an explication of the intentional structure of the thing, namely of its horizons and of the constitutive accomplishments that make it possible. In light of this, Nobili suggests that *Auslegung* is the methodological core of Husserl's idealism. Indeed, by means of this practice, any region of being can prove to be the correlate of the operations of a transcendental subjectivity. By the same token, every intentional explication is also a self-explication and an instance of self-knowledge of transcendental subjectivity, since what is explicated is also the subjective experience itself from which everything acquires its meaning and validity of being.

In this regard, Nobili heavily emphasizes that Husserl's idealism is not a premise or thesis that one can demonstrate once and for all, so much as it is a "perspective" that one progressively reaches through such a "work of explication" (p. 345). Or, to put it in Husserl's words from the *Paris Lectures*, idealism is a position whose "proof … is found in the active exercise of phenomenology itself" (Husserl 1975, p. 35).

At this point, one may wonder what position Nobili takes on the issue of the metaphysical neutrality or realism of Husserl's theory. Regarding this, I think the author does not clearly spell out his view. He contends that Husserl's idealism is only "an epistemological and even methodological one" (p. 341), suggesting that it makes no claim on the metaphysical status of reality, but he then claims that Husserl's phenomenology is at odds with any form of metaphysical realism (p. 345, *n*. 40), since the transcendental approach rules out the possibility of an "in-itself" of the world and its independence. Accordingly, he writes that in Husserl's view "the in-itself of the object is not a noumenon but it is constituted … as the

convergence index of an open system of possible experiences concerning it" (p. 346). This latter assertion sounds to me like a fairly strong claim about the metaphysical status of reality, which would therefore make Husserl's idealism more than a mere methodological one. In my opinion, such a crucial point deserved slightly less ambiguity and perhaps the argument would have benefited from a more thorough discussion of the literature.

Another interesting aspect of Husserl's idealism is its relation to the modern tradition of idealism. Indeed, given the meaning Husserl attributes to this term, one might wonder why he decided to revive this old and controversial notion for the characterization of his philosophy. While Nobili does not address this question —which would have been beyond the reach and aims of his book—, he makes some observations on the relationship between Husserl's idealism and the German idealism of the 19th century, especially that of Hegel. In particular, Nobili takes Husserl's claim of *correlationism* to be similar to Hegel's notion of subject-object identity. Indeed, Nobili contends that there is no division between the subjective and the objective, neither at the primordial level of constitution (because the constituting and the constituted coincide) nor after self-explication is realized (because at the highest level of awareness of transcendental subjectivity consciousness and world "tend to be partial moments of the same totality") (p. 347). Importantly, however, Nobili states there is still a difference between their philosophies: while for Hegel the subject-object division can be overcome (i.e., at the level of the absolute Spirit), for Husserl the overcoming is rather a regulative ideal, since the *Auslegung* is a task, the accomplishment of which is essentially out of reach. Personally, I would be warier and somewhat more inclined to stress the differences between the two projects rather than their affinities. After all, talking of correlation between consciousness and the world equates to conceptualizing not only their interdependence but also their essential difference.

The chapter then closes with a section on the problem of the *Urphänomenon* and the domain of those phenomena that defy any intuitive access. Nobili maintains that while requiring a somewhat constructive method, the explication of these phenomena does not imply a dismissal of the intuitive method of phenomenology (in favor of inferential and metaphysical reasoning), since it is possible to account for them by means of a combination of genetic-regressive investigations and the eidetic method of free variation.

In conclusion, I would reemphasize that Nobili's work stands out for the expansive knowledge of Husserlian texts that it contains and the wide range of topics it covers. While this book will hardly be accessible to beginners and non-specialists, it will be a highly useful volume for Husserlian scholars and all phenomenologists dealing with the problem of time. Hopefully, this work (or part of it) will soon be available to English-speaking readers, so that it may reach as many interested people as possible.

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