

RICOEUR AND HUSSERL

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The goal of this essay is to clarify the connections between Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology and the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Its scope is both narrower and wider than that suggests, however. It is narrower because the selection of a focus is required for the work of interpretation and by the limits of a journal article. The focus selected here is Ricoeur's interpretation and critique of Husserl's foundationalism. If this selection of focus is successful, a beginning will have been made in the clarification of the connections in question. The scope of this essay is also wider than the title and goal suggest because a counterfocus to Husserl is involved in Ricoeur's way of thinking. He is a combative thinker who typically chooses to fight on two fronts at a time. Husserl has been Ricoeur's constant companion on the paths of thinking since the 1930's when he began reading the *Ideas* in the English translation in Paris where he was participating in Gabriel Marcel's private seminar. There has always been a counterfocus to Husserl, however, and typically there have been two: one classical and one contemporary. With regard to the critique of Husserl's foundationalism, the two counterfoci are Kant and Hans-Georg Gadamer. The connections with them cannot be explored here, but references to them must be made to begin to clarify the complex connections with Husserl.

Why focus on foundationalism, especially when so many have given it up for dead or mortally ill? First, because it is nevertheless the center of Husserl's enterprise, and second because Ricoeur has turned more explicitly to it lately. He is active in the University of Chicago's Committee on the Conceptual Foundations of the Sciences and his most recently published self-interpretative essay¹ is focused on this topic.

Foundationalism in general is the classic and received theory of theory. It involves a conception of a theory's belonging to genuine science or an ideal of scientificity, a conception of a theory's being justified by some foundational entities such as concepts or propositions, and traditionally a conception of knowing these entities with noninferential certitude. Each of these complex conceptions can be diversely developed so that several versions of foundationalism are

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¹Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," *Nous* 9 (1975), pp. 85-102. Hereafter cited as "PH".

possible and indeed actual. My purpose here is neither to explicate Husserl's version nor to render any assessment of it. I expect to publish my attempt at that elsewhere, but here shall focus on Ricoeur's critique of Husserl's foundationalism for the light it can shed on the connections between these two major phenomenologies.

A *provisional* summary of the connection can be expressed in this opposition: total vision vs. total mediation. By the former Husserl would claim that "all mediate grounding leads back to the immediate"² and that to found is "to see" or intuit. By the latter Ricoeur would claim that on the contrary there is no unmediated intentionality and that all reflection is mediated.³ The way from claim to counterclaim takes Ricoeur through two critiques of what he calls "opposed pretensions": to "transparent objectivity" and to "subjective autonomy."⁴ Explication of these two critiques will constitute the two central sections of this essay. Before turning to them, however, we need to attend to a fundamental distinction that guides Ricoeur in his struggle with Husserl.

THE METHOD AND ITS INTERPRETATION

Ricoeur has consistently sought to maintain a distinction between Husserl's phenomenological method as it was actually practiced and the idealistic interpretation given to it by Husserl himself.⁵ This interpretation of his method's meaning is central to Ricoeur's understanding of his foundationalism. Any assessment of the validity of this distinction should come after following the path of thinking opened by it. It should be noted here, however, that this distinction does not coincide with the one between phenomenology as method and as theory. Ricoeur recognizes that the method of eidetic intentional analysis depends upon the theory of intentionality which sees the content of all intentional acts as noemata which can be rendered essences by a process of ideation. His own phenomenology of willing uses an expansion of Husserl's concept of noema: the pragma.⁶

²Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson, New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1931. Hereafter cited as *Ideas*.

³"PH", p. 91. See also Ricoeur, "Herméneutique de L'idée de Révélation," Publication Des Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Bruxelles, Number 7, p. 44. This essay appeared in a collection of essays by several authors. The as yet unpublished translation used here was done for Professor Ricoeur's use by David Pellauer and given to me by Professor Ricoeur. Hereafter cited as "HR".

⁴"HR", p. 34.

⁵Ricoeur, "Kant and Husserl," in Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. E.G. Ballard and L.E. Embree, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967, p. 176. Also see "PH", p. 85. Hereafter cited as "KH", and the larger work as *Husserl*.

⁶Ricoeur, "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will," in *Husserl*, p. 216f. See also Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. E. V. Kohak, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966, pp. 209ff. Hereafter cited as "MTPW."

It should be understood that the drift of Ricoeur's distinction is not away from the phenomenological reduction, although he rejects one of Husserl's interpretations of it. Ricoeur considers reduction to be "the straight gate to phenomenology."⁷ Even so, he finds in Husserl's interpretations of it a "metaphysical decision" which is interwoven with the "methodological conversion" which is the reduction itself.

Phenomenological method involves "a conversion which causes the 'for-me' to emerge from every ontic positing. Whether the being (*être*) is a thing, a state of affairs, a value, a living creature, or a person, the *epoché* 'reduces' it to its appearing. A conversion is necessary here because the 'for-me' is initially disguised by the positing of the particular being (*être*). This dissimulating positing, which Husserl called the natural attitude or the general thesis of the world, is hidden from reflection. Thus a special spiritual discipline (*ascèse*) is necessary in order to destroy its charm."⁸ Ricoeur understands the conversion to be from actuality to possibility or "meaning", and the conversion is a choice for the phenomenological attitude in contrast to the naturalistic-objectivistic one. With this we can turn to Ricoeur's first critique.

THE CRITIQUE OF TRANSPARENT OBJECTIVITY

Ricoeur took over from Husserl the methodological conversion that shifts from an orientation toward beings to an attitude turned toward the "meanings" which made possible the naturalistic-objectivistic attitude in the first place. With this the foundationalist enterprise is underway and is tied to the critique of the pretention to transparent objectivity. This pretention is understood in part by Ricoeur as precisely the "methodological attitude"⁹ which Husserl's reduction converts.

The pretention in question is a claim to complete transparency of truth, of truth understood in terms of adequation and verification.¹⁰ This is the ideal of truth as measured by the criteria of empirical verification and falsification. The critique is of the uncritical acceptance of this conception of truth. It also is directed toward the positing of the world as absolute. Ricoeur takes over from Husserl a refraining from such positing which thereby gains the world as perceived and signified in the reflective life, as phenomenon. This opened the way for Husserl to what I take to be his essential foundationalism

⁷"KH", p. 176.

⁸"KH", p. 176. See also "PH", p. 96.

⁹"MTPW", p. 223. This is an early statement of the two pretentions.

¹⁰"HR", pp. 36f.

which is a justification of the concepts used in a theory by virtue of their relationship to pure essences.

This much of the critique reveals a positive connection with Husserl's methodological conversion, although the details of Ricoeur's distinctive interpretation of it have not been considered here. The contrasting "metaphysical decision"¹¹ which Ricoeur opposes is seen when Husserl adds to the claim that the world is "for-me" his notion of consciousness as that "in" which meaning occurs. With this idealistic interpretation a new pretention crops up, and the reduction becomes the "constitution" of the world not only "for" but also "in" the subjective life of consciousness. Reduction first uncovers the "relativity" of what appears to consciousness and then the metaphysical decision takes this to mean that "nothing is except as a sense in consciousness."¹²

Ricoeur's critique reaches a crucial point in this interpretation of Husserl's transcendental idealism. He must be careful not to interpret the method as a turn from objects as they exist to objects as they are in consciousness, for that would misconceive Husserl's turn from objects as posited to the noemata and noematic essences whereby they can be posited. It is Husserl's claim that all objectivities are unities of sense *in* and *for* consciousness that Ricoeur calls his idealism. He objects that it puts objects entirely out of the picture and leaves only an impoverished ontology of egos and noemata/essences. This seems very questionable as a reading of Husserl to me, but Ricoeur has in mind primarily the author's preface to *Ideas I* and the *Cartesian Meditations*. I shall not attempt a counterinterpretation here, for the focus is on Ricoeur's connections with Husserl.

Ricoeur argues that "the realistic function of intentionality (the object X as correlative of the unity of apperception) penetrates through and through the idealistic function of objectifying my representations. How is this possible? The key to the problem is the distinction, fundamental in Kant but totally unknown in Husserl, between *intention* and *intuition*. Kant radically separates from one another the relation to something and the intuition of something. An object = X is an intention without intuition."¹³ Ricoeur's critique of Husserl's foundationalism thus focuses on the problem of intuition, with the help of a concept drawn from the struggle with Kant. This is what I mean by saying that Ricoeur fights on two fronts at a time. He thinks Husserl lost "the ontological dimension of the phenomenon

¹¹"KH", pp. 190f.

¹²"KH", p. 177.

¹³"KH", p. 189.

and simultaneously lost the possibility of a meditation on the limits and foundations of phenomenology."¹⁴ He affirms both an objectivity constituted "in" me and a founding objectivity "of" the phenomenon, so as to rule out the idealistic interpretation of foundationalism which claims that the being-status of phenomena come "from" me.

The problem of intuition arises because Ricoeur reads Husserl as claiming that the principle of foundation is on the order of intuition. "To found is to see" in Husserl, he says.¹⁵ Ricoeur thus interprets Husserl as asserting the ideal of the *complete* fulfillment of empty intentions as a basic tenet of his foundationalism. The role of intuition is "to fulfill the 'emptiness' of signs by the 'fulness' of presence. To constitute actuality is to refuse to leave its 'presence' outside the 'sense' of the world."¹⁶ Ricoeur's conception of an intention without intuition limits this ideal. "Where consciousness posits itself as the origin of meaning, hermeneutics brings about the abandonment of this pretention."¹⁷ The reference to "hermeneutics" brings Gadamer into the struggle too.

With this Ricoeur has moved from Husserl's "total vision", a foundationalism based on intuition, toward Gadamer's "total mediation," a hermeneutic that threatens to destroy foundationalism. Ricoeur opposes to what he takes to be Husserl's ideal of immediate seeing with no interpretation, a universality of interpretation with no immediacy. "The Husserlian exigency of the return to intuition is opposed by the necessity for all comprehension to be mediated by an interpretation."¹⁸ It is not clear precisely what the intuition Ricoeur denies is supposed to be an intuition "of". If it is an intuition of real objects of perception, then Husserl too acknowledges an intention without intuition (in the sense of adequacy or completeness of evidence). Instead, it should be an intuition of essences, for this is the true location of Husserl's foundationalism, and eidetic intuition need only be apodictic but not "adequate" or complete with respect to evidence. Further, the grasping of an essence can be mediated by the noema and still be a direct grasping of the essence itself.¹⁹ Ricoeur's critique of Husserl's foundationalism does not really focus on the role of essences. His phenomenology of action leads him to look elsewhere, to existential subjectivity.

¹⁴"KH", p. 190.

¹⁵"PH", p. 86.

¹⁶Ricoeur, "An Introduction to Husserl's *Ideas I*", in *Husserl*, p. 23. Hereafter cited as "TH."

¹⁷"HR", p. 47.

¹⁸"PH", p. 89.

¹⁹See Robert Sokoloski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974, Chapter 3: "How To Intuit An Essence."

THE CRITIQUE OF AUTONOMOUS SUBJECTIVITY

As Ricoeur interprets Husserl's foundationalism, the place of fullest intuitivity is subjectivity.²⁰ This is the central issue in Ricoeur's critique, rather than the question of the intuition of essences. It is what he takes to be the central thesis of Husserlian idealism, and thus the pretention most seriously to be overcome. It is the pretention to autonomous subjectivity, the pretention that consciousness constitutes itself as well as its correlate.²¹

Ricoeur takes intuition to mean primarily the "filled" as opposed to the "empty" quality of intentions. He does not devote much attention to the other major attribute: presence as opposed to absence of the objectivity, regardless of how incompletely present it may be. Given this focus, he argues that for Husserl all transcendence is "doubtful", while immanence is alleged to be "indubitable." The reason for this in Husserl's foundationalism is that transcendence is given by "profiles" (*Abschattungen*) and the convergence of these profiles is always presumptive because incomplete. The presumption can always be deceived by inner discordances. Immanence, or subjectivity positing itself, is not doubtful, however, for it is not given in profiles and so is not presumptive. The intuition of subjectivity by itself alone permits the coincidence of reflection with what has just been experienced. Here alone does intention coincide with intuition perfectly. This alone can be the foundation. But this Ricoeur sees as a pretention too, and he opposes to it the limit idea of a total mediation. The idea of "dependence" upon a founding event and tradition plays the role here that the idea of the thing-in-itself played in the previous critique.²²

Gadamer is now the principal counterfocus to Husserl. In place of the pretention to autonomous subjectivity founded upon the concept of a sovereign consciousness, he puts the recognition of man's real dependence which is in no way synonymous with a heteronomy. Dependence replaces autonomy as Ricoeur explicates the traits of self-awareness wherein the subject would free himself of the arrogance of consciousness.

Ricoeur recognizes that while Husserl promotes subjectivity to the transcendental role, it is not the empirical consciousness or object of psychological investigation that plays it. He charges Husserl's parallelism or correspondance between these two senses of subjectivity with confusion.²³ It is not consciousness of lived-processes and

²⁰"PH", p. 87.

²¹"HR", p. 34.

²²"HR", pp. 43ff and 51ff.

²³"PH", p. 87.

their noematic essences that Ricoeur confronts here, but the self's consciousness of its own existence and meaning. He can grant that the "I am" is apodictic, but it is a thoroughly empty evidence that fails to answer the question of "who" I am. There is no intuition here, for "the ruses of self-consciousness are more clever than those of the thing."²⁴ The pretention to autonomous subjectivity must be submitted to the radical critique that phenomenology applies otherwise to all appearance.

As Ricoeur adds his critique of subjectivity to that of objectivity he draws upon the "critique of ideologies" and psychoanalysis but his counterfocus to Husserl is chiefly Hans-Georg Gadamer. Husserl believed that self-knowledge could not be presumptive because it does not proceed from profiles, while Ricoeur argues that it can be for other reasons. "In the measure to which self-knowledge is a dialogue of the soul with itself, and to which this dialogue could be systematically distorted by the violence and by all the intrusions of the structures of domination into those of communication, self-knowledge, as interiorized communication, can also be as doubtful as knowledge of the object, although for different reasons."²⁵ This is clearly a different issue from that of the foundational status of essences. The first critique broke with the absolutizing of the object and the second with the absolutizing of the subject — not essences.

The refusal to absolutize the subject results in the claim that "all reflection is mediated, there is no immediate self-consciousness."²⁶ In his critique of autonomous subjectivity Ricoeur sought for a general dependence that upholds a subject who does not have at his disposal an immediate intuition of his existence and his essence as a thinking being. This idea of the abandonment of sovereign consciousness is a central point in Ricoeur's thinking. He seeks to internalize in philosophy the saying of the Gospel: "Whoever would save his life must lose it." In the realm of reflection that means that whoever would posit himself as a constituting consciousness in the idealistic sense will miss his destiny. Reflection can not achieve this renunciation out of itself, however, but only by confessing its total dependence on founding events and on Transcendence. Ricoeur claims to have grasped the key to the second critique by the time he wrote *The Symbolism of Evil*, but it was only with *Freud and Philosophy* that he broke decisively with the illusions of consciousness as absolute.²⁷ From that time on he has claimed that all reflection is mediated. In place of Husserl's

²⁴"PH", p. 91.

²⁵"PH", p. 91.

²⁶"HR", p. 44.

²⁷"HR", pp. 43f.

total vision he came to assert with Gadamer a total mediation. This seems uncharacteristically undialectical. We should have come to expect a third critique from Ricoeur.

THE CRITIQUE OF TOTAL MEDIATION

In addition to the pretensions to transparent objectivity and autonomous subjectivity, we now have a new pretention to universal interpretation.²⁸ Although he has now used the key term "pretention" in connection with the claim to total mediation which comes from the encounter with Gadamer and is asserted contra Husserl, Ricoeur has not yet published the critique this promises. Here then we can only explicate the pretention provisionally and suggest the limiting idea that Ricoeur may set over against it. This time the limit may come from Husserl.

The pretention to total mediation is connected with "the experience of belonging to a cultural tradition which precedes us, encompasses us, and supports us, but which we can never grasp from without, place in front of us, and judge."²⁹ Gadamer developed this experience in connection with the phenomenon of understanding to show "the universality of human linguisticity as a limitless medium that carries *everything* within it."³⁰ Jürgen Habermas has already charged that this is an "idealism of linguisticity," although Gadamer argues that his view of total mediation does not entail a linguistic relativism. The similarity to Husserl's all-encompassing idealism of constitution as Ricoeur interprets it is striking. Can anything be set over against the pretention to limit it?

It might seem unlikely, since we are told that this is the primordial foundation, the originary horizon. Ricoeur tells us that the conquest of this concept of belonging-to, which he borrowed from Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, "marked the end of a difficult struggle with Husserlian idealism which was not yet broached by the preceding avowal of the mediated character of reflection. It was still necessary to call into question Husserl's scientific ideal, especially in the sense of a final justification or a self-founding of the transcendental ego, to discover in the *finite* ontological condition of self-understanding the unsurpassable limit of this scientific ideal."³¹ The foundation

²⁸Ricoeur, "Philosophische und theologische Hermeneutik", in *Evangelische Theologie*, Sonderheft zur Hermeneutik religiöser Sprache, 1974, p. 25. Professor Ricoeur provided me with an English translation which is used here. Hereafter cited as "PTH".

²⁹"PTH", p. 26.

³⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. D.E. Linge, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, p. 25.

³¹"HR", pp. 44f.

has been relocated in our manner of belonging to a historical, linguistic tradition.

We are thus at a new point in the dialectic of Ricoeur's struggle with Husserl's foundationalism. First, the object is brought back by a critique from its isolation and set in relation to a subject for whom it is what it is. Next, the subject is brought back from its isolation and set in relation to a tradition that is the indispensable foundation, the condition of every enterprise of justification and foundation and theorizing. Every such enterprise is always preceded by a relationship which supports it.

Does this destroy completely the project of ultimately founding theories of all sorts? It surely seems to do that, for interpretation places the interpreter *in medias res* and never at the beginning or end. We seem to have moved from foundationalism as the pretention to total vision to a new pretention to total mediation by human linguisticity. Is there a limit idea which Ricoeur can set over against this pretention, as he did in the cases of the other two? I think there is, but it is an idea he seems to think Gadamer's hermeneutics shares with Husserl's phenomenology. I cannot see how it fits into the former's claim to total mediation.

The idea I refer to here is that of "the derived character of merely linguistic meanings."³² Ricoeur agrees finally with Husserl that the whole linguistic order refers back to the structure of experience. His hermeneutic phenomenology does not begin with human linguisticity but with an investigation of what is "brought to discourse." This is certainly characteristic of his current efforts to work out the promised "poetics" of willing. He is convinced that "poetic" discourse alone restores to us that participation in or belonging to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject."³³ The idea of the derived character of merely linguistic meanings sets a limit to the total mediation as a pretention which claims to have destroyed the illusion that things precede their manifestation in language.

Ricoeur's efforts to overcome the opposition between explanation and understanding appear to be part of his working out of the critique of this pretention to total mediation.³⁴ He seems to be finding in Husserl a coincidence of intuition and explication which may open

³²"PH", p. 98.

³³"HR", pp. 39f.

³⁴Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1967. See also Ricoeur, "Expliquer et comprendre," in *Revue Philosophique De Louvain*, Tome 75 (Février 1977), pp. 126-147.

the way to a nonidealistic version of phenomenological foundationalism.³⁵ Meaning cannot have been acquired initially through intuition, but if intuition is finally seen to coincide with the process of explication it can be connected with original intention which calls for explication. If to found is not to see, perhaps it is to believe in order eventually to see. The question arises then for a hermeneutic phenomenological foundationalism of how beliefs, empty intendings, function in theory weighting. For Husserl the phenomenological foundation of any theory lies in the validity of its concepts and the propositions combining them. The concepts are "traced back" to the noemata but the work of intuiting essences is one of "going ahead" to bring the emptily intended to whatever fulfillment it permits. An intimate connection persists between Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology and the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl. To found is both to believe and to expect to see.

³⁵"PH", pp. 100f.

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