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PHENOMENOLOGY AND METAPHYSICAL REALISM (72 pp.)

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The recent re-turn to metaphysical realism in Continental Philosophy, evident in the emergence of the Speculative Realism movement, has posed challenging questions to phenomenology. Most importantly, is phenomenology compatible with metaphysical realism? Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow charge phenomenology with being, respectively, correlationist, a philosophy of access, and metaphysically agnostic or idealist. However, their charges do not go unanswered. Zahavi responds to the challenges by pointing out how phenomenology is compatible with, and indeed inclined toward realism. He does so by looking at concrete interactions between phenomenology and realism, as well as addressing what realism is and what it entails within phenomenology. Following Zahavi, as well as my own investigation into Husserl's phenomenology, I conclude that phenomenology is compatible with metaphysical realism.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND METAPHYSICAL REALISM

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In his first book, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*¸ Graham Harman lacks an acknowledgements page. Instead, Harman states that he has "chosen to thank those who helped me in a more private way" (*TB,* vii).[1] I have chosen to do the same.

[1] Harman, Graham. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2002. In-text abbreviation: *TB.*

Introduction: Husserl, Phenomenology, and Metaphysical Realism

In the last twenty years, some continental philosophers have taken seriously the task of putting forward a realist metaphysics and/or ontology. Though some of them reject the label, these philosophers with a speculative interest in realism are referred to as speculative realists, and their 'movement' or 'school of thought' as speculative realism. Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and Tom Sparrow are members of this group. Despite differences in their respective philosophical projects and approaches, they are united in their rejection of phenomenology, particularly Husserl's conception of it. They reject Husserlian phenomenology because all three consider it to be incompatible with metaphysical realism. To be sure, they differ on what it is that they think renders Husserlian phenomenology incompatible with metaphysical realism. However, they are united in their ultimate conclusion: that Husserl and his conception of phenomenology must be rejected.

Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow's respective calls to abandon Husserlian phenomenology have not gone unanswered in scholarly literature. One of the more comprehensive responses to the speculative trio emerges from Dan Zahavi. His response to the speculative realist trio centers around questioning their interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology and of what is meant, in part, by realism. Fruitful as it is, it is not without theoretical lacunas that leave Husserlian phenomenology still vulnerable to the challenges posed by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow. For instance, Zahavi does not address at all some of Sparrow's key critiques of Husserlian phenomenology. As a means of rectifying these gaps, I offer my own response. I argue, with recourse to Husserl's primary works, that because the

interpretation of Husserl that each of the three speculative realists puts forward is questionable, and because there is strong textual evidence to the contrary of their interpretation, they are wrong in concluding that Husserlian phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. As such, I conclude the following: there is nothing that renders Husserlian phenomenology incompatible with metaphysical realism.

In Chapter One, I explicate the respective critiques made against Husserlian phenomenology by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow. Meillassoux claims that Husserlian phenomenology is a correlationist philosophy, and is thus incompatible with metaphysical realism. Harman suggests that Husserlian phenomenology is metaphysically idealist, practices metaphysics of presence, and is a 'Philosophy of Human Access'. As such, on his view, it is incompatible with metaphysical realism. Sparrow alleges that the method at play in Husserlian phenomenology renders it unable to support metaphysical realism and leads to its eventual collapses into metaphysical idealism. Thus, for Sparrow, Husserlian phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. While different in content, all three critiques share the same conclusion: Husserlian phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

In Chapter Two, I give an overview and discuss Zahavi's response to the critiques made by Sparrow, Harman, and Meillassoux. Zahavi argues that Sparrow's position is inconsistent, and thus should be dismissed. He suggests that Harman misunderstands key concepts of Husserlian phenomenology. Finally, concerning Meillassoux, Zahavi maintains that correlationism does not rule out realism since realism is far more than Meillassoux thinks it is. While a fruitful initial response to the speculative realist trio, Zahavi's article does not address some of their more serious critiques against Husserl, leaving his response with some major theoretical lacunas. I use these lacunas as a pivot for my own response in the third chapter.

In Chapter Three, I formulate a response to, and counter-argument against, Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow. I do so through recourse to Husserl's primary works. I argue that the speculative realist trio fundamentally misunderstand the nature of Husserl's phenomenology and misinterpret several key concepts at play in his methodology. I argue that we should interpret Husserlian phenomenology as a critical epistemology that does not take for granted that which is not given immanently in experience. It is true that phenomenology cannot outright claim that the external world exists—but this does not imply that it is incompatible with metaphysical realism. There is nothing that precludes Husserlian phenomenology from being compatible with metaphysical realism.

I conclude by explicating further my conclusion—that Husserlian phenomenology is not incompatible with metaphysical realism—and sharing some remarks on realism and Husserlian phenomenology's relation to it.

Chapter 1: Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow against Phenomenology

In this initial chapter, I outline the critiques levied against phenomenology by three Speculative Realists. Though their critiques are not identical, they make essentially the same point—phenomenology is not, and cannot be, metaphysically realist. As such, it should be rejected.

I will begin with Quentin Meillassoux, who argues that phenomenology is one among many other post-Kantian correlationist philosophies, and therefore is incapable of saying anything about the existence of an Absolute or our relation to it. This is a problem, says Meillassoux, because at best, correlationist philosophies cannot accept certain scientific statements as true, and at worse, they legitimate fideism—a pernicious idea that since the Absolute cannot be ascertained with reason, faith is the only legitimate means to do so, and therefore all claims about the Absolute based on faith are legitimate. I then continue with Graham Harman, who charges phenomenology with idealism, and calls it a philosophy of access. Husserl, says Harman, was an idealist who practiced a metaphysics of presence. I conclude with Tom Sparrow, who, building on Meillassoux and Harman, charges phenomenology with being at best metaphysically agnostic, and at worst, metaphysically idealist. Sparrow asserts that phenomenology is methodologically incapable of saying anything about the transcendence of an object of experience. Since all experience is revealed to be imminent to the experiencing ego or subject, then the givenness structure of intentionality is also immanent. Thus the "given as transcendent" is still a statement about an object within the immanent sphere of experience. I

argue that all of these critiques essentially reduce to the following: phenomenology is not, and cannot be, metaphysically realist.

Meillassoux's Critique of Husserlian Phenomenology

Meillassoux's *After Finitude* is a critique of phenomenology inasmuch as he considers phenomenology to be a type of "correlationist" philosophy. Correlationism, for Meillassoux, is "any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation" where 'the correlation' refers to "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (*AF,* 5) [2]. In other words, correlationism claims that we never have access to an object or a thinking subject in isolation. According to Meillassoux, this entails that we can never grasp the thing in-itself, because as soon as we try to, we are already thinking the thing in relation to us: 'We cannot represent the 'in-itself' without it becoming 'for us,' or as Hegel amusingly put it, we cannot 'creep up on' the object 'from behind' so as to find out what it is in itself' (*AF,* 4). Thus, anytime we think or say anything about the in-itself, we are actually saying something about the in-itself as it is for us. Meillassoux points out that correlationism is not restricted to representing the in-itself to us, or to the correlation between subject and object—the framework of representationalism (*AF,* 7). Rather, correlationism maintains the correlation between thinking and being broadly construed—of which representationalism is one among many forms; this evident in Heidegger's "notion of *Ereignis…*[which] means that neither being nor man can be posited as subsisting 'in themselves'" (*AF,* 8).

[2] Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. In-text abbreviation: *AF*.

Meillassoux introduces correlationism in order to contrast Kantian and post-Kantian critical philosophy with the pre-critical, primary and secondary qualities metaphysics of Descartes and Locke (*AF*, 1). For Descartes, and by extension for Meillassoux insofar as he adopts the Cartesian thesis of primary qualities, the following holds true—"all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself" (Meillassoux, *AF*, 3). For Meillassoux, the mathematizable properties "are effectively in the object in the way in which I conceive them," meaning that the mathematizable properties that I think are the very same properties of the in-itself (*AF,* 3). What this entails, contra-Kant and critical philosophy, is that we can get at the noumenal in-itself, and not merely at the phenomenal in-itself for us.

What is, then, the tension between this two-property metaphysics and Kantian and post-Kantian critical philosophy? Meillassoux points out that the two-property metaphysics appears as "pre-critical" to a contemporary philosopher, and his own thesis—that we can indeed access the mathematizable primary properties of the in-itself—will appear to the same contemporary philosopher as a "regression to the 'naïve' stance of dogmatic metaphysics" (*AF,* 3). The reason why the two-property theory and Meillassoux's own thesis seem naïve and regressive is because they assert that "thought is capable of discriminating between those properties of the world which are a function of our relation to it, and those properties of the world as it is 'in itself', subsisting indifferently of our relation to it" (Meillassoux, *AF,* 3). After all, is it not preposterous to maintain that thought can get outside its own sphere, that it can step out of the correlation between self and world and see the world as it is in itself? To think the in-itself is to still *think* it and thus render it a thought-for-us.

Meillassoux points out that the two-property theory is outright dismissed as naïve by any philosopher who takes seriously the transcendental revolution initiated by Kant (*AF,* 4). Indeed, a philosopher "who sees himself as 'post-critical' rather than as a dogmatist—will maintain that it is naïve to think we are able to think *something* even if it be a mathematical determination of the object—while abstracting from the fact that it is invariable we who are thinking that something" (*AF,* 4). The implication here is that any philosopher who does not wish to be seen as a dogmatist—and this includes most post-Kantian philosophers—holds that thought cannot get at the Absolute apart from and independent of thought. Thus, any such post-Kantian philosopher is a correlationist. With correlationism, epistemological adequation as truth becomes replaced by intersubjective universalization (Meillassoux, *AF,* 4). This has implications not just for epistemology in philosophy, but also for the sciences, since "scientific truth is no longer what conforms to an in-itself supposedly indifferent to the way in which it is given to the subject, but rather what is susceptible of being given as shared by a scientific community" (Meillassoux, *AF,* 4-5). Knowledge of that which is given to us is only objective when there is consensus among an intersubjective community.

Post-Kantian critical philosophy is intuitively appealing. After all, we cannot get outside of ourselves, out of our correlation with the world, and ascertain how the world as it is given to us compares to how the world is in-itself apart from us. In order to illustrate the problem with correlationism, Meillassoux introduces the notion of "ancestral statements" or scientific statements about a "reality anterior to the emergence of the human species—or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth" (*AF,* 10). Consider the following ancestral statement: 'The earth accreted 4.56 billion years ago, prior to the emergence of any life on earth' (Meillassoux, *AF,* 9). Such a statement would be easily and readily interpreted by a Cartesian

dogmatic metaphysician. Meillassoux points out that for the Cartesian, while nothing can be said about the experience of the accretion of the earth—that it was hot back then, or that it was bright—what can be said "about such an event is what the 'measurements', that is to say, the mathematical data, allow us to determine: for instance, that it began roughly 4.56 billion years ago, that it…took place over millions of years…that it occupied a certain volume in space" (*AF,* 11). In other words, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities becomes useful here because while we cannot say exactly what the secondary qualities of the accretion of the earth were like, we can however state the primary qualities of the accretion, namely the mathematizable properties that existed at the time of the event independently of any experiencing subject. Meillassoux points out that the implication of this Cartesian interpretation is that while the ancestral statements are linguistic and therefore ideal, "the *referents* of the statements about dates, volumes, etc., existed 4.56 billion years ago as described by these statements" (*AF,* 12). In other words, for the Cartesian dogmatist, ancestral statements, insofar as they are validated by science, refer to something which was real and anterior to life on earth. It follows that for the Cartesian, science can think a world without human consciousness as its correlate.

A correlationist philosopher has a far more complicated interpretation of the meaning of ancestral statements. Meillassoux points out that for the correlationist, the meaning of an ancestral statements cannot be "literal" but must rather be clarified with a "codicil" that specifies for whom it is that the statement is meaningful (*AF,* 13). He asks us to consider the following form of ancestral statement: 'Event Y occurred x number of years before the emergence of humans' (Meillassoux, *AF,* 13). A correlationist would add the following codicil to the end of that formal statement—"*for humans* (or even for *the human scientist*)" (Meillassoux, *AF,* 13). Meillassoux states that with the addition of the codicil, the correlationist is guilty of splitting

meaning into two levels—the statement's "immediate, or realist meaning; and the more originary correlationist meaning, activated by the codicil" (*AF,* 14). Whereas the Cartesian, in affirming the statement's literal meaning, believes that the "realist meaning of the ancestral statement *is its ultimate meaning*," the correlationist denies the literal interpretation of the ancestral statement because the implication leads to an absurdity (Meillassoux, *AF,* 14).

The absurdity arises, according to Meillassoux, because if one upholds the literal interpretation of ancestral statements, then it follows that we are thinking of a being that is anterior to givenness and thus uncorrelated to thought (Meillassoux, *AF,* 14). The material basis upon which scientists make ancestral statements – what Meillassoux calls the "arche-fossil"—would appear to be given to us as a "being that is *anterior to givenness*" (*AF,* 14). This tension is quickly resolved by the correlationist, who points out that "being *is not* anterior to givenness, it *gives itself* as anterior to givenness" meaning that this object gives itself in the present as anterior to givenness as such. Meillassoux points out that for the correlationist "there are indeed two levels at which ancestrality can be approached, each corresponding to the double occurrence of the term 'givenness'…being gives itself (occurrence 1) as anterior to givenness (occurrence 2)" (*AF,* 15). The correlationist will argue that the first occurrence reveals a deeper and a far more originary meaning—"that the correlation between thought and being enjoys a logical priority over every empirical statement about the world and intra-worldly entities" (Meillassoux, *AF,* 15). This transcendental meaning is the primary and the only true meaning for the correlationist—the realist meaning that the Cartesian or the naturalist infer is secondary and only derives from the more originary and fundamental way in which the arche-fossil gives itself in the present (Meillassoux, *AF,* 15).

Meillassoux points out that the ancestral statement discussed above about the accretion of the earth would be explicated by the correlationist in the following way: 'The present community of scientists has objective reason to consider that the accretion of the earth preceded the emergence of hominids by x number of years' (*AF,* 15). Thus, for the correlationist, an ancestral statement that a scientist makes is "true insofar as it is founded upon an experiment that is in the *present*…insofar as it has its basis in an experience which is by right reproducible by anyone" (Meillassoux, *AF,* 16). This seems reasonable, inasmuch as scientists are conducting their research in the present. The arche-fossil's anteriority to givenness is still given presently, here and now, for the scientists. Meillassoux argues that the correlationist position holds that, necessarily, we "carry out *a retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*" (*AF,* 16). He summarizes the correlationist position on ancestral statements and the arche-fossil in the following way: 'It is not ancestrality which precedes givenness, but that which is given in the present which retrojects a *seemingly* ancestral past' (Meillassoux, *AF,* 16). Despite this, Meillassoux acknowledges that correlationist philosophers, though they do not take ancestral statements and scientific statements literally, nonetheless do not interfere with science and do not question the practical validity of its findings (Meillassoux, *AF,* 13).

However, Meillassoux still believes that much is at stake in accepting or rejecting correlationism, namely what we can ultimately say about the world. He suggests that if we ask a correlationist the questions "*what is it that happened 4.56 billion years ago?* Did the accretion of the earth happen, *yes or no?*", the correlationist will give a vague answer that, inevitably, collapses into a position of subjective idealism (Meillassoux, *AF,* 16-8). The correlationist, as we have seen, will answer in the positive, with the clarification that a statement is true insofar as it is verifiable by an intersubjective community of scientists, but also in the negative, since what the

sentence 'literally' refers to is unthinkable, and therefore the events the statement claims to describe could not have occurred in that particular way (Meillassoux, *AF,* 16). But this leads the correlationist into an absurd position—while an objective ancestral statement can be said to be true if it is intersubjectively verifiable, its *"referent cannot possible have actually existed in the way this truth describes it*…it is an 'objective' statement, but it has no conceivable object…to put it more simply: *it is a non-sense*" (Meillassoux, *AF,* 17). For the correlationist, the ancestral statement is non-sense because it attempts to think an object which *a priori* cannot be thought.

In doubling the statement's sense, what the correlationist really does is undermine scientific statements and practice, because fundamentally, if one upholds the correlationist thesis, ancestral statements are non-sense and describe a referent which cannot possible be conceived of (Meillassoux, *AF,* 17). In light of correlationism's true nature, Meillassoux says that "it is as if the distinction between transcendental idealism…and speculative or even subjective idealism…this distinction which we had been taught to draw—and which separates Kant from Berkeley—became blurred and dissolved in light of the fossil-matter" (*AF,* 17-8). Indeed, Meillassoux tells us that all forms of correlationism are really just a form of "extreme idealism" wherein any statements made by science about that which is independent of humans are rendered as non-sense since the object of their description is an impossibility (*AF,* 18). In this respect, correlationist philosophies which claim to be critical of dogmatist metaphysics collapse into metaphysical idealism that denies any possible discourse on a reality that subsists and exists independent of our correlation to it.

Harman's Critique of Husserlian Phenomenology

Harman's relationship with phenomenology is complicated. The very beginnings of his Object-Oriented Philosophy and Ontology have their roots in his readings of Husserl and Heidegger. His first book—*Tool Being*—builds a philosophical system out of a radical reading of Heidegger's tool analysis in *Being and Time*. However, his relationship with phenomenology is not merely that of origins. It is complicated by his rejection and critique of phenomenology as metaphysically idealist, a metaphysics of presence, and a philosophy of access. This is evident in his *The Quadruple Object*. Additionally, it comes to the fore in his very recent *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. Of interest to us in this project is his critique of Husserl; in keeping with the general critique mentioned above, Harman accuses Husserl of being a metaphysical idealist, a metaphysician of presence, and a philosopher of access (*QO*, 20, 60-4).[3]

Harman suggests that for Husserl, we must begin with suspending "the external world from consideration, refusing to accept any natural or causal theories about things" (*QO*, 21). In this move of suspension, we must absolve ourselves from all metaphysical commitments—justified or unjustified—including those to the mind-independent reality of the world. To emphasize the extent of this move, Harman states that Husserl demands that we even "exclude all possibility of objects that are unobservable in principle by consciousness" (*QO*, 21). If we perform this suspension or epoché, we find that consciousness is intentional—it is always directed toward something, namely an object (Harman, *QO*, 21). In other words, consciousness is always consciousness of something. Harman explains this: 'When I judge there is something judged; when I love there is something or someone loved. In directing my attention toward this something, I "intend" it' (*QO*, 21). For Harman, however, the epoché carries with it a terrible price, namely metaphysical idealism

[3] Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011. In-text abbreviation: *QO*.

Harman suggests that the epoché places the "independent natural world outside of philosophy" and that "bracketing of the natural world is a brutally idealist gesture" (*QO,* 22). Harman argues that this is so because insofar as the epoché reveals intentional objects, it also confines them to the intentional realm—as objects of consciousness and not objects as such. He states that "in phenomenology these objects have no autonomy from consciousness" and, even if they had some kind of a persistent essence, they "would still have no autonomous reality apart from being objects of actual or potential observation" (Harman, *QO,* 22). As support for his claim, Harman references Husserl's disagreement with Kasimir Twardowski—while Twardowski believes that the intentional object exists outside of consciousness but its content within consciousness, Husserl contends that there is no such distinction, and that the object intended is the object in the world as such (*QO,* 23). Harman tells us that Husserl "famously holds that the Berlin intended in consciousness and the Berlin existing in the world are one and the same," a held belief that "paves way for his increasing idealism over the years" (*QO,* 23).To be sure, there is a difference between an object and content for Husserl, but this difference, says Harman, exists entirely within the "immanent sphere of consciousness" (*QO,* 23).[4] It follow then that intentional objects—the objects of experience—are confined to being a correlate of and immanent to consciousness, stripping them of any reality independent of us. It is precisely on these grounds that Harman feels confident to conclude later on that "for the mathematically trained Husserl, it is absurd to think that there could be objects that are not, in principle, the

[4] It should be noted here that Husserl does not accept the distinction between some 'immanent sphere of consciousness' and the real world. Harman acknowledges this, but in the next section, after making his first claim. See page 24 of *Quadruple Object.*

correlate of some consciousness that observes them," rendering him an idealist, and, as Meillassoux would claim, a correlationist (*OOO*, 77).[5]

Harman argues that Husserl's metaphysical idealism is also evident in his notion of adumbrations. He suggests that for Husserl, intentional objects are "always encountered through a specific profile: an *Abschattung* or 'adumbration'" (*QO,* 24). He gives an example of observing a water tower: imagine walking around a water tower 100 meters away at night when you are depressed—the tower is experienced through different profiles and perceptions which in turn reveal different details, yet there can hardly be dispute that the tower is the very same tower throughout all the profiles and perceptions (Harman, *QO,* 24). The water tower is always experienced through adumbrations, yet "these adumbrations are not the same thing as the intentional object they manifest" and "the intentional object is no bundle of adumbrations" either (Harman, *QO,* 24). Adumbrations then are the perceptual profiles or aspects through which the object is seen. For Harman, the metaphysical implication of adumbrations is that "the object always remains the same despite numerous constant changes in its content" and that "for Husserl both the object and content are immanent" since this is all evident through intentionality (Harman, *QO,* 24). Because the object and also its content are immanent to experience, it follows that "there is really no concealment for Husserl" (Harman, *QO,* 25). The object and content are always fully present; their reality is always already there. While Husserl might deny that content and object are immanent to consciousness such that the resultant immanent realm is "an idealist prison cut off from access to the outer world," this is only so "because he accepts no 'transcendent' world that would make phenomena 'immanent' by contrast" (Harman, *QO,* 24, 26).

[5] Harman, Graham. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. London, UK: Pelican Books, 2018. In-text abbreviation: *OOO.*

Another way that Harman attempts to critique Husserl is through suggesting that Husserl is wrong about eidetic variation's ability to intellectually intuit an object's eidos or essential features (*QO,* 27). Harman tells us that eidetic variation is Husserl's methodology for getting to the essential features or the *eidos* (essence) of an object (*QO,* 27). Through eidetic variation, the content of an object given through adumbrations is stripped away to reveal only that which is necessary—the essential features or qualities that an object needs to be what it is (Harman, *QO,* 27).[6] Furthermore, Harman suggests that for Husserl, the eidos of an object is not immediately present in experience, but rather is attained through categorical intuition "such that only the work of the intellect delivers the eidos" (*QO,* 27-8). In other words, Husserl believes that an object's essential features—features that make it what it is—can be known by us. Harman criticizes Husserl for holding this position, arguing that intellectual intuition is no different than its sensual counterpart: 'Both sensual and categorical intuition are forms of intuition, and to intuit something is not the same as to be it' (*QO,* 28). The implication here is that for Harman, in order to intuit or know something, one has to *be* that thing.

On Harman's reading, Husserl's eidetic variation is a form of metaphysician of presence. Taking Heidegger as his inspiration, Harman suggests that "by reducing a thing to its accessibility to consciousness, the thing itself is turned into a caricature, or 'cut off at the knees' as the young Heidegger says" (*QO,* 52). For Harman, Husserl's eidetic variation seems to suggest precisely this reduction of a thing's reality to its presence to an observer. Harman states that "Husserl seems to think it possible that we might attain adequate intuition into things, and to this extent he is guilty of reducing things to presence in consciousness" (*QO,* 53). In other words,

[6] This does not imply, however, that the object can be reduced to its essential features. Consider the following: perception is perspectival. That perception is always from a perspective is a part of its essence, but by no means does this exhaust what perception is.

to think that an object's reality can be exhausted intellectually is to render its reality relative to consciousness rather than independent of it—an idealist move. Harman states that "Husserl is simply telling us that there is no impenetrable inwardness of things, since the proper intellectual attitude can give us their inwardness directly" (*OOO*, 78). Put differently: Harman thinks that for Husserl, the thing itself is what is present to us and no more. Harman rejects this reduction to presence of a thing's reality and states that "the things themselves must have autonomy from their relation to us, or they are not things themselves" (Harman, *QO*, 53). From this, we can infer that Harman thinks Husserl to be a metaphysician of presence and an idealist.

Harman tells us that while Husserl is unique, since he sheds light on the fact that we experience objects and not qualities, he is still part of an "overmining" trend in the history of philosophy (*OOO,* 49). Overmining, Harman tells us, is a trend in the history of philosophy where "objects are important only insofar as they are manifested to the mind, or are part of some concrete event that affects … other objects as well" (*QO,* 11).[7] We can see that Husserl's alleged metaphysics of presence puts him squarely in this camp, a conclusion Harman reaffirms in stating that Husserl "thought it absurd that an object could exist as anything other than the potential correlate of an observing consciousness" (*OOO*, 49). Metaphysical idealism is inherently intertwined with overmining philosophies, and Harman references Meillassoux in stating that all of these philosophies are correlationist (*QO,* 12). In this respect, Husserlian phenomenology, insofar as it is guilty of overmining, is also, by extension, guilty of metaphysical idealism.

Whereas Meillassoux calls all post-Kantian philosophy correlationism, Harman describes correlationist or overmining philosophies as examples of the "Philosophy of Human Access"

[7] It should be kept in mind that for Husserl, objects are not just physical things, objects are the anything that we experience, see page 5 of *Quadruple Object* and page 51 of *Object-Oriented Ontology.*

tradition (*QO,* 61). Harman tells us that the line of thought that summarizes the tradition of Philosophy of Human Access is the following: 'If we try to think a world outside human thought, then we are *thinking* it, and hence it is no longer outside thought. Any attempt to escape this circle is doomed to contradiction' (*QO,* 60-1). In other words, when we try to think the noumenal, we convert it to the phenomenal—the thing-in-itself becomes the thing-for-us. While Husserl does not recognize any distinction between immanent and transcendent worlds—the for-us and the in-itself—Harman suggests that this is mere denial, and that implicitly, Husserl is a philosopher of human access (*QO,* 24). According to Harman, Philosophies of Human Access are flawed. He suggests that in asserting that experiential or phenomenal reality is exhaustive of reality as such, Philosophies of Access reduce "that reality to the tiny portion of it directly available to humans" (*QO,* 64). It follows that Husserlian phenomenology is guilty of this reduction, and is therefore incompatible with metaphysical realism.

To recap, Harman charges Husserl with being a metaphysical idealist, a metaphysician of presence, and a philosopher of access. These accusations stem from Harman's interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology. Harman suggests that Husserl's notions of intentionality, adumbrations, and eidetic variation reveal his implicitly idealist metaphysics. Husserl shows that consciousness is intentional; in other words, consciousness is always consciousness of something, of some object. But Harman argues that for Husserl, the intentional object is also revealed to be immanent to, and dependent on, consciousness. Husserl's suggestion that objects always reveal themselves through adumbrations also suggests metaphysical idealism and a metaphysics of presence because both the object and its content are revealed as immanent to consciousness. Finally, Husserl's eidetic variation as a means of deriving an object's *eidos* or essence also reveals his phenomenology as a sort of metaphysical idealism and a Philosophy of

Human Access, because it suggests that we can exhaust an object's reality through intellectual intuition. Harman's several charges against Husserl reduce to the following: Husserl is a metaphysical idealist who implicitly holds all objects of experience to be dependent on and immanent to intentional consciousness; if there is no consciousness, then there is no world. As such, we should reject Husserlian phenomenology.

Sparrow's Critique of Husserlian Phenomenology

Sparrow's critique of Husserlian phenomenology stems from his interpretation of Husserl's methodology. Sparrow claims that he will demonstrate how Husserl's "phenomenological method, rather than maintaining its intended metaphysical neutrality, actually forecloses metaphysical realism as it bolsters transcendental idealism" (*EOP,* 26).[8] In other words, despite claims to metaphysical neutrality, the actual methodology of phenomenology cannot justify metaphysical realism. Central to its inability to justify realism is the phenomenological reduction, which is a key method for Husserl and phenomenology in general (Sparrow, *EOP,* 36). Sparrow's critique also extends to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty; however, I will not address these authors here. Instead, I will focus on Sparrow's interpretation of Husserl's methodology and his argument that it is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

Where does phenomenology, as a method, begin? Sparrow suggests that for Husserl, phenomenology begins much like Kant's critical philosophy, with the question of epistemology preceding the question of metaphysics (*EOP,* 28). Before we can answer "the question of how cognition is supposed to 'get at' the way things are in themselves," we must first perform "the critique of cognition for which phenomenology is the method" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 28). The problem

[8] Sparrow, Tom. *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and The New Realism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. In-text abbreviation: *EOP*.

of our access to the world is an epistemological one for Husserl, and phenomenology then is an epistemological method rather than a metaphysical one (Sparrow, *EOP*, 28). To begin this method, we must, much like Descartes, put out of play any kind of dubitable presuppositions: "This involves first and foremost a reduction of the scope of the theory of knowledge to what is given immanently to consciousness, or what is immanently apprehended" (Sparrow, *EOP*, 28). This reduction of epistemic scope to only that which is given immediately and immanently in experience is the phenomenological reduction and is central to Husserl's method.

The reason why we must perform the phenomenological reduction is to stay clear of the unjustified presuppositions of naturalism. Naturalism, defined as the naïve metaphysics of the natural scientist, holds that the objects scientists study exist entirely independent and transcendent of scientific observation (Sparrow, *EOP,* 28). If phenomenology is intent on attempting to understand how it is that scientists can get at the things themselves, then it must not accept any unjustified metaphysical assumptions and "must restrict its investigation to what is immanent to consciousness because this provides the only phenomenologically accessible foundation for cognition" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 28). In other words, in performing the reduction, phenomenology focuses only on that which given immediately to consciousness without assuming its transcendent reality. By contrast, the naturalist "posits, or at least presumes, the transcendence of what is immanently presented to the phenomenologist within the reduction" (Sparrow, *EOP*, 29).

Sparrow suggests that in performing the reduction, phenomenology "abandons the question of how cognition can 'get at,' or know, an object that transcends it" (*EOP,* 28). This is because the object of study for phenomenology is experience or "pure phenomena" which are not understood as metaphysically real or unreal, but rather as just immanent to consciousness

(Sparrow, *EOP*, 29). Furthermore, because the phenomenological reduction puts out of play any kind of metaphysics—thus being ostensibly metaphysically neutral—the "phenomenological field, therefore, deals only with the *meaning* of the given, not with the given…as really existing of metaphysically real" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 29). Sparrow states that for Husserl, the reality of what is experienced is not positively denied by the reduction; rather, the phenomenological reduction simply cannot "affirm the autonomy of this reality" (*EOP*, 29). In other words, the phenomenological reduction refuses to posit any kind of metaphysical status for the pure phenomena which are its objects of study. Instead, pure phenomena are examined for their meaning, while their reality remains out of play.

Sparrow states that Husserl believes phenomenology capable of "seeing" essences or universals within the pure phenomena (*EOP,* 29). For Husserl, the "universal is something instantiated in particular phenomena, but must not be seen as something that resides only in this or that particular phenomenon" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 29). Consciousness is then able to intuit, through "eidetic abstraction," also known as eidetic variation, the essence or universal from a particular pure phenomenon (Sparrow, *EOP*, 29). This raises the question of how it is that an essence—something which transcends particular instantiations—can be intuited from a pure phenomenon immanent to consciousness. Sparrow suggests that Husserl "encourages us to see the universal, essences, as immanently transcendent. The universal is given immanently, but *as transcendent*" (*EOP*, 29).

In this way, transcendence does become the subject of phenomenological inquiry, despite the reduction confining the scope to only that which is immanently given to consciousness. Sparrow suggests that after the reduction, it is only possible for a phenomenologist to talk about transcendence only insofar as it is "found within the immanent sphere of the reduction" (*EOP,*

30). For Husserl, essences derive their reality and meaning from "the constitution of the object in view, not the constitution of the subject viewing" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 30). In other words, I do not create the reality of the essence by thinking; rather, I intuit the essence from the way in which the object is constituted. Essences gain their reality and transcendence from their object, but the object itself "does not exist in consciousness the way a toy exists in a chest" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 30). The object is part of pure phenomena which are immanent, but within this immanent experience, the object appears as independent. The key here is that the appearance takes place immanently—within experience. Sparrow states that "the objects of consciousness, then, do not give unambiguous evidence of their mind-independent transcendence, although they might suggest it" (*EOP,* 30). However, this suggestion, this "reference beyond the phenomenal is always itself phenomenal" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 30). In other words, the evidence of transcendence is merely phenomenal, and by no means definitive.

Sparrow argues that "Husserl's claim that objects and essences are constituted within the reduction as well as his choice of 'transcendental idealism' as a name for this mature philosophy support the charge that his phenomenology is fundamentally idealist" (*EOP,* 30). Husserl's claim that 'consciousness constitutes objects' can be read as suggesting that it makes or fabricates these objects, rendering him a metaphysical idealist (Sparrow, *EOP,* 30). But Sparrow suggests we can also read Husserl's constitution like Heidegger did, wherein constitution "means *letting the entity be seen in its objectivity*" (*EOP,* 30). In this respect, constitution becomes "a tool of realism, an instrument that allows entities to show themselves as they are independent of the machinations of perception or cognition" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 30-1). But this reading of constitution returns us to a distinction between phenomena and noumena because it suggests "that there is a way that the objects of experience are, independent of experience, and it is constitution that lets them display

this objectivity" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 31). This would be inconsistent with Husserl's project, and so Sparrow seemingly rejects this interpretative move.

Following the rejection of the Heideggerian reading, Sparrow suggests that Husserl is close to "Kant's constructivist solution to the problem of knowledge, which, as Tom Rockmore frames it, reduces the apparent world to the phenomenal world" (*EOP,* 31). Indeed, much like Kant, Husserl is "at pains to show that the world's appearance requires subjectivity, but subjectivity is not the sufficient condition for the world's manifestation" (Sparrow, *EOP,* 31). Yet Kant's constructivism implies that there are no transcendent objects because there is no transcendent world (Sparrow, *EOP,* 31). However, Sparrow argues that Husserl disavows Kant's constructivism because it would contradict his theory of constitution wherein objects are given as transcendent in immanent experience (*EOP,* 31). To be sure, there is a transcendence for Husserl, but this transcendence is always given immanently. Sparrow argues that this tension forces Husserl into a contradiction:

> Husserl, to avoid the Kantian constructivism he disavows, must commit to some form of metaphysical realism. And yet, as soon as he makes this commitment he has transgressed the boundaries of the subject/object correlation which he insists is the proper field and foundation of phenomenological investigation. This must be taken as a constrained but unjustified breach of method (*EOP*, 31)

In other words, there seems to be a tension between the reduction and constitution. The phenomenological reduction attempts to avoid the equivocation of reality to phenomena. Yet constitution seems to suggest it. If Husserl wants to avoid this contradiction, Sparrow suggests that he must contradict the phenomenological method and affirm metaphysical realism despite phenomenology's alleged metaphysical neutrality.

Sparrow suggests that Karl Ameriks presents the most charitable reading of Husserl's phenomenology in relation to metaphysical realism (*EOP,* 31-2). He suggests that it is logically possible that things do not exist "because their absolute being is never immanently present to

consciousness," though it would be "absurd to hold that the objects of experience do not exist because so much phenomenological evidence suggests otherwise" (Sparrow, *EOP*, 33). In other words, pure phenomena, though immanent to consciousness, offer evidence of transcendence. It is not absolute evidence because immanent experience cannot be penetrated by something absolutely transcendent without the latter being rendered immanent; to think otherwise would obtain a logical contradiction (Sparrow, *EOP,* 33). Yet it is still evidence. The same holds not just for things, but for an external world as such. Sparrow suggests, following Ameriks, that we can read Husserl as saying that "the world's existence, though not 'immediately apodictic', nonetheless is 'empirically indubitable', and it is apodictic…that given harmonious experiences it becomes absurd to deny an external world" (*EOP,* 34). What this means is that for Husserl, the reality of an external world—just like the reality of transcendent things—cannot be established with certainty and without contradiction, though phenomenological evidence strongly suggests it. But is this non-apodictic suggestive evidence sufficient?

Sparrow suggests that the realism this reading of Husserl puts forward is "counterfeit realism" (*EOP,* 32). Responding to the claim that there is abundant phenomenological evidence to make it absurd to think that objects of experience are nonexistent, Sparrow says the following: 'By the same token, it is absurd to assert that they exist mind-independently because the evidence for this is lacking, if not impossible to gather. The paradox of a realist phenomenology is that it cannot justify (nor disqualify) its realism using phenomenological evidence' (*EOP,* 33). The implication here is that phenomenological evidence might make it absurd to claim that things do not exist, but the evidence renders it equally absurd to positively claim that they do. For Sparrow, an object that gives itself immanently *as* transcendent is not transcendent. Sparrow replies similarly to the claim that there is non-apodictic phenomenological evidence to think that

a mind-independent world exists. Yet, Sparrow argues that the only thing this phenomenological evidence establishes is that "phenomenology cannot disprove the truth of metaphysical realism any better than it can provide evidence for it" thus rendering it moot (*EOP*, 34).

Sparrow's conclusion regarding Husserl's phenomenological evidence of a mind-independent world is the following: 'Transcendence can only be evidenced within immanence, which means that absolute transcendence can never be affirmed by the phenomenologist for whom absolute transcendence is never given absolutely' (*EOP*, 36). Here, Sparrow is mirroring Meillassoux's critique of phenomenology—namely that due to being a correlationist philosophy, any evidence of mind-independent reality is quickly rendered immanent by the 'for us' codicil (*EOP*, 35). For Husserl, we can think a mind-independent or transcendent world and we can even claim it absurd to think the opposite, but we cannot know it, and thus its inexistence always remains a possibility (Sparrow, *EOP*, 35). For Sparrow, this does not suffice to quality as metaphysical realism. For Husserl, it is the case that "absolute transcendence remains phenomenologically unconfirmed" and in this respect, Sparrow holds that Husserl lapses into anti-realism (*EOP*, 36). Coupled with less charitable readings of Husserl, Sparrow thinks it justifiable to think Husserl's phenomenology as being implicitly idealist (*EOP*, 30). In this respect, Sparrow claims that phenomenology, if it holds true to its method, is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

Concluding Remarks

Despite differences in content, there is a unity in all three of the speculative realists' respective critiques of Husserlian phenomenology. This unity is evident in their conclusion and main allegation: that Husserlian phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. To

be sure, Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow's critiques are unique in their own right. For each, the reason why phenomenology is incompatible with realism is different. But that it is incompatible is universal among the three.

Meillassoux charges phenomenology with correlationism. He argues that phenomenology suggests that we cannot think a world independent of mind because, as it is a correlationist philosophy, it holds that the only thing we have access to is the mind-world or subject-object correlation. The implication here is that a phenomenologist, as a correlationist, rejects the literal meaning of ancestral statements—prepositions about a world uncorrelated to a mind. The implication here is that the phenomenologist does not think that there is a mind-independent reality, or at the very least that we can know it. In this respect, phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

Harman charges Husserlian phenomenology with practicing metaphysical idealism and with being a metaphysics of presence and a Philosophy of Human Access. His charges stem from his interpretation of Husserl's notions of intentionality, adumbrations, and eidetic variation. He suggests that intentionality implies that intentional objects—objects for consciousness—are equivalent to objects in the world. That adumbrations suggest that both the object and the content exist immanently to consciousness. Finally, Husserl's eidetic variation suggests that consciousness can intellectually intuit an object's essence and exhaust its reality. Harman suggests that Husserl, in thinking that the intentional object is immanent to consciousness, renders the intentional object's reality dependent on mind. In this respect, he is a metaphysical idealist. The same holds for adumbrations and content. Husserl is a metaphysician of presence, for Harman, because in thinking that the essence of an object can be made present to the mind and the object's reality exhausted, Husserl thinks there is not a deeper and withdrawn reality to

an object. Finally, Husserl is a Philosopher of Human Access because, as Harman claims, he denies that philosophy can say anything meaningful about that which is beyond our access to the world. Fundamentally, on Harman's view, Husserl's phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

Sparrow charges Husserl's phenomenology with being unable, within the confines of its method, to justify a transcendent or mind independent world. He suggests that for Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is the necessary first step of the phenomenological method. However, the phenomenological reduction reduces the scope of phenomenology's inquiry to only that which is immanent to consciousness—pure phenomena. He suggests that Husserl's claim that things give themselves immanently as transcendent is not a legitimate form of realism. This is because the givenness of transcendence occurs immanently, and the evidence of transcendence is not absolute. In other words, at best, Husserl's phenomenology can vaguely hint at a mind-independent world, but it cannot furnish absolute or apodictic evidence of its existence. Coupled with other aspects of Husserl's phenomenology, we have good reason to think him a metaphysical idealist. Though even on the most charitable reading, phenomenology still remains incompatible with metaphysical realism because it cannot justify it.

The fundamental critique that all three of these philosophers make is that Husserl's phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. In the following chapter, I will examine and evaluate Dan Zahavi's response to these critiques.

Chapter 2: Dan Zahavi's Response to the Speculative Realists

The allegations of phenomenology's incompatibility with metaphysical realism do not go unanswered in the literature. Dan Zahavi has previously written on the relationship between phenomenology and metaphysics, suggesting that by no means is phenomenology metaphysically idealist.[9] He has also directly addressed the challenges levelled by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow. In an article entitled "The end of what? Phenomenology vs. speculative realism," Zahavi reviews, evaluates, and attempts to repudiate the critiques levied against phenomenology by Sparrow, as well as Harman and Meillassoux.

In what follows, I evaluate Zahavi's interpretation of the critiques of phenomenology, as well as his attempt at refuting them. I hold that, while compelling, his response to can be expanded upon. In particular, his interpretation of Sparrow's critique seems to largely omit or dismiss Sparrow's suggestion that 'immanent transcendence' is not *real* transcendence. Similarly, Zahavi's interpretation of Harman's critique omits entirely Harman's critique of Husserl's intentionality as suggesting metaphysical idealism and also a metaphysics of presence. In this chapter, I focus on these lacunas in his interpretation and repudiation of the speculative realists' critiques and, as such, create space for my own response in Chapter Three.

Zahavi and Sparrow

[9] Zahavi, Dan. "Phenomenology and Metaphysics." In *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation*., 49:3–22. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003.

Zahavi suggests that Sparrow's characterization of Husserl and Husserlian phenomenology is inconsistent, since it vacillates among three mutually exclusive positions. According to Zahavi, Sparrow's first position is that phenomenology has no stable or concrete method and identity (*PSR,* 290-1).[10] His second position is that, insofar as phenomenology is committed to the transcendental method and the epoché, it forever forecloses any kind of metaphysical position (*PSR,* 292). Finally, his third position is that phenomenology is not neutral but rather is metaphysically idealist and/or antirealist (*PSR,* 292). So either phenomenology does not exist, or it exists but in virtue of its method forecloses any metaphysical position, or it exists but requires a commitment to metaphysical idealism and/or antirealism. Because these three positions are inconsistent and contradictory, Zahavi feels justified in dismissing Sparrow's claims entirely.

Zahavi's interpretation of Sparrow's first position on phenomenology proceeds along the following lines. Sparrow suggests that phenomenology "never really got started" and/or "began and ended with Husserl" because Husserl "was never able to settle on what phenomenology should become" and thus anyone claiming to do phenomenology is just practicing "zombie philosophy" (Zahavi, *PSR.* 290). Zahavi further suggests Sparrow's first position is derivative of Tom Rockmore's tendentious interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology (*PSR,* 290). Rockmore's position, he maintains, is essentially that Husserl failed to account for what is meant by phenomenology, what any of its concepts mean, and basically that Husserl is just an obscurantist (Zahavi, *PSR,* 290-1). Zahavi does not address this aspect of Sparrow's critique and seems to simply dismiss it (*PSR,* 291-2). I hold that Zahavi is right in dismissing Sparrow's first position on Husserlian phenomenology, since the same reasoning pattern can be applied to

[10] Zahavi, Dan. "The End of What? Phenomenology vs. Speculative Realism." International Journal of Philosophical Studies 24, no. 3 (May 20, 2016): 289–309. In-text abbreviation: *PSR*

'philosophy' as such. Philosophy never got started and/or began and ended with Socrates, because Socrates was never able to agree or settle on what philosophy should become, and thus anyone claiming to do philosophy—like Plato—is just practicing zombie philosophy.

Regarding Sparrow's second and third positions, Zahavi suggests that for Sparrow, Husserlian phenomenology is committed to a transcendental method (Zahavi, *PSR,* 292). For Sparrow, the commitment to the transcendental method entails the necessity of the epoché and the transcendental reduction, such that the only evidence phenomenology considers is pure and immanent experience (*PSR,* 292). However, on Sparrow's view, the commitment to pure and immanent experience as the only source of phenomenological evidence "entails that phenomenology has to abandon and prohibit metaphysics" and thus "cannot offer or provide a defence of full blown metaphysical realism" (*PSR,* 292). While accurate, Zahavi's brief interpretation of Sparrow's argument is somewhat cursory. Indeed, Zahavi does not address what I hold to be to be Sparrow's most challenging point—that an object's transcendence can only be given immanently and through the 'as' structure such that transcendence or mind-independence is never apodictic or certain. Instead, Zahavi immediately proceeds to Sparrow's third point—namely that phenomenology is actually aligned with metaphysical idealism and/or antirealism (*PSR,* 292).

There is not much to be said about Zahavi's interpretation of Sparrow's third position—Sparrow merely asserts his position without much argumentative rigor. As such, it is understandable why Zahavi does not address it directly (*PSR,* 292). Instead, he chooses to address all three of Sparrow's positions in one concise response. Zahavi suggests that the three positions Sparrow puts forward are contradictory (*PSR,* 292). He states that "it is not clear how Sparrow can reconcile the claim that phenomenology has no method, that it has a transcendental

method that prohibits metaphysical commitments, and that its method commits it to idealism" (Zahavi, *PSR,* 292). Zahavi further suggests that given Sparrow's tendency to interpret Husserl the same way Rockmore does, and given how tendentious and inaccurate Rockmore's interpretations are, we should conclude that it is not Husserl who is inconsistent, but Sparrow himself (*PSR,* 292).

Zahavi's refutation of Sparrow's challenges to phenomenology seem to be a sort of *reductio ad absurdum.* I agree with Zahavi that Sparrow's different positions are inconsistent and mutually exclusive. However, I do not think that this is a sufficient reason to dismiss all of the challenges that Sparrow puts forward. As I discussed above, it reasonable to dismiss Sparrow's first argument because suggesting that phenomenology does not exist because there is no set and defined method or perhaps some ambiguity of scope means that we would also have to say that philosophy itself does not exist. We are then left with arguments (2) and (3), which are indeed mutually exclusive. Zahavi argues that that because these are inconsistent, we can dismiss both arguments and in turn, Sparrow's whole project (*PSR,* 292). However, I suggest we ought to think of arguments (2) and (3) as a disjunction, such that either (2) or (3) hold but not both.

Thus, if we dismiss Sparrow's argument that phenomenology does not exist, and think of arguments (2) and (3) as a mutually exclusive disjunction, we are left with the following: either (2) because phenomenology harbors commitments to a transcendental method and the epoché, it is incapable of supporting any kind of metaphysics, and therefore cannot support metaphysical realism; or (3) phenomenology is actually metaphysically idealist; but not both (2) and (3). I think that position (3) can be dismissed on the grounds that Sparrow merely asserts that phenomenology is metaphysically idealist and given no satisfactory evidence or argument to support his assertion. Additionally, I will address position (3) at great length in Chapter 3, and

show how it could never possibly obtain from any of Husserl's works. Therefore, we are left with position (2), namely that phenomenology's method forbids any metaphysics and therefore is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

Zahavi's interpretation of Sparrow's second position is, as I have suggested, too brief. He is accurate in suggesting that for Sparrow, the commitment to the transcendental method and the epoché renders phenomenology metaphysically inept, and unable to justify realism. However, Zahavi does not address Sparrow's reason for thinking this. Recall that for Sparrow, Husserlian phenomenology cannot outright claim apodictic evidence of an object's transcendence or of the existence of a mind-independent reality, because all transcendence or mind-independence is given immanently and through the 'as' structure. So while the world and objects suggest and give themselves as existing independently of me, for Sparrow, this is insufficient evidence of their independent existence because their transcendence is given immanently. On these grounds, Sparrow holds that phenomenology cannot outright support metaphysical realism. I think that in ignoring this line of reasoning, and dismissing this position through a *reductio,* Zahavi leaves this critique without a response. As such, to remedy this lacunae, I will respond to Sparrow's second position in Chapter Three.

Zahavi and Harman

Zahavi identifies Harman with the speculative realism movement (*PSR,* 293). He gives a brief overview of the speculative realism movement and suggests that what they all share is their rejection of correlationism, which Zahavi interprets as the "view that subjectivity and objectivity cannot be understood or analysed apart from one another because both are always already intertwined or internally related" (*PSR,* 293). Zahavi suggests that generally, speculative realists

reject phenomenology because they consider it to be a correlationist philosophy, since speculative realists are after the world in itself and as it exists independently of us (*PSR,* 293-4). Zahavi suggests that one of Harman's critiques of phenomenology is that it prioritizes the relationship between humans and the world and thus does not do justice to the being of objects as well as their relations to other objects (*PSR,* 294-5). For Harman, on Zahavi's view, though objects are different they are still equally objects, and that no object is more special than another, a view wholly incompatible with phenomenology (*PSR,* 295). Since Zahavi combines his refutation of Harman's "Philosophy of Human Access" critique with his refutation of Meillassoux's correlationism, I will examine this point in the section below.

Zahavi also vaguely addresses Harman's accusation that Husserlian phenomenology entails a metaphysics of presence. He suggests that Harman views scientific naturalism, much like phenomenology, to be a form of correlationism that attempts "to squeeze and conform reality to our … mindset" (*PSR,* 295). In other words, the implication here is that for Harman, we never have access to real objects or to the in-itself—the mind-independent object—because the real object's 'true being' always remains inaccessible (Zahavi, *PSR,* 295). Zahavi suggests that for Harman, this inability to get at the in it-self is not unique to humans, but rather is true of all objects since no object can exhaust another (*PSR,* 296). However, Zahavi does not address here the actual issue Harman raises about Husserl's metaphysics of presence. Recall that for Harman, Husserl is a metaphysician of presence because the reality of an object of experience can be known through eidetic variation, and though an object gives itself through adumbrations, it is still, for Husserl, the real object that we experience. Zahavi does not address this aspect of Harman's critique, and as such, I will take this up in Chapter 3.

Finally, Zahavi addresses Harman's claims that Husserlian phenomenology is metaphysically idealist as evident in the concept of intentionality. He quotes a passage from Harman's *The Quadruple Object* where Harman claims intentionality renders phenomenology metaphysically idealist:

> We have seen that one of the worst effects of phenomenology (a movement I have always cherished) was to cement the notion that the dispute between realism and anti-realism is a 'pseudo-problem.' Since intentionality is always directed toward something outside itself, perceiving or hating some object, phenomenology supposedly gives us all the realism we will ever need, and without falling into the 'naïve' realism that posits entities beyond all possible perception. The problem is that the objects of intentionality are by no means real, as proven by the fact that we hate, love, or fear many things that turn out not to exist in the least. By confirming itself to sensual objects and leaving no room for real ones, phenomenology is idealistic to the core and cannot get away with dismissing as a 'pseudo-problem' a difficulty that happens to threaten its own views about the world (Harman, *QO,* 139; Zahavi, *PSR,* 297-8).

Zahavi suggests that "this criticism is unconvincing" and that it does not follow that "since some objects of intentionality are non-existing, all objects of intentionality are non-existing (or unreal)" (*PSR,* 298). Furthermore, while it is true that Husserl rejects the distinction between intentional objects—Harman's sensual objects—and real objects, he does distinguish between "merely intentional" objects and objects that are both "real and intentional" (Zahavi, *PSR,* 298). Therefore, Zahavi suggests that for Husserl, intentional objects are not all merely intentional, and thus it does not follow that he is a metaphysician of presence. However, Zahavi fails to address Harman's claim that for Husserl, insofar as intentional objects are immanent to, and are correlates of, consciousness, they are deprived of reality. I will address this in Chapter 3.

To recap, Zahavi attributes to Harman three general critiques of Husserlian phenomenology. The first is that Husserlian phenomenology is correlationist or a 'Philosophy of Human Access' as Harman would call it. The second critique suggests that unlike phenomenology, Harman's own 'realist' philosophy does not hold that the 'true being' of objects

can be known by us or experienced by any other object. It seems that Zahavi is hinting at Harman's characterization of Husserlian phenomenology as a metaphysics of presence, though he is never explicit about this. Finally, the third critique that Zahavi identifies in Harman's work is that Husserlian phenomenology is metaphysically idealist due to the nature of intentionality. He addresses some aspects of these critiques but not others. As such, in order to remedy the gaps in his response, I will address Harman's critiques against Husserlian phenomenology in Chapter Three.

Zahavi and Meillassoux

Zahavi's discussion of Meillassoux's critique centers around the correlationist charge that Meillassoux raises against phenomenology. As mentioned above, Zahavi defines correlationism as the view that subjectivity and objectivity cannot be thought or understood apart from each other (*PSR,* 293). According to Zahavi, for Meillassoux, the problem with phenomenology is that it is a correlationist philosophy, and therefore rejects "the literal truth of scientific statements concerning events happening prior to the emergence of consciousness" and insists "on the difference between the immediate, realist, meaning of the statement, and a more profound, transcendental, interpretation of it" (Zahavi, *PSR,* 296). Indeed, Zahavi suggests that for Meillassoux, since science can actually give us access to reality as such, correlationism is wrong, and since phenomenology is a correlationist philosophy, then phenomenology is wrong (*PSR,* 296). Zahavi interprets Meillassoux as saying that because phenomenology is a correlationist philosophy, it cannot possibly get us to the things themselves or to a reality uncorrelated to thought, and thus is incompatible with metaphysical realism.

Zahavi begins to respond to Meillassoux's critique by admitting that phenomenology is indeed a correlationist philosophy (*PSR,* 293). He gives several quotes from Husserl, where Husserl makes it explicit that phenomenology actually reveals how deeply rooted the correlation between world and world-consciousness or object and consciousness is (*PSR,* 293). Zahavi suggests that correlationism is indeed widespread in both continental and analytic philosophy, historically and contemporarily (*PSR,* 299). Indeed, one such position is espoused by Hilary Putnam who, as Zahavi suggests, follows Husserl's footsteps (*PSR,* 299-300). Zahavi suggests that for Putnam, it is naïve to think that reality exists in a particular way and that we 'get at it' through categories or structures of consciousness, since the presupposition here is that we can neatly delineate and separate our structures of experience or categories of reason from the reality that exists independently of them (*PSR,* 299). Zahavi articulates his own position in the following way:

> It is an illusion to think that the notions of 'object' or 'reality' or 'world' have any sense outside of and independently of our conceptual schemas… Ultimately, what we call 'reality' is so deeply suffused with mind—and language—dependent structures that it is altogether impossible to make a neat distinction between those parts of our beliefs that reflect the world 'in itself' and those parts of our beliefs that simply express 'our conceptual contribution' (*PSR,* 300).

Zahavi's response to Meillassoux's charge of correlationism is not a rejection, but rather an explication as to why correlationism is actually a sensible position. Zahavi suggests, in agreement with Putnam, that it is impossible to separate the epistemic and the ontological, since both are so deeply intertwined (*PSR,* 300). I fully agree, given our epistemic limits.

To see why rejecting correlationism is not a viable position, consider the following. Suppose that there does indeed exist a mind-independent world; such a world must be either structured in some particular way or entirely unstructured. If we experience such a world, we necessarily experience it through something like categories of reason, or structures of

consciousness, or language. Even if we subscribe to a distinction between primary and secondary qualities, our experience of the mind-independent world necessarily renders it a world-for-us. Unless naïve and direct realism is true—and Meillassoux rejects naïve realism—we experience the world through some structure that renders the mind-independent world a world for us. If so, then it becomes impossible to distinguish where our structures of experience end and the mind-independent world begins. Meillassoux seems to think that primary qualities or the mathematizable features of an object are mind-independent. But mathematics and quantification, as Husserl shows in section 9 of the *Crisis* titled "Galileo's mathematization of nature" as well as in *The Origin of Geometry*, stem from our practices in the lifeworld. Indeed, as Zahavi suggests, even the idea of an 'object' or 'thing' might just be the product of our structures of experience. So to speak of mind-independent objects is naïve, since it might be the case that objects do not exist at all. I will expand on this point in Chapter 3 in the formulation of my own response to Meillassoux.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have explicated and discussed the response Zahavi gives to the challenges posed by the speculative realist trio of Sparrow, Harman, and Meillassoux. While fruitful, Zahavi's response is not without problems. In not addressing some of their more salient critiques of Husserlian phenomenology, Zahavi leaves open several theoretical lacunas concerning the relationship between Husserlian phenomenology and metaphysical realism. As a means of addressing these gaps, I formulate my own response in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Responding to Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow

In Chapter One, I explicated the challenged posed to Husserlian phenomenology by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow. In Chapter Two, I presented Zahavi's attempt to respond to these critiques. Here, in Chapter Three, I present my own response to the speculative realist trio's critiques of Husserl and argue that insofar as Husserlian phenomenology is an epistemological methodology, there is nothing that prevents it from being compatible with metaphysical realism.

Response to Meillassoux: Correlationism as Philosophical Maturity

Meillassoux's charge against phenomenology is that it is a correlationist philosophy. Correlationism is "any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation" where 'the correlation' refers to "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (*AF*, 5). He claims that holding a correlationist position entails the following: the rejection of the literal meaning of scientific statements, legitimation of creationist-like thinking, and subjective idealism. Since phenomenology is a correlationist philosophy, the implication is that phenomenology rejects literal scientific meaning, legitimates creationist-like thought, and collapses into subjective idealism. Therefore, inasmuch as we should abandon all correlationist philosophy, we should also abandon phenomenology, as it incompatible with the kind of metaphysical realism Meillassoux proposes.

Meillassoux's metaphysics can be characterized as a Cartesian-style rationalism (*AF*, 1), inasmuch as he believes that the object of experience consists of primary qualities and secondary

qualities. Primary qualities describe the features of the object of experience that the object has in-itself and without the subject (*AF,* 3). For Meillassoux, these features are mathematizable—for example, length, mass, volume, and so on—and directly describe and express the object or thing in-itself (*AF,* 3). Indeed, my very conception of these mathematizable features is identical to the features of the object itself, such that I am referencing not the object of experience but the very thing-in-itself independent of my experience (*AF,* 3). Secondary qualities are those features of an object that only emerge when a subject experiences the object—they can be conceptualized as sensual qualities or features of the relation between the subject and the object (*AF,* 1-2). Secondary qualities, then, do not exist in the object itself but are rather a byproduct of the correlation between a subject and an object.

There are several uncritical and/or unexamined presuppositions operative in Meillassoux's metaphysics. He presupposes, first and foremost, that mathematics or numerical entities subsist and exist outside of the correlation between a subject and an object. Furthermore, he assumes that our application of these mathematical and numerical entities to the object of experience—or possibly, our ostensible discovery of their existence or subsistence within the objects of experience—genuinely and fully corresponds to the object itself. This is supported by his assertion that our conception of the object's mathematical features directly corresponds to and describes the object itself. To be sure, Meillassoux is a metaphysical realist. However, these presuppositions seem to be a sign of epistemological naïveté– of epistemological faux-realism.

Indeed, Husserl's phenomenological findings in the *Crisis* shed light on these naïve mathematical assumptions. He suggests that one of the first 'modern' natural scientists, Galileo,

took for granted the 'objectivity' and indubitability of geometry and mathematics (*CES,* 23-4).[11] What Galileo forgot is that the geometric method "points back to the methodology of determination by surveying and measuring in general, practiced primitively and then as an art in the prescientific intuitively given surrounding world" (Husserl, *CES,* 27). The implication here is that the geometric method arises from our engagement with the world of experience, rooted in our practical concerns. The pregeometrical art of surveying, which itself is pre-scientific and not 'ideal' or universal, is the "meaning fundament for geometry, a fundament for the great invention of idealization" (Husserl, *CES,* 49). Therefore, the kind of ideal geometry which seemed to Galileo to be objective and indubitable, as if it was the 'truth' itself, is not itself absolutely and objective in itself. Geometry as a science has its origin in our engagement with practical concerns of our surrounding experiential world. It is only objective insofar as universal intersubjectivity constitutes 'objectivity' as such (Husserl, *CES,* 179). Geometry can thus hardly be thought of as itself purely objective in-itself.

What Galileo is guilty of, then, is the "surreptitious substitution of the mathematically substructed world of idealities for the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception, that is ever experienced and experienceable—our everyday life-world" (Husserl, *CES,* 49). This can be conceived of more plainly as a category mistake made by Galileo due to theoretical myopia. In forgetting that the life-world grounds the world of ideal geometry and mathematics, Galileo mistakenly takes that ideal world to be the actual world and makes the mistake of conceiving of geometry's objectivity as being absolute and indubitable. The implication of these reflections on Galileo's project and on the tendency to mathematize nature

[11] Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy.* Translated by David Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006. In-text abbreviation: *CES*

in general is that "all knowledge of laws could be knowledge only of predictions, grasped as lawful, about occurrences of actual or possible experiential phenomena, predictions which are indicated when experience is broadened though observations" (Husserl, *CES*, 50). In other words, knowledge, construed as knowledge of mathematical features of nature, is always rooted in experience and prediction and not in the object as such. Galileo's omission of the life-world as grounding for geometry, and in turn the success of his and future scientific projects, is why Husserl calls him "a discovering and concealing genius" (*CES*, 52).

Meillassoux's anti-correlational Cartesian-style metaphysics surely has as its ancestor Galileo's mathematization of nature. The central presupposition in Meillassoux's metaphysics is that the primary qualities of an object of experience—namely those features which can be mathematized—both really exist in the object itself uncorrelated to a subject and are indubitably true and absolutely objective. However, as Husserl's reflections on geometry and the mathematization of nature show, the assumption that geometry and mathematics are apodictic and objective in-themselves omits their foundational origin—the life-world. Since geometry and mathematics have their origin in the life-world and emerge within experience, the assumption of their absolute truth is naïve. In this way, Meillassoux's use of the dichotomy between primary and secondary qualities seems to break down, since much like secondary qualities, primary qualities emerge from our engagement with the world. The object of experience, then, cannot be said to have primary qualities which correspond to its mathematizable features, since the object of experience only has these mathematic features in virtue of our engagement with it. Because all features of an object emerge from our engagement with it, including those features which can be expressed mathematically due to the nature of geometry and mathematics, I suggest that Meillassoux's own metaphysics is flawed.

Meillassoux might concede, or some other metaphysical realist may reply, that it might indeed be the case that mathematical or geometrical features emerge from our engagement with the life-world or the object of experience—that these might indeed be not primary but secondary qualities. After ceding mathematizable features as primary qualities of an object to our Husserlian critique—or perhaps abandoning the entire Cartesian two-quality thesis—they might put forward a broader and more general anti-correlationist metaphysical conjecture. Such a conjecture would proceed along the following lines. The object of experience, or the life-world broadly construed, can be divided into the contribution or features of the mind-independent world and that of the subject, structures of experience, categories of reason, or Mind. Moreover, we can know which aspects of the object of experience or the life-world are contributed by us, and which are contributed by the mind-independent world. Therefore, on this model, we can know aspects or features of the mind-independent world.

This general anti-correlationist metaphysics assumes, much like Meillassoux's own metaphysics, a set of presuppositions. The central and most problematic presupposition of this metaphysics is the claim that we can know which parts of the object of experience are contributed by the mind-independent world, and which parts of the object of experience are contributed by the Subject, mind, or structures of experience. In order to know that 'X' aspect of the object of experience or the life-world is contributed by the subject or structures of experience and 'Y' aspect is the contribution of the mind-independent world, one would need to know where the contributions of the subject end and those of the mind-independent world begin. As we have seen in Zahavi's critique of Meillassoux's analysis, the idea is naïve; borrowing from Putnam, Zahavi suggests that it is naïve to think that any of our categories exist within reality as

such (*PSR,* 299-300). In other words, it is questionable whether we can really abstract from an object of experience all those aspects that are contributed by us alone.

Zahavi is not the only phenomenologist to think this; for example, he references Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the possibility of delineating a firm boundary between ourselves and the world (*PSR,* 291). Speaking of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, Merleau-Ponty suggests that "the most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (*PP,* lxxvii).[12] Zahavi suggests that Merleau-Ponty makes this claim about the reduction because "we as finite creatures are incapable of effectuating an absolute reflection that once and for all would allow us to cut our ties to the world-immersed life and permit us to survey it from nowhere" (*PSR,* 291). In other words, we have to recognize our finitude—our epistemic limitations and the limitations of our ability to step outside our structures of experience. There is no view from nowhere that grants us the ability to see where our contributions end and the world's begin.

Husserl, in a different though related sense, foreshadows Merleau-Ponty's point. In his *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl attempts to perform the 'primordial reduction to the sphere of ownness' in an attempt to reduce from his experience any contribution and meaning-constitution of other subjects (*CM,* 92-4).[13] However, such a reduction seems to fail. The constitutive contribution of the other is impossible to abstract, in that my own sense of self and my subjectivity become nonsensical, since my very 'self' and 'I' are constituted intersubjectively by others and not just by myself (*CM,* 96-8). Husserl is speaking here about solipsism and the problem of others, but the very idea of the impossibility or the absurdity of the primordial

[12] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Translated by Donald A. Landes. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. In-text abbreviation: *PP.*
[13] Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology.* Lexington , KY: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2013. In-text abbreviation: *CM.*

reduction shows that we cannot so easily abstract and delineate what is contributed to experience by me and what is contributed by others. Translated to our metaphysical concerns, we cannot neatly delineate what is contributed or constituted by the mind-independent world and what is contributed or constituted by us. We cannot complete an absolute reduction and step outside all structures of experience to see where they begin and end.

Returning to the anti-correlationist general metaphysics which asserts that we can, in fact, know what is contributed by the mind-independent world and what is contributed by the subject, it is now clear why we should find this view naïve. We cannot step out from the very structures of experience that bind us and see where they begin and end, because if we attempt to do so, we are still experiencing or thinking—which itself is an experience. If we are experiencing, we are still bound by these structures of experience. If we are thinking, we are bound by the categories of thought. Indeed, the very idea that there are 'objects' of experience or 'things' themselves presupposes the existence, in the mind-independent world, of discrete entities. When Meillassoux claims that objects have primary and secondary features, he assumes that objects exist, and specifically, that discrete entities separate from each other exist in the world. The same critique applies to Graham Harman's ontology, as we will see in the following section. To summarize, this general position espoused by anyone claiming to be an anti-correlationist metaphysical realist is naïve and uncritical in that it fails to reflect on the subject's own finitude.

I will conclude this section by mentioning that Meillassoux and other anti-correlationists can themselves be considered anti-realists. Zahavi suggests that the mistake such 'realists' make is their insistence "that there is a gap between epistemological and ontological issues" and their denial that "epistemological distinctions have … ontological implications" (*PSR,* 300). He states that, in a letter to Émile Baudin, Husserl suggests that out of all the alleged metaphysical

'realists' of his time, and arguably today, it is he—Husserl the phenomenological idealist—who is the most realistic (Zahavi, *PSR*, 300). If we take realism to mean the recognition of our finitude, of our relation to the world, and of our inability to step outside of our structures of experience—in short, if we take realism to be more than just naïve assumption and dogmatic insistence on our ability to step outside of what is available to us—then Meillassoux is not a realist. Meillassoux and other anti-correlationists might be metaphysical realists, yet, at the same time, they are epistemological anti-realists, since they deny the reality and significance of our relation to that metaphysical reality.

Phenomenology is indeed a correlationist philosophy. Meillassoux is right to identify phenomenology with the tradition of philosophy that takes seriously the task of critical epistemology, and even Zahavi agrees that Husserlian phenomenology is a correlationist philosophy (*PSR*, 293). Husserl speaks in the *Crisis* of the a priori of the correlation (*CES*, 166). Elsewhere, we can find him elaborating on the noetic-noematic correlation, the correlation between world and world-consciousness, and so on. That phenomenology is correlationist philosophy is not in doubt. But that correlationism rules out metaphysical realism is false. The only kind of 'realism' that correlationism rejects is the naïve conjecture that an object of experience or the world of experience broadly construed can be easily and neatly divided into contributions of the subject and the contributions of the mind-independent world. I have shown why this is naïve and uncritical. But as such, phenomenology, insofar as it is a correlationist philosophy, does not rule out the existence of a mind-independent world or, as I call it, the Independent, since whatever 'world' means is rooted in the presupposition-ridden tradition.

Response to Harman: Intentional Objects are not 'in' Consciousness

Harman's critique of Husserlian phenomenology centers around three points. The first point is that insofar as the epoché reveals that what consciousness experiences are intentional objects, these intentional objects are not "real" or severed from any independent reality, since they are only 'for consciousness.' The second point is that Husserlian phenomenology is a 'Philosophy of Human Access' because it couches the world in terms of our access to it, and reduces 'Reality' to 'Reality-for-us.' Finally, the third point is that Husserlian phenomenology is a 'metaphysics of presence' because for Husserl, the objects and the entirety of its content can be known through 'eidetic variation' and therefore the object's reality is reduced to what can be known by us. Harman suggests that on these grounds, we can conclude that Husserl's phenomenology collapses into 'idealism' and thus ought to be abandoned, since it cannot speak to the reality of 'objects' which for Harman constitute the entirety of Reality. In what follows, I respond to these critiques and conclude that Harman is wrong about phenomenology's collapse into idealism.

I would like to begin by addressing Harman's claim that Husserlian phenomenology is a 'Philosophy of Human Access.' Recall that he summarizes the tradition of 'Philosophy of Human Access' as follows: 'If we try to think a world outside human thought, then we are *thinking* it, and hence it is no longer outside thought. Any attempt to escape this circle is doomed to contradiction' (Harman, *QO,* 60-1). In other words, when we try to think the noumenal, we convert it to the phenomenal—the thing-in-itself becomes the thing-for-us. Harman is quick to clarify that though Husserl does not accept the distinction between 'noumenal' and 'phenomenal' reality, he still somehow is guilty of this and therefore phenomenology is a 'Philosophy of Human Access' and cannot be a metaphysically realist philosophy (*QO,* 24). This critique is very

similar to Meillassoux's correlationism charge. In much the same way, it falls apart upon closer review.

On my view, holding a position that would be classified by Harman as a 'Philosophy of Human Access' is, much like being a correlationist, a sign of philosophical acuity and a rejection of dogmatism. It is important to note here that Harman never suggests that we can know the full reality of objects—indeed, his whole philosophy is a rejection of such a position. He critiques Husserl for even thinking that the essence—*eidos*—or 'Real Qualities' of an object can be accessed at all (*QO,* 27-8). For Harman, the true metaphysical realist insists on the existence of a mind-independent world, but not its accessibility to us. Indeed, Harman's own metaphysical or ontological position suggests as much. For him, there exist Real Objects and Real Qualities that we can never access or know, but also Sensual Objects and Sensual Qualities that we do have access to and can know; indeed, such Sensual Objects and Qualities can only exist for Real Objects, such as ourselves (Harman, *QO*, 95-109; *OOO*, 60-101). However, one cannot help but ask, does Harman's formulation of this ontology as the structure of Reality as such, and his insistence that these 'Real Objects' exist, not constitute 'knowledge' of Reality? In other words, it seems to me that Harman rejects the idea that mind-independent reality or 'Reality' as such can be known, and yet somehow also claims to know that the world is made of objects that have a fourfold structure, and that there also exist Real Objects that we cannot ever know.

This self-contradiction is a major problem for Harman. It is plausible to say that to know 'X' is, at least in part, to know something about 'X', even if not to know it exhaustively. I consider this plausible because generally, when speaking of the people that we spend most of our time with, for example, we say that we know them. For example: 'I know Jones; he and Smith are my friends.' Yet, it is doubtful that I know exhaustively all that there is to know about Jones.

In other words, to know something does not necessarily mean to know it exhaustively. If this is so, when Harman asserts the existence of Real Objects and that these Real Objects—as do Sensual Objects—have Real Qualities, he is asserting some kind of knowledge about these Real Objects and their features. Since non-exhaustive knowledge is still knowledge, Harman seems to know something about Real Objects even though on his own model, this is an impossibility.

Indeed, it seems that Harman's 'Philosophy of Human Access' charge rests on the distinction between being able to know the in-itself and being able to think the in-itself. Harman rejects that thesis that we can know the in-itself since this would imply we can exhaustively know Real Objects. However, on my view, he accepts the thesis that we can think the in-itself.[14] But this distinction between thinking and knowing the in-itself is questionable. Without examining the validity of such a distinction, which would be its own thesis, we can say that Harman's philosophy is also a 'Philosophy of Human Access,' but one that refuses to admit it. Harman suggests that objects constitute reality—everything is an object, and though objects are different from each other, all objects are equally *objects* (*QO,* 7). But this claim—that objects are what exist—is merely an extrapolation from his *human* experience. Harman cannot know whether, in our experience, what we call an 'Object' is contributed by the structures of my experience or whether 'Objects' as discrete entities actually exist independently of us. Recognizing that no "view from nowhere" exists and that what we encounter is always encountered by us *as* humans—what Harman calls the "Philosophy of Human Access"—is not a vice, but a realist virtue, in that it recognizes the concrete reality of our position in the world, and in general, our finitude.

[14] It is interesting to note that on Meillassoux's view, Harman would fall into the 'weak correlationism' camp that suggests the impossibility of knowing the in-itself, but the possibility of thinking it (*AF,* 35-39)

Harman's second critique of Husserlian phenomenology is that it is a 'metaphysics of presence' that reduces the reality of objects to what is immediately and immanently given to consciousness. As evidence for his critique, he points to his interpretation of Husserl's notion of eidetic variation. Harman seems to think that because for Husserl, eidetic variation can be a means by which we can intuit the essence or eidos of an object, it follows that Husserl "is guilty of reducing things to presence in consciousness," thus rendering phenomenology incompatible with realism (*QO,* 54). On my view, there is an unjustifiable leap between the antecedent and the consequent in Harman's argument. Indeed, Harman's view of Husserl's phenomenology, of which eidetic variation is part, is highly reductive. Even supposing that Harman is right and that Husserl does believe that eidetic variation is a means by which we can intellectually intuit the essence of some object, it does not follow that the object is in this way reduced to consciousness. Indeed, the very idea of presence '*in*' consciousness is irrelevant here, because intentional objects are not *in* consciousness—however, I will address this later.

The central claim that Harman is making here is that Husserl is a naïve philosopher who thinks that through phenomenology as first philosophy and eidetic variation, we can exhaustively and once and for all know the essence of things. This is patently false. In "The Vienna Lecture", Husserl suggests that "part of the theoretical attitude of the philosopher, then, is his [sic] constant and prior resolve to dedicate his future life always, and in the sense of a universal life, to the task of *theōria,* to build theoretical knowledge upon theoretical knowledge *in infinitum*" (*CES,* 286). For Husserl, philosophy becomes a theoretical enterprise, and insofar as the philosopher adopts the theoretical attitude, he or she take on the task of *theōria,* which continues *in infinitum.* With this in mind, Husserl suggests that "philosophy retains its guiding function and its particular infinite task: the function of free and universal theoretical reflection" (*CES,* 289).

Phenomenology, which is philosophy, is an infinite task that is never complete. It is a continuous, collective, and shared infinite enterprise. To claim that Husserl is a naïve metaphysician of presence, an idealist rationalist who claims that the essence of things can be simply and exhaustively known by the intellect, is a drastic oversimplification of Husserl's lifelong philosophical project, and thus Harman's interpretation of Husserl can be set aside as flawed. Husserl is clearly not a philosopher or metaphysician of presence.

Interestingly, Harman's own philosophy collapses into a metaphysics of presence. Keep in mind that Harman sets up a dichotomy between Real Objects and Qualities that always withdraw from all access, and Sensual Objects and Qualities which are the only ones we ever experience or have access to. On his model, we never know or experience Real Objects and Qualities, since, by definition, they are inaccessible. I have mentioned the problem with the claim that Real Objects and Qualities actually exist, and this problem leads directly to a metaphysics of presence. If we never experience or know the Real, then the Sensual is all that we can, and ever will, experience and know. On Harman's model, all that we know are Sensual Objects, this is essentially *our* reality. But with this move, it is Harman, and not Husserl, who severs us from reality by reducing what is present to all that can be experienced and known. By setting up a dichotomy between the Real and the Sensual, Harman confines us to the Sensual and thus, in a sense, reduces the reality of our experience, presencing the world to that which is 'Sensual'.

Harman's third critique of Husserl is aimed toward Husserl's conception of intentionality and intentional objects. Recapping briefly, Harman alleges that while the *epoché* or the bracketing of the external world reveals that consciousness is intentional or aimed toward objects in the world, it also confines these intentional objects to the intentional realm, rendering them

dependent on consciousness (*QO,* 21-2). This is so, says Harman, because for Husserl, intentional objects cannot possibly exist without a consciousness and thus are rendered metaphysically ideal. As a means of backing up his allegations, Harman points to instances where Husserl states that the intentional objects and the object in the world are exactly the same, such as Berlin (*QO,* 23). Husserl's refusal to recognize the difference between an intentional and 'real' object is problematic because, Harman suggests, for Husserl there is no 'real' object in a 'real' world, if 'real' is taken to mean mind-independent. As I will show, this critique, like the other two, does not apply.

The problem with Harman's allegations against Husserl's conception of intentionality is that they ignore the relevant primary literature on the subject. This tendency to make Husserl appear as a simplistic and one-dimensional thinker is already evident in Harman's accusation of Husserl as a philosopher of presence. In his article, Zahavi began to address the claims Harman makes against intentionality by suggesting that for Husserl, just because some intentional objects are merely intentional, it does not follow that all intentional objects are, and that what matters is not the distinction between intentional and real objects but between merely intentional objects and both intentional and real objects (*PSR,* 297-8). However, Zahavi does not address Harman's central claim—that intentional objects are confined to consciousness or the 'immanent realm.' Luckily, in *Logical Investigations II,* Husserl makes some statements that should clarify some of Harman's confusion surrounding intentionality and intentional.

Husserl suggests that due to the heritage of Brentano's naturalistic presuppositions, along with philosophy in general, the language around phenomenology—terms like 'in consciousness' or 'for ego' and especially 'immanent objectivity'—can becomes confusing and prone to

misunderstanding (*LI II,* 98).[15] One such misunderstanding is that intentional objects and the intending-act take place within consciousness, as if in "a sort of box-within-box structure of mental contents" (Husserl, *LI II,* 98). Speaking of experience and intentionality, Husserl further suggests that "there are…not two things present in experience, we do not experience the object and beside it the intentional experience directed upon it…only one thing is present, the intentional experience, whose essential descriptive character is the intention in question" (*LI II,* 98). Here, we see Husserl reject the idea that the intentional object is present 'in' consciousness as if it were a box, and we see him also rejecting the idea that the intentional object and the intentional experience are two different things, one neatly separate from the other. The intentional experience and consciousness do not contain within themselves the intentional object as if consciousness or experience were a box. This is why Harman is wrong to assert that for Husserl, the intentional object is confined to consciousness, or the 'immanent realm' of experience.

Moreover, Husserl clearly admits that there is a difference between real or existing and non-real or non-existing objects, though for him this difference is not a significant one (*LI II,* 99). As an example, he suggests we think of 'god Jupiter' of Roman mythology (*LI II,* 99). This 'god Jupiter' is immanently present or has mental inexistence in my intentional act—my thinking of it—but this is not the presence or existence we think of (*LI II,* 99). In fact, 'god Jupiter' will not be found in a dissected intentional experience, and is not really mental or immanent; in short, it does not exist at all" apart from being a "particular sort of experience" (*LI II,* 99). However, if 'god Jupiter' did actually exist, like say 'planet Jupiter,' not much would change for Husserl. He suggests that "it makes no essential difference to an object presented and given to consciousness

[15] Husserl, Edmund. Logical Investigations, Vol. 2 . Edited by Dermot Moran. Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001. In-text abbreviation: *LI II.*

whether it exists, or is fictious, or is perhaps completely absurd. I think of Jupiter as I think of Bismarck, of the tower of Babel as I think of Cologne Cathedral" (*LI II,* 99). For Husserl, there is indeed a difference between really existing intentional objects and mere intentional immaterial objects, a difference he admits and addresses. But this difference is not a significant one, since the way in which I intend the object does not change. This is why Husserl says the following: "It makes no difference what sort of being we give our object, or with what sense or justification we do so, whether this being is real or ideal, genuine, possible or impossible, the act remains 'directed upon' its object" (*LI II,* 120). The intentional object is not a metaphysical postulate, and what matters for a phenomenologist is not whether this intentional object *really* exists or not, but the kind of intentional relation one has to it. Harman fails to grasp this nuance and thus conflates the metaphysically neutral status of the intentional object with inexistence.

These passages from Husserl shed light on what exactly Harman misunderstands about the nature of intentionality and intentional objects. Intentional objects do not derive their reality from consciousness nor are they confined to some immanent 'realm' of experience. To think otherwise is to fall into the trap of old ways of thinking where consciousness is some box in which non-physical objects float. Already, in 1939, Sartre recognized and praised Husserl's phenomenology for exactly avoiding this type of box-within-a-box image of consciousness, suggesting that it is Husserl who "put horror and charm back into things" and who "has given us back the world of artists and prophets" as opposed to those philosophers who think consciousness to be a 'digestive' system which absorbs objects and makes them present (*FIHP,* 4-5).[16] The question of whether or not the object exists is irrelevant. What is relevant is that it is

[16] Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology." In *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1, no. 2 (1970): 4-5. In-text abbreviation: *FIHP*

the object that is warranting our consideration and not some mental representation 'inside' consciousness.

In summary, Husserl is not a metaphysician of presence. To read him as one is to caricature his nuanced phenomenological project and to completely ignore the nuances of his later works. Husserl might indeed be a 'Philosopher of Human Access,' but this is not a negative characterization. As I have shown, recognizing one's own epistemic limitations and position is a sign of philosophical maturity. Finally, Husserl's concept of intentionality does not entail that intentional objects are somehow inside consciousness, or that they derive their reality or existence from consciousness. Husserl writes exactly on this question, and answers in the negative as to whether intentional objects are somehow within or inside consciousness. Intentional objects may or may not exist—some do and some do not. Their existential status does not matter because phenomenology is not a philosophical method tasked with ascertaining the existence of objects which give themselves to us. Phenomenology is tasked with describing the relation we have to these objects, and the way in which these intentional objects give themselves to us. Harman's charges against Husserlian phenomenology thus hold no weight and should be dismissed.

Response to Sparrow: Phenomenology is not a Metaphysics

Sparrow's critique of Husserlian phenomenology, in virtue of being aimed at Husserl's method, poses the greatest challenge to the compatibility between phenomenology and metaphysical realism. Put concisely, Sparrow's critique is that Husserl's restriction on what counts as phenomenological evidence leads to a methodology that cannot justify the independent existence of objects and world. In traditional metaphysical parlance: the phenomenologist cannot

support the thesis of a mind-independent reality. The restriction that Husserl places on what counts as phenomenological evidence is the result of the transcendental epoché—the bracketing or suspension of the thesis of the external world and science. What obtains after the epoché is immediately immanent experience. As I have argued, phenomenology does offer this sort of evidence in support of objects of experience really existing; Husserl was not a metaphysical idealist. Immanent to immediate experience, the world and its objects give themselves as transcendent, as really existing independently from experience. But for Sparrow, this immanent evidence is insufficient since it is merely suggestive and not apodictically adequate or absolutely true. In other words, though objects and the world give themselves as transcendent, they do so immanently—within immediate experience. For Sparrow, since Husserlian phenomenology cannot absolutely support the transcendence of the objects of experience, it is incompatible with metaphysical realism. And because it is incompatible with metaphysical realism, we should dismiss Husserlian phenomenology.

Initially, Sparrow's argument seems convincing. If the epoché restricts the scope of phenomenological evidence to that which is immediately and immanently given to consciousness, the evidence of the transcendence of objects of experience, or of the world, can only be immanent and immediate. Since the evidence of transcendence is immanent, considering that anything in experience is given immanently, the transcendence of the objects of experience is not absolute. So at best, phenomenology is metaphysically neutral, since it can neither confirm nor deny the reality of things and the world. And because it cannot confirm the transcendent reality of objects, it is incompatible with metaphysical realism. To be sure, Sparrow's argument is clever. However, he performs intellectual sleights of hand. First, the main conclusion—that phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism—does not follow from the

intermediate conclusion—that phenomenology, in virtue of being metaphysically neutral, can neither confirm nor deny the reality of things. Second, this intermediate conclusion does not follow from phenomenology's metaphysical neutrality and inability to provide absolute, apodictic, and adequate evidence of objects and world's transcendence.

Suppose that the intermediate conclusion did follow from the entirety of Sparrow's argument, and that phenomenology, due to its metaphysical neutrality, can neither confirm nor deny the reality of things. Even in this case, the main conclusion—that phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism—would not follow from phenomenology's metaphysical neutrality. Imagine that you are a phenomenologist and that in front of you there is a small black box with door that you can open and close. When you open the door, you can see a glowing light bulb inside. When you close the door, you cannot see whether the bulb is still glowing, since the box and the door form a tight, light-proof seal. The box is too small for you to get into, or to put a camera or some other mechanism inside to ascertain what happens when the door is closed. The light could either be on or off, but based on the evidence available, it cannot be said whether the light inside is glowing or not. Therefore, you choose to remain bulb-neutral, as opposed to dogmatic bulb-realists who insists that the light is surely on, and dogmatic bulb-idealists who insist that it cannot possibly be the case that the light is glowing.

However, your commitment to bulb-neutrality does not rule out the possibility that the bulb is still glowing, and that the bulb-realist is right. Indeed, there is some evidence that the light might be glowing—more than there is evidence that it is not: there is no visible trigger mechanism, it seems that current is still being drawn from the wall outlet, the temperature of the box did not seem to decrease when it was closed. However, since you are a phenomenologist, you can only say with apodictic and adequate certainty that the light bulb is glowing if it gives

itself to you, in immanent and immediate experience, as glowing. Since you cannot see the bulb when the door is closed, you cannot say, at least with certainty, that the bulb is glowing. If you claim to know the status of the bulb with certainty, you negate your commitment to the phenomenological conception of evidence.

However, your inability to know that the bulb is on does not mean that it is off. It simply does not follow. We can think of this in terms of the law of the excluded middle. Most are committed to the truth of the law of the excluded middle—it is either the case that 'P' is true or that 'not P' is true, but not both or neither. The light bulb is either glowing or not, both scenarios by themselves are possible. If you are committed to the truth of the law of the excluded middle, as well as to the phenomenological conception of evidence—namely that what counts as evidence is that which is given immediately and immanently to consciousness—then, though you cannot say whether the bulb is glowing or not, you are nonetheless committed to the thesis that the bulb is either glowing or not glowing. Your commitment to bulb-neutrality does not rule out the possibility that the bulb is on.

Sparrow's main conclusion thus does not follow from the intermediate conclusion because even if phenomenology were metaphysically neutral, it would not mean that phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. If the intermediate conclusion is right, then phenomenology, in its neutrality, can neither confirm nor deny whether things really do exist transcendently. However, things either do exist transcendently or they do not. Phenomenology is committed to this logical truth. Thus, phenomenology is not incompatible with the thesis that things do exist transcendently, it just cannot say that they do. However, Sparrow's intermediate conclusion—that phenomenology can neither confirm nor deny the reality of things and the world—does not follow from phenomenology's metaphysical neutrality

and inability to provide absolute, apodictic, and adequate evidence of objects' and the world's transcendence. Phenomenology need not be metaphysically neutral, and can indeed provide evidence of the transcendent existence of things.

Consider once again the black box with the light bulb inside of it. It is true that a phenomenologist cannot say apodictically that the bulb inside the box is glowing. There is no phenomenological evidence to allow the phenomenologist to say with apodictic and adequate—in other words absolute—certainty that the bulb inside the black box is glowing. However, this does not mean that there is no experiential evidence, even for the strictest phenomenologist, that the bulb inside the black box is glowing once the door is closed. The phenomenologist can examine the box and find that there is no light switch. She can also check the current being drawn from the outlet. In addition, she can touch the box and feel that even when closed, the box remains warm as if energy is being dispersed within it. In this sense, the phenomenologist can say that the box gives itself as containing a bulb that is glowing. This is not adequate evidence of the bulb's glowing, since it is not the bulb giving itself as glowing. But it is still evidence in favor of the thesis that the bulb remains glowing when the black box is closed. One could even say that the evidence is enough to tentatively and cautiously confirm the glowing-bulb thesis.

For the phenomenologist, there exists evidence that the bulb inside the black box remains glowing once the door is closed. This evidence is not adequate to conclude with absolute certainty that the bulb is glowing, but this does not mean that phenomenology cannot confirm that the bulb is glowing. Tentatively, a phenomenologist would say that the black box gives itself as containing a glowing bulb within itself. A careful and tentative confirmation of the glowing bulb thesis, but a confirmation nonetheless. Of course, Sparrow and those with similar views would challenge my use of the words 'confirm' and 'confirmation' as being too loose. In that

case, we can use a synonym like ‘corroborate’ or ‘support’ or ‘validate.’. In terms of metaphysical realism, phenomenology does actually support the thesis that the world and its things exist transcendently. Like correlationism in general, phenomenology’s cautious and tentative, as opposed to dogmatic, support for metaphysical realism is a virtue and not a vice.

Consider the philosopher who claims that it must be the case that the bulb inside the black box is on. It is not clear on what grounds this philosopher makes this claim. The black box lacks a trigger, current is being drawn, and the box remains warm. This is the only evidence available in favor of the thesis that the bulb remains glowing. This is enough evidence to cautiously support the thesis that the bulb is glowing. One could say something along the following lines: Based on the evidence available, it is not only possible, but also likely, that the bulb inside the black box is glowing. However, this is not adequate for Sparrow and thus is not adequate for the philosopher claiming that the bulb *must* be glowing inside the box. Such a philosopher might say that based on the evidence available, it is obvious the bulb is glowing. Sparrow’s own position is unknown, since he never suggests what his metaphysics and epistemology are. But what would those philosophers who hold with certainty that the bulb must be glowing say in the case where the black box contains a tiny and undetectable sensor that triggers, upon the closing of the door, a heating element that draws current from the wall and generates heat equivalent to that of the bulb? If that were the case, then the dogmatic insistence on the glowing status of the bulb would be preemptive and mistaken, in a word—foolish.

Some might object that the black box problem is an epistemological one, having nothing to do with metaphysical realism. The question of whether or not the light is glowing once the door is closed is a question of knowledge, and not of whether or not something really exists. They might say that it does not matter whether or not we can know that the bulb glows; what

matters is whether or not the bulb is glowing, regardless of our knowing so. I fail to see, however, how we can possibly talk about the status of the bulb without involving our knowledge of it. Furthermore, this objection is not relevant to this project since Husserlian phenomenology is, on Sparrow's own account, first and foremost an epistemological method tasked initially with ascertaining how it is that scientific cognition can 'get at' the things themselves (*EOP, 28*). The question of access to the things themselves, as opposed to just the things themselves, is an epistemological question. What matters is that insofar as Husserlian phenomenology, as an epistemological methodology, is tasked with answering the question of our knowing whether or not objects of experience really do exist in a transcendental way, it is neutral and cautious against committing to a realist or idealist dogma. Cautiously, Husserlian phenomenology suggests realism.

Some might reply that perhaps I am being too charitable in my interpretation of Husserl and his phenomenology and that Sparrow is correct in his characterization of Husserl as anti-realist. Such a critic would claim that Husserl was indeed an idealist or anti-realist and that his method, rather than being epistemologically cautious, is merely a guise for pernicious skepticism. Let us put aside the internal contradiction already pointed out by Zahavi—that Husserlian phenomenology could not be at the same time metaphysically neutral, metaphysically idealist, anti-realist, or not anything at all—and examine what Husserl had to say in his works. Speculating on what Husserl *really* was metaphysically and epistemologically is not helpful here, and I propose that once again we return to his works to see what he says of phenomenology as an epistemological methodology.

I have already, though for different reasons, addressed Husserl's counterargument to solipsism, the equivalent of metaphysical skepticism, in his *Cartesian Meditations*. Here, Husserl

accepts the limitations of transcendental phenomenology in ascertaining, with apodictic and adequate certainty, that others exist as genuine egos and subjectivities. He suggests that it may appear as if phenomenology, in necessitating the epoché, leads to solipsism, since all that is left after the reduction is immediate experience immanent to consciousness (Husserl, *CM,* 89). However, solipsism is not acceptable to Husserl. He suggests that if we consider transcendental phenomenology a solipsist philosophy, then we have "done transcendental realism an injustice" since the idea of solipsism is so opposed to what he considers to be realism (*CM,* 89). Husserl proceeds to defend transcendental phenomenology against charges of solipsism by demonstrating, in a kind of *reductio ad absurdum,* the absurdity and impossibility of holding a solipsistic position in light of phenomenological evidence which takes the form of the meaning-constituting contribution of other subjects (*CM,* 92-3, 96-8). In other words, it is impossible to reduce and abstract from my experience what is contributed to it by others. Moreover, the world gives itself to me in such a way that "even if a universal plague had left only me," the world would still remain for others, and in principle "experienceable by everyone" (Husserl, *CM,* 93). Clearly, Husserl is not a solipsist, nor does he have to transgress the phenomenological method to assert the existence of others, as Sparrow seems to think he has to do to secure metaphysical realism (Sparrow, *EOP,* 31).

In one of his short works, the "Foundational Investigation of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature", Husserl performs a phenomenological investigation into what exactly grounds the Copernican conception of astronomy and astrophysics. He suggests that the Copernican worldview, widespread as it is, takes for granted the idea that the earth is one among many other bodies in space, moving relative to other bodies, but always moving nonetheless

(*OSN*, 223).[17] However, Husserl questions how it is exactly that the Copernican can claim that the earth moves. Performing a phenomenological inquiry into rest and motion, he suggests that we can only say that a physical body moves if we already have, as a foundation for ourselves, some basis-body that does not move and from which to judge the movement of another body (*OSN*, 224). In other words, movement of a body is always relative to some other body that is not moving. Therefore, in order for us to say that some body in space moves, we have to have for ourselves a non-moving basis-body from which to judge motion.

Husserl also suggests that at different times, we have different relative basis-bodies. When I drive a car, the car becomes my basis-body from which I judge the movement of other bodies: when I drive, I experience the world around me as moving, I say 'the countryside is moving' and not the other way around (*OSN*, 224). The same holds for airplanes and train cars. However, all of these are relative basis-bodies, all founded upon the earth-basis (*OSN, 224*). The earth-basis is our foundational basis. We never experience the earth as just another body, but always as a body-basis (*OSN*, 226). At least while on earth, we cannot experience the earth as just a body, since the earth is always for us the basis-body and not just a body: for us, the earth is origin-ark which is the foundation for the movement and rest of all other bodies (*OSN*, 226, 228). Husserl suggests that we certainly can conceive of the earth as a body, but this is a conception and a hypothesis, not an immanent experience of the earth as a body (*OSN*, 224). So, as phenomenologists committed to immediate and immanent experience, Husserl suggests that we should say the following: 'The earth does not move' (*OSN*, 225).

[17] Husserl, Edmund. "Foundational Investigation of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature." In *Husserl: Shorter Works*, edited by Peter McCormick and Frederick A Elliston , 222–33. Notre Dame, Indiana: UNDP, 1981. In-text abbreviation: *OSN.*

It is easy to misinterpret Husserl here as being an archaic anti-Copernican who is skeptical of science and committed to restoring a geocentric model of the universe. However, this is far from the truth. Husserl's project here is to inquire into what allows astronomers like Copernicus to claim that the earth moves and is not stationary. The statement 'the earth does not move' merely serves as a concise summary of the fact that, in immediate and immanent experience, we do not experience the earth as just another body moving since the earth for us is the origin-ark, the original basis-body. This does not mean that we cannot say that the earth moves. On the contrary, Husserl suggests that, with earth as our basis-body, through induction, empirical observations, and inferences, we can hypothesize and say that the earth does move and heliocentrism is the case—Husserl was not a science-denier after all (*OSN,* 228). It is just that the earth's movement is not apodictic; it is not given in immediate and immanent experience. We cannot be absolutely certain that the earth moves—it is not a phenomenological truth since it is not something that we experience.

I suggest that we should read Husserl's refutation of solipsism in the *Cartesian Meditations* and his inquiry into the rest and motion of bodies in space in his "Foundational Investigation of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature" as examples of his commitment to phenomenology as a critical epistemology. Husserl is not an external world skeptic, he is not a solipsist, and he is not a science denier. Instead, he suggests that while there is no apodictically certain evidence to refute solipsism or to say that the earth moves, there is still strong evidence to think and support the thesis of other subjects or of the earth as a Copernican body in space. That Husserl goes to great lengths to defend phenomenology from solipsism, as opposed to loosening his conception of evidence, shows that he is committed to critical and uncompromising epistemology and the absurdity of solipsism. The same holds for his reluctance

to yield to the prevalent naturalism of his day. Some, like Sparrow, object that Husserl's conception of evidence might be too narrow, and that, much like it is not enough to support realism, it is not enough to support the thesis of other subjects or of the earth's movement. The argument goes like this: since Husserl cannot outright support, with absolute certainty, the existence of others or the movement of the earth, he must thus be an anti-realist. But as we have seen, this line of thought is fallacious. A critical epistemology does not make for a dogmatic anti-realist skeptic.

Seeing that Sparrow is not content with Husserl's phenomenological conception of evidence, I cannot help but ask what kind of evidence Sparrow himself is happy with. Following Dominique Janicaud's 'conservative' view of phenomenology, Sparrow suggests that theological phenomenologists like Levinas, Marion, and Henry are guilty of transgressing the rigorous phenomenological rules set out by Husserl in that they seem to make the object of phenomenological inquiry and knowledge absolutely transcendent entities like God or the Other (*EOP*, 52-5). For these theological phenomenologists, what is "at stake…is the reality of the divine…but if phenomenological analysis is restricted to the evidence of immanence, it is simply contradictory to claim that intentionality can reach the transcendent"—the divine (Sparrow, *EOP*, 53). In rejecting the conception of phenomenology put forward by theological phenomenologists, Sparrow rejects the notion that a non-Husserlian conception of phenomenological evidence—namely a conception that allows them to claim apodictically certain knowledge of transcendent entities not immanent to experience—rescues phenomenology from its alleged incompatibility with metaphysical realism. What this rejection signifies is that Sparrow does not actually have a problem specifically with Husserl's conception of phenomenological evidence, but rather with phenomenology as such.

The End of Phenomenology is certainly a polemic against phenomenology, especially Husserl's conception of it. It is also a polemic against any kind of non-dogmatic and critical epistemology that takes seriously the epistemic limitations that we find ourselves living with. Based on the works of Husserl that I have presented, however, Sparrow clearly misunderstands what Husserl's methodology was, and what it means to conceptualize phenomenology as a critical epistemology. There is nothing that renders Husserl's phenomenology incompatible with metaphysical realism. Indeed, a careful reading of Husserl's works shows that there is indeed phenomenological evidence in support of realism. Such evidence is not apodictically certain: in a word, it is not absolute. However, it is pretty strong, and arguably, as strong as it could ever be.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I addressed the critiques of Husserlian phenomenology articulated by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow. Meillassoux claims that insofar as Husserlian phenomenology is a correlationist philosophy, it is incompatible with metaphysical realism. However, as I have shown, correlationism is an epistemic virtue and not a vice. Nothing about holding a correlationist position entails subjective idealism, and by no means is correlationism incompatible with realism. Harman claims that Husserl was an idealist, a metaphysician of presence, and a "Philosopher of Human Access", thus rendering him diametrically opposed to metaphysical realism. But as we have seen, Harman's analysis of Husserl is fairly superficial, considering that his interpretation of Husserl's conceptions of intentionality and knowledge does not correspond at all with what Husserl actually said. Finally, Sparrow's critique of Husserl, though nuanced, misinterprets the project of phenomenology as a critical epistemology. Sparrow argues that because phenomenology cannot outright declare transcendent objects to be really

existing, it must then be incompatible with realism. However, this argument is fallacious. Phenomenology is a critical epistemology that recognizes the limits of what can be known with absolute certainty, and whether objects of experience really exist cannot be known in an apodictic way. Indeed, phenomenology can support, though tentatively, metaphysical realism.

Conclusion: Husserlian Phenomenology and Metaphysical Realism

Let us briefly recap out progress thus far. In Chapter One, I explicated the criticisms put forward by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow against Husserlian phenomenology. Though different in content, what unites their respective criticisms is their shared conclusion that Husserlian phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. In order to begin to address their criticisms, in Chapter Two I turned to Zahavi's article on the debate between phenomenology and the three speculative realists. While fruitful, I found Zahavi's response incomplete in that it failed to address, in enough detail, the significant questions raised by the trio. In Chapter Three, I responded to the criticisms made by Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow by examining some weaknesses in their critiques, as well as their misinterpretations of Husserl's body of work. I conclude by addressing what I see as the essence of these critics' shared misinterpretation of Husserlian phenomenology, and of realism.

Merleau-Ponty begins the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception* with the question "What is phenomenology?" (*PP*, lxx). Husserl's first work that mentions phenomenology appeared in 1900/1901, forty-four years prior to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception.* Seventy-five years later, the question as to what constitutes phenomenology is still an open one. The same holds if we ask what constitutes philosophy. We have a general idea, but not a universally agreed-upon definition. To be sure, even in areas of philosophy where there is consensus and agreement upon definitions, disagreement and debate are still a possibility. I will not deny that what is meant by phenomenology can be ambiguous.

Ambiguity, however, is not license for relativism where any interpretation goes. There might be ambiguity about what a term means, but this does not imply that any kind of meaning can be attributed to the term. There is a useful heuristic for this sort of problem that suggests drawing a distinction between a concept and a conception of a concept. While the meaning of a concept is loose, the conception of such a concept is a refined and more sophisticated interpretation. There might be ambiguity about the concept itself, but such ambiguity is less present in the conception. Ambiguity about phenomenology is understandable; ambiguity about Husserl's conception is less so.

Even though Husserl was the founder of phenomenology, his conception of what the phenomenological project is remains just that—a conception, one among others. However, unlike the general concept of phenomenology, it is the speculative realists' analysis of Husserl's conception with which I am concerned here. Ostensibly, it is his conception of the phenomenological project that they critique, on the grounds that it is incompatible with metaphysical realism. However, what they end up critiquing is their interpretation of Husserl's conception of the phenomenological project, and as we have seen, their interpretation does not have strong grounds in Husserl's primary texts.

On their interpretation, Husserl's phenomenology denies scientific truths, denies the reality of the external world, is guilty of metaphysics of presence, perpetuates a conception of consciousness as a container, and, ultimately and most importantly, is incompatible with metaphysical realism. However, their interpretation does not find strong support in the primary literature; in fact, Husserl explicitly and implicitly rejects such characterizations of his project. In order to refute their interpretation, I explicated Husserl's phenomenological project as discussed in his works the *Crisis, Cartesian Meditations, Logical Investigations vol. II* and the short text

"Foundational Investigation of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature." This painted a picture of Husserl's phenomenology as a critical and nuanced epistemology that investigates the foundations of knowledge.

I will grant that *prima facie* there is some evidence for the speculative realists' conception of Husserl's project. After all, in the *Cartesian Meditations,* he is unable to outright reject solipsism and has to offer an argument as to why solipsism is an absurd position. In the "Foundational Investigation of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature," he states that in some sense, the earth does not move. Moreover, the very language surrounding phenomenology may suggest metaphysical commitment, as evident in Harman's incorrect claim that, for Husserl, intentional objects are *in* consciousness in the way something is in a container. Yet Husserl still rejects solipsism, and he does agree that the earth moves. Phenomenology merely investigates the conditions for the possibility of our saying so. We cannot just assert that others exist; we cannot just assert the earth moves. If we do, then we can hardly call ourselves critical and undogmatic philosophers. To be sure, it is appropriate for scientists to assert these things at the outset of their inquiry. But scientists are not philosophers, and philosophers are not scientists. My interpretation of Husserl's conception of phenomenology is still an interpretation. However, it is one that is grounded in a close reading of relevant primary texts, as opposed to the more superficial treatment given by the speculative realists.

In addition to calling into question the speculative realists' interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology, I would also like to question what they mean by 'realism.' We have seen that Meillassoux's conception of metaphysical realism entails a dogmatic and uncritical belief in the transcendental reality of numbers and primary qualities. I call his position dogmatic because not only does he merely assert that this is the case, but he ignores the historicity of geometry and

numerals, as described by Husserl in the *Crisis.* Harman asserts that objects of experience really do exist in a transcendental way, yet without our being able to know them. Such a conception raises the following question: how can you know that Real Objects exist if the essence of Real Objects is to be unknowable? Harman's support for his metaphysics is recourse to experience and dogmatic insistence that it is just so. Finally, Sparrow's conception is not entirely clear, though we can assume from his support of Meillassoux and Harman that his position is not compatible with theirs.

In some sense, each of these conceptions of metaphysical realism is different. For instance, Harman and Meillassoux disagree about what is real. We can assume that there is some disagreement between Sparrow and the other two as well. However, what unites all three is their conception of what it means to support metaphysical realism. Meillassoux, Harman, and Sparrow all insist that the world and/or its objects exist in some way independently of our experience of them, and moreover, they claim that we can know how it is that they exist.[18] Beyond insistence that their variety of realism is obviously true and that denying its obviousness is equivalent to rejecting it altogether, the speculative realists do not have arguments backed by apodictic and absolute certainty in support of their conception of how the world really is. The arguments that they do put forward can be shown to be uncritical, as we have seen in Chapter Three. In sum, their conception of realism entails an uncritical and dogmatic conviction that the world and its objects do exist independently of our experiencing them, that they exist in a certain way, and that we can know in some sense or other the way which in which this world and its objects exist.

However, a broader conception of metaphysical realism shows that it is not incompatible with Husserlian phenomenology. For Husserl, phenomenology was a first philosophy, a pre-

[18] Harman may claim that we do not know anything of real objects other than that they exist, though as I have argued, this constitutes knowledge of the object as such, since knowledge need not be exhaustive.

condition for all further theorizing, not only scientific but also metaphysical. Based on this, I suggest that if we are going to be metaphysical realists, we should follow Husserl and also be epistemological realists—we should admit and investigate the limitations of what we can know, such that we do not dogmatically and mistakenly insist on a reality which does not actually exist. Metaphysical realism, if it is genuinely realist, must be accompanied by a critical epistemology, and must not be put forward on dogmatic grounds. In this sense, none of the speculative realists are actual realists. Seen in this way, Husserlian phenomenology is not incompatible with metaphysical realism in general, but only with the narrow version of it proposed by the speculative realists.

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