

“The Immortality of the Transcendental Ego”¹ **Francesca Dell’Orto: Reconstructing Opacity: Husserlian** **Motivation as a “Third Synthesis”**

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I found Professor Dell’Orto’s account of ‘the Husserlian notion of “motivation” by comparison with Kantian Schematism’ instructive and I appreciate her aim ‘to recast the transcendental basis of Phenomenology taking the opacity of consciousness in serious account’. I must admit that I am not sure if I can do justice to this compact paper.

The aim of this paper is to reassess Husserl’s idea of motivations from *Ideas II*, in order to revisit the ‘ground [of] the transcendental subject’ and ‘to mark its defeat’ (1). Dell’Orto suggests that ‘motivations are a kind of transcendental schema’ because for Husserl, as she writes, ‘the ego constitutes itself in the unity of a history’ through the ‘universal form of “motivation”,’ that is, ‘in its synthetic unity of retentions and protentions’ (5). She notes that ‘the most important gain of the transcendental approach is the understanding that the constitution of “natural ego” (psyche) is not equivalent to the constitution of the “real ego”’ because ‘the psyche always leaves a “residue”’ between ‘the psyche animating the body’ and ‘the cultural and communal realizations of men’. It is this ‘temporal [discord]’ that ‘makes finally the transcendental possible.’ Dell’Orto’s proposition is to think through this ‘residue’ that, according to her reading, ‘stratifies itself forming the “motivation’s realm”.’ As she puts it, it is ‘a sort of “third synthesis” between the physical one and the psychological one, ...between the one of world and the one of consciousness’ (1).

In *Ideas II*, Husserl introduces personal and community problematic in an attempt to ‘reconfigure’ ‘the ego-psyche polarity’ by introducing the ‘notion of *Geist*’ (1). As she notes, this notion is problematic because ‘it includes in itself the shadow of “not-subjectively-lived”’ (2). Yet, by introducing this notion, Husserl attempts to constitute ‘a total experience of subjectivity wherein the role of passivity and body are not left to a naturalistic explanation but recovered in the subjectivity itself’ (2). The motivation, in opposition to natural causality, is the ‘the fundamental law of the spirit’ because “[m]otivation” designates the rule, that is not a deterministic causality, according to which consciousness unfolds and it is temporally connected to itself and to the world’ (2). Dell’Orto also suggests that the ‘unity of motivation is a tangle rooted in intentional acts and not in the mere reality as such’ (3). Citing Husserl on

¹ Husserl, “The Apodicticity of Recollection”, *Husserl Studies* 1985, 3-32, §10, 24ff

the meaning-constitution as not causal (2), she suggests that ‘the third and deeper synthesis acted by motivations is an issue of the third temporal synthesis, integrating the retentive and the reproductive’ syntheses (3). Dell’Orto proposes that motivations, despite Husserl’s resistance not to leave behind ‘lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*)’ is, ‘a sort of “transcendental schema” that constitutes ‘an excess’ to lived experience. It is similar to the Kantian ‘transcendental schema’ that ‘requires images’ (4) that are exterior to it.

It is here that Dell’Orto considers Kant’s ‘theory of Schematism’, esp. ‘Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding’ (4), where Kant speaks of three syntheses: ‘*synthesis of apprehension, reproduction and recognition*’ that Dell’Orto maps into Husserl’s ‘primary memory (retention), secondary memory (reproduction), and “tertiary memory” (image consciousness)’ (4). As she explains, in Kant, the third synthesis of ‘recognition is a *production* which entails the matter of a re-production (second synthesis), demanding in turn an apprehension (first synthesis) of perception’ (4). This ‘schematisation is the process that projects the internal sense into images, making it accessible by the external sense. What is at stake here is the possibility of transmission and heritage of knowledge’ (4-5). Hence, ‘schematism becomes the “hidden art” which allows the construction and the articulation of concepts’ (5). However, since ‘schema can *produce* a knowledge’ only by unifying ‘the *reproduced* past images’ (5) and since ‘every schema, even in [Kant]’ is based ‘on an image, notably an empirical and accidental one’ (4), then the resulting ‘enigma of reminiscence’ makes clear that ‘the origin of consciousness is not concurrent to itself’, making ‘the circle of consciousness never to be closed’ (5).

To expand on this ‘enigma of reminiscence’, that is, to explore the amnesia that is constitutive of reminiscence proper, the following discussion considers Husserl’s internal time consciousness and his assertion that ‘retention’ is ‘the motivation for protention’, i.e., past motivates the future, by offering ‘a content to intentionality’. At the same time, as we anticipate future based on past, future becomes the reversed past, or, as she says, ‘protentions’ being ‘inverted retentions’ (5). Following the above discussion of excess, in other words, that which must be a surplus to lived experiences, Dell’Orto asserts that if every protention is at the same time retention, it must follow that ‘there is something in memory that makes it immediately a protention’. In other words, ‘at the beginning there is a synthesis’, because ‘the origin is not a punctual impression but rather a retention’. Hence, the impossibility of beginning is marked by the synthesizing of retention and protention, where there cannot be retention, so to speak, or, as she puts it, ‘the beginning [is], *at the same time*, protentionally ahead to itself’ (5). This is an excess mentioned above, there must be something to allow the

synthesis and this is ‘the necessity of an external support, or “prothesis”’ (6), whereby, ‘the ego individuates itself through the mediation of retentions and protentions, i.e. through cultural artefacts exceeding consciousness’ (6), i.e., exceeding ‘lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*)’.

‘Thus, motivations abandon the binary or dual epistemology’ – I suspect, the subject/object divide – and, instead, ‘motivation as the third synthesis, gives life to that peculiar temporality which is just the one of history. The realm of motivations can finally be named the realm of history’ (6). In the process, ‘this temporality ruins the status of transcendental’ (6). It seems that the world time trespasses on the transcendental time-consciousness.

As may be obvious already, I have taken some liberties in reconstructing Professor Dell’Orto’s account.

It seems to me that at the heart of the paper is Husserl’s notion of the internal time consciousness and its streaming. The problem for me is that this temporality is not clearly defined and it sometimes seems that we move between the ‘world’ time and the internal time consciousness. While I appreciate and learned from Dell’Orto’s discussion, I want to suggest that to capture Husserl’s sense of motivation, for example, it is important to note that his rejection of causal explanation of our meaning constitution does not mean that motivations are not lawful. As Husserl writes at the end of the quote cited on p. 2, after considering the night sky and the crack of a whip: ‘Still, even here a kind of motivation can be exhibited, *included in the form of inner time-consciousness*. This form is something absolutely fixed: the subjective form of the now, of the earlier, etc. I can change nothing of it’.² Motivations are tied to the meaning constitution in the stream of its internal-time consciousness. Perhaps Husserl’s assertion that the transcendental ego is immortal might be helpful to reconsider that excess as explained by Dell’Orto, using Kant’s schematism and Husserl’s motivation.

It seems that the key sentence of the argument is: “if this temporality ruins the status of transcendental ..., nevertheless [??] the opposition between empirical and transcendental must be overcome without losing the need of differing facts and rights, assuring a criterion for decision, which will never be something of merely factual” (6).

Perhaps, we need to ask: What is ‘the binary or dual epistemology’? What is temporality? Is temporality the ‘world time’? How is world temporality related to Husserl’s time-consciousness? And why empirical and transcendental has to be overcome?

² Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), 239 [27], italics in original

I think we need to go back to the claim that '[r]ather than subscribing to an Aristotelian "hylomorphic scheme" using a static separation between form and matter, as if ego were the *morphé* and the external world the *hyle*, motivations are expected to outline a more dynamic process of individuation taking into account the becoming of the individual. There is a dynamic and bidirectional relationship between the constituted entity (i.e., the ego) and the constituting process' (2).

To reflect on this assertion, it seems to me that the starting point for the argument is the subject/object split that Husserl's work questions. In this paper, the split is implicitly assumed and even confirmed by 'the "motivation's realm"', which is the "'third synthesis": the synthesis 'between the physical one and the psychological one', 'between the one of world and the one of consciousness', (1) becoming, in the end, 'the realm of history' (6).

Only by accepting the split, we can argue against it by pointing out that Kant builds his system on 'an image, notably an empirical and accidental one' (4). It means that 'the origin of consciousness is not concurrent to itself' (5) because it is based on something that is outside of itself, i.e., an empirical image. Through 'reconstructing the genesis of the original opacity' (1), the argument can proceed to show that Husserl's schema of internal time-consciousness cannot account for the 'first memory', or, as she says, 'at the beginning ... is a synthesis', i.e., 'the origin is not a punctual impression but rather a retention', which means (according to Dell'Orto), that the beginning is a problem, since 'the beginning [is], *at the same time*, protentionally ahead to itself'. So, in short, there is no possibility to account for a beginning.

Yet, in "The Apodicticity of Recollection", Husserl clearly says,

The beginning is conceivable only *in process*, but not as the beginning *of the process*. The "nothing" (*das Nichts*) which preceded the beginning already presupposes a "something" in order to be able to conflict with it. An emptiness may lie before the beginning, an indifferent, monotonous, mute dullness - but even this [dullness] itself is past and has the essential structure of something temporal.³

There is nothing that simply starts *ex nihilo*, and Husserl is more aware of that than any other philosopher. He is also aware that the 'now' is merely an abstraction. As he points out,

... Time is only possible as the original present, as past, or as the approaching future. But the original present is the enduring present, which is a constant change of the present toward the future. ... In the changing of these modes, however, the one infinite time (to the extent that it is already past), and every position, every interval of this time, is absolutely rigid and identical, i.e., they are identifiable with complete certainty as the same again and again. Consequently, transcendental life and the transcendental Ego cannot be born, only man in the world can be born. Ego as transcendental Ego was eternally; I am now, and belonging to this Now is a horizon of the past

³ Husserl, "The Apodicticity of Recollection", 24-25, italics in original

which can be unfolded (*aufwickelbar*) to infinity - this means in itself that the Ego was from eternity.⁴

Hence,

... a recollection may be incomplete, and it may be illusory; ... But behind [this painting-over] lies the past, and identical time and identical individual life-contents of time in the necessary mode of the changing past.

Expectation ... can deceive as is the case with all anticipation. But life is living on, and the law of time imputes an apodictic content also to expectation.

[Yet] ... To transcendental experience there also belongs a lawfulness of expectation. ... [This expectation] allows us to order certain contents into the empty form of the future. ... Obviously the possibility that expected things will not happen (*Nichteintretens*) belongs to the essence of expectation.⁵

...every real recollection will have its margin of uncertainty, although it will always and necessarily also have a certain, universal and ineliminable content.⁶

So, to conclude, I would like to pose a couple of questions, to clarify some of the points of the argument.

The first question is about Kant's schematism and the clarification vis-à-vis Kant's text: Dell'Orto's suggests that Kant's schema is based 'on an image, notably an empirical and accidental one'. However, Kant writes that 'a schema must be distinguished from an image'⁷ because 'it is schemata, not images of objects, that lie at the basis of our pure sensible concepts'.⁸ 'A *schema* of sensible concepts ... is a product and, as it were, a monogram of the pure a priori imagination through which, and according to which, images become possible in the first place'.⁹

The second question is about the first memory that is already protentional. I am not sure if there could be first or last memory if our attitude is turned towards the transcendental sphere. This would need a further clarification.

Regardless of the problems I have with the paper and which might be just a result of not having sufficient space to explain all the claims in the paper, I agree with Professor Dell'Orto that 'the notion of motivation recalls us' (6) to further philosophical work.

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⁴ *Ibid*, 26

⁵ *Ibid*, 29

⁶ *Ibid*, 31

⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, (1781) 1996), A140, B79

⁸ A140-41, B80

⁹ A142, B81

Quotations:

... we come to an identical infinite time in the necessary mode of the infinite past; this mode is necessarily variable, since all past times must be given in incessantly changing and necessarily constantly changing modalities of the past. Time is only possible as the original present, as past, or as the approaching future. But the original present is the enduring present, which is a constant change of the present toward the future. And accordingly, every past is an enduring past which changes along with the present which pertains to it. In the changing of these modes, however, the one infinite time (to the extent that it is already past), and every position, every interval of this time, is absolutely rigid and identical, i.e., they are identifiable with complete certainty as the same again and again. Consequently, transcendental life and the transcendental Ego cannot be born, only man in the world can be born. Ego as transcendental Ego was eternally; I am now, and belonging to this Now is a horizon of the past which can be unfolded (*aufwickelbar*) to infinity - this means in itself that the Ego was from eternity.¹⁰

... a recollection may be incomplete, and it may be illusory; ... But behind [this painting-over] lies the past, and identical time and identical individual life-contents of time in the necessary mode of the changing past.

Expectation directs itself toward the future. [Expectation] is merely anticipating, and can deceive as is the case with all anticipation. But life is living on, and the law of time imputes an apodictic content also to expectation.

... To transcendental experience there also belongs a lawfulness of expectation. It is known by the title of associative, or inductive, expectation. [This expectation] allows us to order certain contents into the empty form of the future. Only think of the transcendental turn which turns natural perceptual belief into the certainty of the elapse of those transcendental phenomena in which the same object of experience, the same natural, physical object presents itself. Such matters may serve as a vast class of examples, just like the transcendental turning over of the natural, naive certainty of empathy, or respectively, like the turn of the certainty of the objective existence of animals and men. Obviously the possibility that expected things will not happen (*Nichteintretens*) belongs to the essence of expectation; thus, no such inductive experience can have apodictic validity. Also in this case there are apodictic contents which nonetheless provide a transition to doxic modalities (*Glaubenmodalitäten*), for instance into that of real possibility or probability. This is valid wherever the certainty of expectation has a role.¹¹

... every real recollection will have its margin of uncertainty, although it will always and necessarily also have a certain, universal and ineliminable content.¹²

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¹⁰ Husserl, "The Apodicticity of Recollection", 26

¹¹ *Ibid*, 29

¹² *Ibid*, 31