



Remarks on the “ego” in the Phenomenology of Logical Investigations

Considerações sobre o “eu” na Fenomenologia de Investigações Lógicas

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Husserl's theses on the “ego” in the first edition of the *Logische Untersuchungen*. While the concept of a “pure ego” becomes significant in the later transcendental developments of his thought, the origins of phenomenology reveal a clear rejection of such an ego. In a more detailed analysis of the only data that can be phenomenologically recognized as an “ego,” Husserl differentiates between the “empirical ego” and the “ego as a phenomenological unity of lived experiences.” This paper aims to clarify Husserl's arguments for rejecting the first concept and elucidating the latter two, as well as exploring their interrelation and hierarchy. In doing so, I seek to enhance our understanding of the theoretical position of the “ego” in the origins of phenomenology and its implications in subsequent phases of the method.

Keywords: ego; self-consciousness; egology.

RESUMO

O presente artigo visa considerar as teses de Husserl acerca do “eu” na primeira edição das *Logische Untersuchungen*. Se nos desdobramentos transcendentais de seu pensamento, a ideia de um “eu puro” assume relevância decisiva, nas origens da Fenomenologia deparamo-nos com sua expressa rejeição. Em um exame concreto dos únicos dados que poderiam ser fenomenologicamente reconhecidos como um “eu”, Husserl introduz as noções de um “eu empírico”, por um lado, e de um “eu como unidade fenomenológica de vivências”, por outro. O interesse aqui é entender a argumentação do pensador para rejeição do primeiro conceito e para a clarificação dos dois últimos, bem como de sua inter-relação e hierarquia. Com isso, pretende-se compreender melhor a posição sistemática do “eu” nas origens da Fenomenologia e oferecer subsídios para a sua compreensão nas fases mais tardias.

Palavras-chave: eu; autoconsciência; egologia.

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Introduction

The theme of the “ego” is conventionally regarded as one of the most significant in Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology, particularly in its transcendental aspects. This can be attested in various ways throughout the works that characterize this phase of his thought. In *Ideen I* (1913), often considered the most fundamental of these works, Husserl presents a notable defense of a “pure ego” (*reines Ich*) within his comprehensive analyses of the so-called processes of “constitution” (*Konstitution*). In these examinations, the philosopher claims that all objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*), all horizons (*Horizont*), and ultimately the world itself, as *omnitude realitatis*, are constituted in the immanence of a transcendently reduced consciousness, the ultimate source of meaning and origin of all being, in which that “ego” resides (Husserl, 1976, p. 123). Similarly, in the *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), a pivotal work of the transcendental phase, we find the notion that the fundamental task of Phenomenology is articulated through the concept of a “pure ego.” This task involves the development of an “egology” or a descriptive science of the so-called “universal scheme” (*allgemeines Schema*) “ego-cogito-cogitatum,” which serves as the foundational structure in every phenomenon (Husserl, 1973, p. 69, 87, 121-124). The text presents extensive analyses of the ego as an identical pole of subjective processes, a substrate of “habitualities” (*Habitualitäten*), and as a “monad” (*Monade*). Furthermore, it claims that non-egological developments of Phenomenology, particularly regarding “monadological intersubjectivity,” can only be methodologically accessed through egological grounds (Husserl, 1973, p. 100-103). Additional pertinent examples may be found in studies examining the role of the ego in the so-called “active syntheses” or in the varied interpretations of the later concept of an “arch-ego” (*Ur-ich*) (Lohmar, 2012). However, our enumeration need not be extended further. These few specific references suffice to illustrate and substantiate the assertion of the ego's significance for Transcendental Phenomenology.

From this perspective, it may come as a surprise to many scholars that Husserl's stance on the ego was fundamentally different in the formative work of his Phenomenology, the *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900-1901). Specifically, in the Fifth Investigation, which aims to establish the concept of “consciousness,” the philosopher scrutinizes various psychological and philosophical interpretations attributed to it during that period, concentrating particularly on three: (i) consciousness as a unity of the stream of lived experiences; (ii) as inner perception; and (iii) as intentionality (Husserl, 1984, p. 356).¹ This thematic exploration marks a pivotal moment in the investigations, where many of the foundational theses of Phenomenology are developed. It is precisely in the first edition of this work that Husserl explicitly dismisses any notion of a “pure

¹ These simplified labels for each of the concepts are owed to Zahavi (2008, pp. 139–140).

ego” as phenomenologically valid, thereby advocating for a distinctly non-egological Phenomenology. The primary source for this discussion is § 8 of the Fifth Investigation, in which Husserl critically assesses the ideas of the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp as presented in his work *Einleitung in die Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (1888). Husserl contends that Natorp's ideas resonate with other proponents of Kantianism and even with empiricist thinkers of his era. In this context, Husserl states:

I must frankly confess, however, that I am quite unable to find this ego, this primitive, necessary centre of relations. The only thing I can take note of, and therefore perceive, are the empirical ego and its empirical relations to its own experiences, or to such external objects as are receiving special attention at the moment, while much remains, whether 'without' or 'within', which has no such relation to the ego (Husserl, 1984, p. 374; 2001, p. 92).²

The rejection is categorical. However, in works from the transcendental phase, Husserl revisits this passage and clarifies that he no longer endorses this stance. In *Ideen I*, for instance, he states in a footnote to § 57: “On the question of the pure ego, in the Logical Investigations I stood for a skepticism that, as my studies progressed, I could not maintain. The criticism that I directed against Natorp's thoughtful “Introduction to Psychology” [...] is thus not correct in one main point” (Husserl, 1976, p. 124; 2006, p. 106). Similarly, in the second edition of *Logische Untersuchungen*, specifically designed to align this work with the author's transcendental thought, he retains the previously mentioned criticism in the main text but mentions in a footnote his change of position: “I have since managed to find it [the pure ego], i.e. have learnt not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic” (Husserl, 1984, p. 374; 2001, p. 353 — my addition). Generally, it is understood that this so-called “ego-metaphysic” encompasses the philosophies that emerged in the wake of Kant, particularly German idealism, as well as neo-Kantianism (Lohmar, 2012, p. 280-281. Cf. Cramer, 2011, p. 11). Ultimately, it is evident that Phenomenology, in its inception, upheld a robust thesis regarding the ego that significantly diverges from its later interests and, by extension, from its most prevalent representation in the history of Philosophy and the manner in which we tend to perceive it today.

This essay explores the inherent tension surrounding this topic. It seeks to systematically analyze Husserl's perspectives on the ego as presented in the *Logische Untersuchungen*, with the aim of comprehending them within their own context, motivations, interests, and implications. This analysis will provide us with the means to critically and more thoroughly assess the initial stages of the transcendental turn undertaken by the philosopher, as well as the significance of his new

² All reproductions of passages from Husserl's text will be referred first to the volume of *Husserliana* cited and then to the English translation used.

assertions, viewed from an alternative standpoint. To achieve this objective, the essay will be organized into four sections. The first section will address the previously mentioned critique of the pure ego as articulated by Natorp, allowing us to grasp the reasons Husserl provides for its dismissal. The second section will examine the concept of an “empirical ego,” which the philosopher identifies in the aforementioned excerpt as the only ego he could genuinely perceive in his experiences and objective relations. The third section will discuss the idea of a “phenomenological ego,” which underpins the empirical ego and can be understood as the unity of the stream of lived experiences. Finally, the fourth section will explore the interconnections among these concepts and their implications for understanding the subsequent transcendental positions.

1. The rejection of the pure ego

Let us begin with an analysis of §8 of the Fifth Investigation, wherein Husserl engages in dialogue with Natorp, as previously noted. In Husserl's reconstruction, Natorp's doctrine defends the existence of a “pure ego” (*reines Ich*), of “pure apperception” (*reine Apperzeption*), which serves as the “unitary point of relation” (*einheitlicher Beziehungspunkt*) or the “subjective centre of relation” (*subjektives Beziehungszentrum*) for all “contents of consciousness” (*Bewusstseinsinhalte*) that may be presented to us. Consequently, every content of consciousness exists in relation to an ego, for whom and of whom it constitutes a content of consciousness. This foundational ego is also referred to by Natorp, in his philosophical terminology, as “awareness” (*Bewußtheit*) (Husserl, 1984, p. 372).

Three fundamental theses for this doctrine should be highlighted here. According to Natorp: (i) the pure “ego” is entirely inapprehensible, impassible to any objectification — i.e., it cannot be converted into an object of any kind — since its function is to serve as a pure condition of possibility of objects; (ii) an object is only such to the extent that it is an object for this pure ego — which is, therefore, its subject —, that makes it possible and gives it concretion; (iii) the correlation between the two, pure ego and object, is a “basic fact of Psychology” (*Grundtatsache der Psychologie*). These theses illustrate that, for Natorp, there is a fundamental and inescapable categorical distinction articulated in the relationship between the pure ego and the object: the pure ego serves as an unfathomable condition of possibility of experience, ensuring its characteristics, yet it can never properly appear within that experience, unlike its contents. Psychological science must be constructed upon this foundation.

Husserl's unease with these assertions is rooted in the tension between theses (i) and (iii). Strictly speaking, how can one reflect upon or assert anything regarding an ego that never appears, never reveals itself as it is, and eludes any attempt on our part to transform it into a theme or object

of thought? How can we reflect on or assert something about that which is objectively ungraspable? How can we justifiably claim that such an ego fulfills this or that role in some “basic fact” for the construction of a science? These questions remain unresolved for Husserl. In his view, everything that I can reflect upon must have become the object of cognitive acts involved in this reflection. Even if it is something that was not originally given in an objective way, such as an act of consciousness, when I make it the theme of a reflection, I perform an “objectification” (*Vergegenständlichung*)³ of it. And it is by this means that I can reflect on it (Husserl, 1984, p. 14). Likewise, any certification of something as a “fact” in the sense advocated above — i.e., of a recognition of a true state of affairs — must occur on the basis of some intuition, some immediate seeing of this same “fact”. It is necessary, here, that not only my signitive or merely symbolic references to the presumed fact be brought into play, but also a certain direct apprehension or verification of the very validity of this fact as such — as something that grounds, supports and illustrates those signitive references, fulfilling them and showing that they are the case. A seeing is therefore necessary (Husserl, 1984, p. 43-45, p. 558). Now, none of this is possible if the pure ego is elusive in the face of all objectification and cannot be seen or intuited in any way.

The postulation of such ego, therefore, engenders Husserl’s skepticism and his claim that he cannot find it. As we saw in the quote from our Introduction, it could only be described and verified phenomenologically as a certain “empirical ego and its empirical relations to its own experiences” (Husserl, 1984, p. 373; 2001, p. 92. *Cf.* Zahavi, 2022, p. 270). If an “ego” is to be assessed, it must be able to appear in some way.

2. The empirical ego

It is, therefore, essential to clarify what Husserl means by the term “empirical ego.” *Prima facie*, his assertion should be understood merely as an effort to demonstrate that we find only concrete experience when we search for anything as an ego. However, upon a more thorough examination of the philosopher’s argument, it becomes evident that the term often assumes a more precise connotation. When referring to an empirical ego, Husserl frequently employs expressions such as “phenomenal subject” (*phänomenales Subjekt*), “empirical person” (*empirische Person*), “personal ego” (*Person Ich*), and “empirical personality” (*empirische Persönlichkeit*) (Husserl, 1984, p. 360, 761). He articulates this in conjunction with discussions regarding the common, non-phenomenological interpretation of “lived experiences,” as exemplified by the ordinary and

³ Strictly speaking, we could use any immanent moment in the stream of lived experiences as an example. See *infra*, section 3(i).

uncritical assertion that we have already “experienced” a particular historical event (Husserl, 1984, p. 361-362). The empirical ego is thus intrinsically connected to the concepts of an individual-psychological ego, a person with a distinct personality and a unique history of psychological development and singularization. This ego represents who we are in a completely ordinary, immediate, and spontaneous manner, in which we are embedded in our daily experiences with their factual, contingent character.

Three fundamental theses provide a more detailed characterization of this ego.

(i) The first of these is that it is “constituted” and “transcendent,” and that its mode of appearing must be compared to that of a physical thing, which “adumbrates” (*schattet sich ab*) or “presents” (*stellt sich dar*) itself in profiles. Husserl is unequivocal in his assertion: “We perceive the ego, just as we perceive an external thing” (Husserl, 1984, p. 375; 2001, p. 93) — or, in a more emphatic formulation from the second edition of the publication: “[...] “the empirical ego is as much a case of transcendence as the physical thing” (Husserl, 1984, p. 368; 2001, p. 352). This thesis challenges the assumption that the empirical ego must represent an original, profound, and structuring dimension of us that shapes our experiences — specifically, one that is accountable for performing acts of consciousness and operating the constitutive processes of the objects possible to it, thereby enabling their apparition as phenomena. Rather, the empirical ego emerges as a product of these constitutive processes, presented to us as any worldly object (Zahavi, 2002).

Let us draw an analogy with physical things and their modes of givenness in order to understand Husserl's argument. Every physical thing, in terms of extended and sensible objects, conforms to the so-called structure of “adumbration” (*Abschattung*). This indicates that it is revealed solely through partial intuitions, which present to us and make immediately accessible only certain profiles, aspects, or nuances of the object, but never its totality. In addition to these actually intuited profiles, there is a collection of other profiles that are absent, unseen, and not intuited, but which nevertheless belong to the object and the way we relate to it in its unity. This observation is maintained across any variations in perspective that we may have regarding the object: if, initially, it is visible from profiles *a* and *b* while obscuring profile *c*, at a subsequent moment, from a different perspective, it may be visible from profile *c*, concealing profiles *a* and *b*. In all instances, the presentation of the object invariably comprises a distinctive blend of presence and absence, intuited and not intuited, given and not given, which cannot be altered through perspective variations. The unity of the object always appears in an inadequate, incomplete, and gap-filled manner. When we mean it, we invariably place ourselves in relation to something greater and broader than what is strictly presented (Husserl, 1984, p. 589-592. Cf. Sokolowski, 2000, p. 17 ff).

The mode of givenness of the empirical ego, when we consider it in thought and reflect on it, is fundamentally characterized as follows. What we have before us in these activities is a momentary and partial appearance of a broad and to some extent cohesive set of private and factual experiences of various kinds — e.g., perceptions, memories, judgments, fantasies, hopes, feelings, etc. And this momentary appearance is also out of step with the totality of what appears. My examination of the momentary aspect currently revealed makes me aware of the numerous other facets of this same self that do not present themselves before me and remain absent — facets that I can certainly presume, re-present, or examine in succession, yet which are still not revealed (Husserl, 1984, p. 363).

(ii) A second thesis reveals the epistemic implications of this. Although, as Husserl states, “Self-perception of the empirical ego is, however, a daily business, which involves no difficulty for understanding” (Husserl, 1984, p. 375; 2001, p. 93), it does not necessarily imply that this self-perception is particularly informative, substantial, or characterized by complete, adequate evidence. On the contrary: precisely because the empirical ego is something which, in its mode of givenness, obeys the structure of adumbration, presenting itself through various profiles, that our access to it remains epistemically disadvantaged and full of possibilities for deception and confusion. The descriptive context itself justifies this: if the way something is given is necessarily a mixture of presences and absences, then my evaluation of its totality may be compromised by a lack of access to the former. Or again: if I see only a part and glimpse something larger in which it is coordinated, I can easily be mistaken in this extrapolation. Husserl expresses this condition of my epistemic access to the empirical ego when he says, in the *Beilage of the Logische Untersuchungen*, that “[...] not every perception of the ego, nor every perception of a psychic state referred to the ego, is certainly evident, if by the 'ego' we mean what we all mean by it, and what we all think we perceive in perceiving ourselves, i.e. our own empirical personality” (Husserl, 1984, p. 761; 2001, p. 340).

(iii) A significant thesis concerns the fact that the empirical ego is not a constitutive part of our experiences and does not appear during their occurrence. When we live in the performance of any act, such as perceiving a bookshelf before us, we do not have an experience within which two distinct, major poles — the empirical ego and the bookshelf — are relating to one another, with both contributing to the overall content of the phenomenon. In other words, when perceiving a bookshelf, what emerges through this objectual relation is solely the bookshelf, without the simultaneous presence of myself as the observer. I do not identify as part of the experience in question. Instead, we are absorbed in the performance of the act and direct ourselves toward the object as its theme; we are a disposition, an openness, and an immediate movement toward the transcendent (Husserl, 1984, p. 389-390).

Despite this, we note that every effort to *reflect* on such an experience operates a clear phenomenal transformation in its content. Reflection, in fact, offers us a portrait of that experience as if it had been broader in content and given prominence to an ego, which had appeared and assumed some role in it. Reflection, in fact, brings to light a certain “ego-presentation” (*Ichvorstellung*) and connects it to the objectual appearance, situating it as the instance that experienced the act directed to it. But this is not the original descriptive context. Husserl states:

In our description relation to an experiencing ego is naturally inescapable, but the experience described is not itself an experiential complex having the ego-presentation as its part. We perform the description after an objectifying act of reflection, in which reflection on the ego is combined with reflection on the experienced act to yield a relational act, in which the ego appears as itself related to its act's object through its act. Plainly an essential descriptive change has occurred (Husserl, 1984, p. 391; 2001, p. 101).⁴

The empirical ego, therefore, is something that does not genuinely given within our experiences as we live them; instead, it is only subsequently positioned within them through our reflection.

3. The phenomenological ego

As indicated in the Introduction, Husserl does not limit himself to this empirical “ego”, offering an alternative understanding of the ego that holds greater philosophical significance. Beyond a personal egoity, at its core, we find what the philosopher articulated as the previously mentioned first concept of consciousness in the Fifth Logical Investigation, namely:

Consciousness as the entire, real (*reelle*) phenomenological subsistence of the mental ego (*der gesamte reelle phänomenologische Bestand des geistigen Ich*). (Consciousness = the *phenomenological ego*, as a 'bundle' (*Bündel*) or interweaving (*Verwebung*) of psychic experiences (*Erlebnisse*) (Husserl, 1984, p. 356).

In a more concise formulation, he states: “consciousness as the phenomenological unity of the ego's experiences” (Husserl, 1984, p. 356; 2001, p. 82). This represents a new conception of the ego, which disregards the “the *phenomenal subject* (myself as an *empirical person*, a thing)” and engages

⁴ Zahavi (2002) asserts: “That we nevertheless tend to experience an ego in these cases only testifies to the transformative nature of reflection. When we reflect on an experience, we are not just living it through, we transcend it and, in doing so, we, as it were, situate the experience in an egological context.” (p. 55) This last statement, of course, simply means that reflection produces the notion that experience is the experience of an ego. This is not, of course, a claim that contradicts the idea that the Phenomenology of the *Logische Untersuchungen* is non-egological, since the state described is not the original mode of being of consciousness. See also Zahavi, 2022, p. 270.

with “*consciousness in the sense of a unity of such conscious contents (the phenomenological ego)*” (Husserl, 1984, p. 360; 2001, p. 84).⁵ Let us attempt to gradually shed some light on these claims.

(i) Let us first clarify the concept of a “stream of lived experience” (*Erlebnisstrom*) as it was understood during the period of the *Logische Untersuchungen*. In Husserl's understanding, it refers to the most fundamental and original layer of our consciousness, wherein a multitude of “lived experiences” (*Erlebnisse*) unfolds continuously, interacting and articulating with one another in various manners — whether through “interconnection” (*Verknüpfung*) or “interpenetration” (*Durchdringung*) — thereby forming experiences of varying complexity and ultimately contributing to the unity of consciousness itself (Husserl, 1984, p. 357).

It is remarkable and important from a theoretical point of view that Husserl uses the term “bundle” (*Bündel*) in his formulation, allowing us to glimpse a certain influence of David Hume and his famous “bundle-theory of perception” (Husserl, 1984, p. 356, 390. Cf. Cramer, 2011, p. 5, 9-10; Lohmar, 2012, p. 279; Moran & Cohen, 2012, P. 89; Renaudie, 2021, P. 19; Shim, 2021, P. 197; Zahavi, 2012, P. 54). It is well known that, according to the doctrine of this empiricist, the ego would not be anything like a substance at the basis of the rapid flow of our impressions and representations, giving cohesion and a deeper unity to them, but rather a mere circumstantial, late and contingent organization of such contents.⁶ Such a Humean inspiration occurs, strictly speaking, in a good place, since Husserl also rejects a pure ego and now wishes to reflect on the authentic criteria for the organization of consciousness.

In the stream of lived experiences, the constitutive processes that allow us to relate to objects at the level of experience (*Erfahrung*) are operated. The lived experiences that integrate the stream are called by Husserl “genuine” (*reell*) or “immanent”, in the sense that they are the most basic descriptive elements and that effectively construct the stream itself in its concreteness, being, therefore, intrinsic to it, essential parts of its consistency (Husserl, 1984, p. 360-362, 387. Cf. Husserl, 1958, p. 35). The author shows us more closely what these lived experiences are by breaking down the classes into which they are organized.

(a) A first class is composed of mere sensory contents, which normally consist in a mass or complex of disorganized data, i.e., a raw, dispersed material, without contours, form, unity or meaning and which serves precisely as “support points” for the constitution of the objects of our

⁵ Precise formulations of the same distinction can be found in the secondary literature: Ursula Panzer (1984) states: “The phenomenological ego, i.e., the empirical ego reduced to what is phenomenologically given, he had defined as a complexion of lived experiences [...]” (p. LV-LVI; my addition). Zahavi (2002), on his turn, states: “Either the ego is simply identical with the empirical person, i.e., with the person who can be described from a third-person perspective [...], or the term “ego” is used as a synonym for the stream of consciousness [...]” (p. 52-53).

⁶ In the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume (2007) provides us with the classic passage on the subject: “I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (p. 165”).

experience. Among them we find, e.g., sensations (*Empfindungen*), psychic and phantasmal traces left by sensations (*Phantasmen*), feeling-sensations (*Gefühlsempfindungen*) etc. (Husserl, 1984, p. 80, 134, 165, 198, 360-361, 406-407).

(b) A second class is composed of act characters (*Aktcharaktere*), which consist of the type of intentional direction characteristic of a given experience of ours, such as, e.g., “perceiving”, “remembering”, “fantasizing”, “feeling”, etc. Such acts operate, each in its own way, “apprehensions” (*Auffassungen*) or “interpretations” (*Deutungen*) of the above-mentioned contents, “animating” them (*sie beseelend*), articulating them with each other, giving them meaning and, with this, constituting an object from them (Husserl, 1984, p. 17, 134, 361-362, 394-401).

(c) Finally, we can also mention the complete appearance of the object itself (*die volle Erscheinung des Gegenstands*), which consists of the way in which the object shows itself, in concrete terms, on the occasion of its factual appearance — i.e., with this profile, from this meaning, with such and such properties in relief, in such and such relations, etc. (Husserl, 1984, p. 358).

The object itself, in its identity, is not confused with its circumstantial appearance or with any other of the immanent components that make it possible, surpassing them and showing itself as a “transcendence” (Husserl, 1984, p. 399). This transcendent status of the object, however, does not interest us here. What is important is that the description of the stream is limited to the genuine and immanent dimension of the lived experiences, leaving aside everything that could be affirmed as transcendence before it.⁷

(ii) Husserl's analysis of the stream goes beyond mere description and differentiation of its components. He has a strong mereological interest, i.e. focusing on the part-whole relationships that characterize the stream. The discussion of consciousness as “entire genuine phenomenological subsistence” or “phenomenological unity of the ego's experiences” explicitly highlights this interest. Husserl elucidates it through a succinct exploration of the term “content” (*Inhalt*):

The normal sense of the word 'content' is relative: it refers quite generally to a comprehensive unity which has its content in the sum total of its component parts. Whatever can be regarded as a part of a whole, and as truly co-constituting it, belongs to the content of that whole. In our current psychological talk of contents, the tacitly assumed relational focus, i.e. the corresponding whole, is the real unity of consciousness. Its content is the sum total of present experiences, and 'contents' in the plural means these experiences themselves, i.e. all that as real part constitute the respective ego or consciousness (Husserl, 1984, p. 362-363; 2001, p. 85).

⁷ Other examples of stream components could be added here (cf. Husserl, 1984, p. 362), but the examples given are enough.

Thus, if every “content” implies a relation to a “framework”, of whose concrete integrity it is part and within whose totality it is embedded, the discussion about “contents of consciousness” must be understood along the same general lines, implying a larger, more comprehensive unity of which these contents can be said to be a part, i.e., which serves as their framework — the whole in which they inhere as parts. Thus, the stream itself must be conceived as the larger, supra-ordinate unity in which singular lived experiences are arranged and integrated as components. And this is precisely what Husserl wishes to name here, a “phenomenological ego”: beyond any psychological-individual or private dimension, beyond any personality, inner self, any idiosyncrasies or unique mental determinations, there is for all of us the constant temporal course of our lived experiences and their concrete configurations, each time distinct because they are also in flow, but capable of conferring unity to what they contain of diverse and contingent.

The deepest one can reach in the search for an ego, therefore, does indeed mean abandoning the personal meaning of the term, but it does not mean, in any way, postulating a pure, unfathomable, ungraspable ego that is supposedly at the basis of all consciousness. It is a matter of assuming a position, let us say, “intermediate”: it is a matter of going to the stream itself, examining its ordering, assessing its unity and understanding that this unity itself already constitutes what we can see as the deepest ego capable of being described in phenomenological terms. What is decisive here, however, is to note that it is the lived experiences themselves and the laws inherent in them that define how this unity is possible. It is not a unity “received from outside”, imposed on the stream by some transcendent and preeminent instance. Rather, it concerns laws that emanate from the stream itself, which are based on the very nature of the lived experiences that compose it.

According to the philosopher:

It is evident that the ego is nothing peculiar, floating above many experiences: it is simply identical with their own interconnected unity. In the nature of its contents, and the laws they obey, certain forms of connection are grounded. They run in diverse fashions from content to content, from complex of contents to complex of contents, till in the end a unified sum total of content is constituted, which does not differ from the ego itself. These contents have, as real contents generally have, their own law-bound ways of coming together, of losing themselves in more comprehensive unities and, in so far as they thus become and are one, the ego or unity of consciousness is already constituted, without need of an additional, peculiar ego-principle which supports all contents and unites them all once again. Here as elsewhere it is not clear what such a principle would effect (Husserl, 1984, p. 363-364; 2001, p. 86).

This is what two expressions used by Husserl at the beginning of § 2 refer to: “interconnection” (*Verknüpfung*) and “interpenetration” (*Durchdringung*). Depending on the nature of its content, a lived experience can be articulated with another either by “coupling” itself externally to it, or by “merging” itself, “mixing” with it (cf. also Husserl, 1984, p. 369). Here, we are

dealing with mereological relations examined in depth in the Third Logical Investigation. In the case of mere interconnections, we have relations between parts in which they appear as “independent parts” or “pieces” (*Stücke*) in relation to each other. This means that their convergence is factual and episodic, expressing no ultimate, imperative need for them to be integrated and compose a certain whole. Integration just happened to occur in a given circumstance in someone's conscious stream. In the case of interpenetrations, however, we have relations between parts in which they appear as “dependent parts” or “moments” (*Momente*) in relation to each other. This means that their convergence is, in fact, expressive of a necessity, so that they have, for essential reasons, to integrate and compose a whole (Husserl, 1984, p. 230, 282-283). Let us seek to make these claims clearer and more intuitive. When we think of distinct act characters that have no essential relation to each other, but are only contingently articulated in the stream of lived experiences, we see the so-called interconnection relations attested. If we consider, for example, someone who perceives a given object and, in parallel, remembers another one, without any motivational connection between both experiences, we find an illustration of this. In this context, both the nature of the act of perceiving and that of the act of remembering will assume their respective roles within their own constitutive processes, enabling the subject to engage in both perception and memory. The simultaneous occurrence of these processes is not a necessity. They converge, in practical terms, to contribute to the momentary whole of experience and the unity of consciousness; however, the perceptual relationship can, in principle, entirely function independently of the relationship with memory, and vice versa. They are together, but they can also be distinctly separated without significant phenomenal alterations. Thus, contingently, both functions appear as complementary to one another, establishing an interconnection.⁸

When we consider, however, the relationship between certain characteristics of an act and the type of content of apprehension with which they have to relate to the constitution of their object, we see that these are not merely factual determinations, but rather prescribed in essence. If we consider the character of the act of perceiving, e.g., then its relationship with a material foundation to be apprehended and from which to constitute a “perceived object” is undeniably restricted and requires, in principle, that the foundation in question be a “complex of sensations” (*Empfindungskomplex*) (Cf. Husserl, 1984, p. 283-284, footnote). Only those sensitive contents of greater vivacity, “fullness” (*Fülle*) and which denote a present and living affection of our consciousness should figure as the genuinely apprehended basis for the appearance of the perceived object. I cannot play freely with this and attribute, for example, to perceiving an exclusive dealing with the phantasmal traces that fantasizing apprehends or, even, with the “feelings-sensations”

⁸ I base these statements on similar analyses by Brentano (1982, p. 12).

(*Gefühlsempfindungen*), which belong to the “feeling-acts” (*Gefühlsakte*) (Husserl, 1984, p. 165, 399, 406). I cannot expect an act character to ignore its most fundamental conditions of possibility and to vivify genuine data with which it, for reasons of essence, does not have to have relations, and which are appropriate to another act character. This illustrates a context in which both lived experiences — the character of perceiving and the complex of sensations — figure as moments for each other, presenting a non-fortuitous relationship of interpenetration. In general terms: every constitution that operates according to the model “apprehension - content of apprehension” establishes immanently necessary relations between these instances, so that a given type of apprehension is appropriate to a given type of content of apprehension, without any exchanges being possible in this regard.

We could also add here, as illustrations, different types of relationship between founding and founded acts. If we think of the relationship of foundation of a non-objectifying act by an objectifying one, it will be clear. Rejoicing, for example, as a sentimental act, is non-objectifying, and does not provide its own object to itself.⁹ It therefore depends on another act, which is, on its turn, an objectifying one and does provide its own object to itself, to ensure its intentional reference. Now, this relationship of dependence can only be seen as dependence on objectifying acts — perceptions, fantasies, judgments, etc. Non-objectifying acts cannot figure here as founders — for example, sentimental acts cannot offer other sentimental acts any foundation. Strictly speaking, not only the fact that they present dependence, but also in relation to what this dependence concretely occurs, are not fortuitous characteristics of this class of acts, but rather necessities that arise from their immanence.

If we similarly examine the relationship between the foundational nature of one objectifying act and another, the conclusion is the same. Judging, for instance, although inherently an objectifying act that establishes a state of affairs as its higher-order object, relies on more fundamental objectifying acts for its execution, operating within a complex and dual-layered intentionality.¹⁰ Furthermore, this relationship of dependence needs a specific class of acts as foundations, rather than any acts that may be arbitrarily appropriated by the processes of consciousness and incorporated into the judicative constitutions.

⁹ Husserl, 1984, p. 401-410. Such theses underwent significant changes from 1913 onward. In *Ideen I*, Husserl asserts that feeling-acts are, in fact, objectifying and have their proper object, which is the “value” (*Wert*) (Husserl, 1976, pp. 220–222, 243). In the M Manuscripts, now published in the second volume of the *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins*, we encounter the concept of “humor” (*Stimmung*), which consists of an affective horizon that operates in various ways: it defines the “colors” through which objects appear to us; it motivates us toward certain types of experiences while deterring others; it modulates our receptivity to specific aspects of objects or states of affairs, either enhancing or diminishing it; and it influences the constitutions and objectifications carried out by our consciousness (Husserl, 2020, p. 103, 110-111). Cf. also Cano, 2019; Lee, 1998.

¹⁰ Husserl, 1984, p. 681-685. For an overview of relations of foundation, cf. Mayer & Erhard, 2008.

Other examples could certainly be invoked, but these are enough. The potential for connection and interpenetration of experiences consistently permeates the stream, serving as criteria for its organization. They have an absolutely relevant characteristic that must be emphasized here.: they do not arise from any synthesizing activity of a formally preeminent instance that imposes its contours, as is often suggested regarding a pure ego. On the contrary, they represent immediate expressions of laws grounded in the intrinsic nature of experiences and their content. These laws are immanent to the stream itself, facilitating its fundamental functions, shaping our experiences, and unifying consciousness. As Husserl articulates in the previously cited excerpt, the ego does not exist apart from the multiplicity of lived experiences; rather, it is identical to the unity of this multiplicity. It does not possess an egological principle that transcends and grounds it; instead, it is the very result of such unification (Husserl, 1984, p. 363-364. *Cf.* Cramer, 2011, p. 6; Zahavi, 2002, p. 54; 2022, p. 270).

There is, however, another significant aspect of this discourse regarding immanent laws that reside within the data of the stream and organize it, which is not adequately addressed in the *Logische Untersuchungen* due to the static nature of its methodology. This is the unification of the stream of lived experiences operated by immanent temporality (*innere Zeitlichkeit*), which is the focus of inquiry in the *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (1928). For reasons of thematic scope, it should not be dealt with here, but it must be mentioned nonetheless. Husserl himself briefly acknowledges this in § 6, with greater emphasis in the second edition (Husserl, 1984, p. 368-370).

(iii) In conclusion to this exploration of the phenomenological ego, it is important to emphasize that it is, indeed, in alignment with the preceding discussion, the structured stream through which the empirical ego is formed and upon which it fundamentally relies. However, it may also, in certain instances, have the same limiting characteristics or challenges as the empirical ego, as outlined in the previous section of this essay. Let us take a closer look, albeit briefly, at what this means. If the empirical ego does not inherently belong, as something that appears, to the concrete context of our experiences, but rather is something that reflection on these experiences subsequently adds to them,¹¹ the same is true for the phenomenological ego. It does not emerge spontaneously, in any manner, as a content co-present with objectual appearances. No representation of the current configuration of our stream of lived experiences insinuates itself as incidental content within our experiences; if such a relationship is to be established, it must occur through reflection.

¹¹ *Cf.* supra section 2(iii).

Likewise, if the empirical ego has revealed itself to be a transcendence, that is, something that presents itself in the form of an object or thing and, as a result, constitutes an inadequate givenness,¹² one can also consider the phenomenological ego from this perspective. It is important to note that the increasingly organized structure of our lived experiences, in their connections and interpenetrations, and in their purely immanent, genuine phenomenological unity, does not constitute an object in itself. This is evident, as it represents the very stream of lived experiences. However, when we examine it objectively and perceive it as a unitary whole, that is, as a totality of contents, it also presents itself to us as an object or thing, in inadequate givenness. Cramer (2011) is particularly clear about this:

[...] Whenever something can be apprehended as a whole, with its content consisting of the totality of its constituent parts and its unity arising from their interconnection, it is apprehended as an individual object. This applies not only to the empirical person, bound to the thing-like unity of their body, but also to the phenomenological ego [...], the unity of consciousness (p. 8).

The stream, therefore, in its current structure, can be apprehended and objectified — which also has for it the epistemic implications already seen and consistent with such a descriptive scenario.¹³

Final considerations

The path traced by this essay has therefore shown us a clear plurivocity of the notion of ego in Husserl's initial Phenomenology. The rejection of the notion of a pure ego in the general lines of the Kantian tradition, as a transcendental instance of pure apperception that unifies consciousness, has opened up very rich discussions for us. Starting from this rejection, an empirical ego of a psychological-personal nature was found and, on the basis of this, as its foundation, the phenomenological ego, a genuine unity of lived experiences, a living stream of immanent data that is organized in different ways and hosts the constitutive processes of every experience of an object. This stream shows itself as an instance whose unity and structure are not acquired from outside, but rather affirmed in its own immanence and as an immediate, necessary expression of what it holds within itself. In contrast to Natorp's ego, which can never be turned into an object and appear, the empirical ego and the phenomenological ego described by Husserl behave in an

¹² Cf. supra sections 2(i), (ii)

¹³ In these considerations, Husserl even speaks of the possibility of some kind of unity of the ego, no longer in the phenomenological sense, but in the realm of actualities, as a “persistent object” (*verharrender Gegenstand*) subordinated to extra-phenomenal causal links. This small speculative look beyond the boundaries of Phenomenology, however, is not developed for methodological reasons (Husserl, 1984, p. 364; 2007a, p. 386).

essentially different way, and can, indeed, be identified in the concrete examination of our experience and viewed as objects. This means that they can be intuited, described in their modes of givenness and in their mereological structure. They are, therefore, legitimate phenomenological data. This is decisive, since Husserl's investigations are effectively the scholium of his statement, in §8 of the Fifth Logical Investigation, that the only thing he can find, in the search for an ego, is not Natorp's transcendental principle, but rather an ego said to consist of concrete experiences. After all, there can be no phenomenological statement about that which does not appear.

Two significant conclusions should be added to this.

(i) The popular comparisons between Husserl and Hume, however pertinent they may be, have to be limited in a very relevant sense: for Hume, there is no immanent or necessary criterion that unifies the rapid flow of impressions and ideas in our minds. Every criterion for organizing this so-called “bundle” is factual, contingent, resting on associations and mere habits derived from previous experiences. For Husserl, by contrast, there are immanent criteria for structuring the stream and these are, strictly speaking, very important for us to understand how there is unity in it. This unity is not that of a mere contingent aggregate, but rather expressive of necessity. Although Husserl himself evokes the Humean term “bundle” (*Bündel*) to speak of the first concept of consciousness, this reference must be put into perspective and read in light of this crucial difference.

(ii) The understanding of the stream of lived experiences in the *Logische Untersuchungen* already presents a very important characteristic, which we often see recognized as a theoretical achievement of Phenomenology only from 1905 onwards, with the developments of the Phenomenology of Time — the thesis of the unification of the stream by immanent and non-egoic criteria. If later Husserl will tend to fundamentally value the descriptions of the temporality of experiences as a criterion for asserting that they generate and unify themselves, theses with the same aim are already present in 1900-1901, without the consideration of time.

To these conclusions, finally, a third must be added, possible only in an overview of Husserl's work, which goes beyond the text of the *Logische Untersuchungen*.

(iii) Interestingly, we also note in this path of Husserl's initial non-egological Phenomenology a characteristic that would set the tone for his later steps, in his foray into transcendental thought: the increasingly radical distancing from any understanding of the self in its psychological, empirical and natural dimensions. In *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* (1907-1908), usually seen as the inaugural work of the transcendental phase, we find the defense of the need to investigate experience outside of its immediate psychological-natural meaning — therefore, disconnected from its contingent character and its efficient links with our organism, with other

circum-mundane effects, with the objective time of chronoscopes, etc. (Husserl, 1958, p. 43-44).¹⁴ In the same vein, the essay *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (1911) offers us a diligent argument against any objectification or naturalization of our consciousness and in favor of understanding it as a continuous temporal stream of purified phenomena, disconnected from metaphysical assumptions like those — of an undeniably naive realistic nature — that inhabit naturalist thought (Husserl, 1987, p. 26-30).¹⁵ Such efforts are preparatory to the entire transcendental conception that the *epoché* must address itself not only to the world, but also to the subjectivity that is the dative of its appearance, which must also be transcendently purified — therefore, conceived as an instance that is not merely in the world, as a real thing among real things, already given and merely available, but that is the very condition of being and meaning of the world (See Cramer, 2011, p. 4; Quijano, 2017, P. 78-79; Keßler, 2010, p. 136-137).

Only in later studies can this special movement, which occurs before *Ideen I*, be properly interpreted and systematically treated. Interestingly, however, we find that one of the fundamental characteristics of Husserl's initial non-egological Phenomenology, his effort to purify a superficial and contingent dimension of the ego, prefigures precisely the *Leitmotiv* of the later theses, which begin to introduce into the Phenomenology the previously rejected egological dimension — and, of course, to recover the concept so decisively warded off by Husserl in 1901, that of a pure ego.

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¹⁴ The thinker states: “The ego as a person, as a thing belonging to the world, and experience as the experience of this person — even if entirely indeterminant — exist in the order of objective time: they are all transcendent and, as such, epistemologically null” (Husserl, 1958, p. 44; 1999, p. 34)

¹⁵ Now here: “It is the line of an immanent 'time' without beginning or end, a time that no chronometers measure. Looking back over the flow of phenomena in an immanent view, we go from phenomenon to phenomenon (each a unity grasped in the flow and even in the flowing) and never to anything but phenomena.” (Husserl, 1987, p. 30; 1965, p. 108)

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