

EDMUND HUSSERL'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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For a long time, it has been assumed that Husserl had no interest in history, nor any vocation for it, due to the predominantly eidetic character that marked the so-called static phenomenology. Hence Husserl's anti-historicism, which resulted from putting the logical aspect of each problem in the foreground while neglecting its existential moment, before he came to recognize – in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) – a kind of historicity of judgement and the genesis of meaning as an essential process of its own constitution. At the same time, however, it is well known that the shift to a genetic conception of phenomenology led to the acquisition of a historical consideration into Husserlian phenomenology that sanctioned, for example, how the ego itself is constituted «in the unity of a “history” » (*MC*, § 37). In rehabilitating the idea of man as a cultural being, i.e., constituted by tradition and history, Husserl is led to affirm a concept of reason closely linked to historicity. Man no longer has the traits of a worldly or purely natural being, but is the correlate of a teleological project, of an infinite task, whereby the meaning of history and the very idea of philosophy imply that the history of philosophy does not present any end or the possibility of absolute knowledge. Celebrating phenomenology as the «secret nostalgia of all modern philosophy» (*Ideas I*, § 62), Husserl traces a philosophy of the history of philosophy that attempts to detect the «thoroughgoing meaningfulness» (*Crisis*, § 14), capable of conferring unity on the becoming of the history of philosophy itself. In Husserl's intentions, however, this does not lead to the ultimate definition of transcendental philosophy, but to the authentic beginning of philosophy *sans phrases*, to be subjected to continuous verification in terms of rigorous self-criticism and even stricter intersubjective feedback. On the other hand, by critically retracing the entire history of philosophy (philosophical ideas) and recognizing itself as historically conditioned by it, phenomenology comes to understand itself as a historical product, as an event in which the secret aspirations of all previous becoming emerge. In this key, Husserl's selective relationship with the philosophical tradition is based on a genealogical method and an archaeological recognition always at the service of the enterprise of phenomenology. As an expression of his philosophical legacy, Husserl develops a teleological consideration of the history of philosophy as a struggle for the existence and meaning of humanity, implementing a contrast between a genuine philosophy and nonphilosophies of a skeptical and naively naturalistic derivation. Seen from the inside, the history of philosophy is to be retraced, without the ambition to instruct or indoctrinate, but only with the need to restore what is seen. Far from wanting to produce a further interpretation of historical-philosophical events, Husserl's teleological approach contemplates these events from the noble plane of the history of ideas and not from the subsoil of mere historical facts. Such an attitude was meant to seek to «strike through the crust of the externalized “historical facts” of philosophical history, interrogating, exhibiting, and testing their inner meaning and hidden teleology. Gradually, at first unnoticed but growing more and more pressing, possibilities for a complete reorientation of view will make themselves felt, pointing to new dimensions. Questions never before asked will arise; fields of endeavor never before entered, correlations never before grasped or radically understood, will show themselves» (*Crisis*, § 7). In this regard, Husserl's desire to retrace the philosophies of the past in order to bring them into the light and the clarity of the present is thus affirmed, through the project of an ultimate foundation on the basis of which «can the unified directedness of all philosophies and philosophers open up», thereby «understand past thinkers in a way that they could never have understood themselves» (*Crisis*, § 15). Between 1915 and 1920, Husserl dealt intensively with the history of philosophy (*Einleitung in die Philosophie. Vorlesungen 1916-1920*), continuing until 1926 to lecture courses on the history of modern philosophy. In this context, the 1923/1924 course (*First*

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Philosophy I) stands out because it does not outline a history of philosophy, but a history of the idea of philosophy as inseparable from the idea of science in their necessary differentiations. This way of approaching the history of philosophy as a “critical history of ideas” serves as a basis for defining, in the *Crisis of European Sciences*, the theme of the teleology of history, since the ideal of a first philosophy can be said to function as a meta-historical criterion for evaluating the history of philosophy itself, teleology being already contained, at bottom, in the idea of philosophy as a rigorous science, with the confirmation that the scientific ideal is also the fruit of a historical product. As he delves into his «poetic invention of the history of philosophy» (*Crisis, Appendix XXVIII*), Husserl – in the last phase of his thought – develops a concern for history and its rich problematics that becomes the theme of a special philosophy of history, to the point of gradually becoming the gravitational center of the system. On this level, once again Husserl’s intention is not to offer a contribution to the history of philosophy as commonly understood, but to subject the philosophical past to an authentic “archaeology” of phenomenological problems, which knows how to systematically investigate «that which comprises within itself this ultimately original source and every origin of being and truth» (*Erste Philosophie II*), so as to bring all knowledge to its ultimate and highest rational form. The need to implement a critical consideration of history and the exemplary significance that Husserl attaches to the history of philosophy determine the status of philosophy in its peculiarity. The task of deepening the history of philosophy is linked to the finding of a philosophical generativity. In contrast to artisans, clerks or workers who, in their professional work, do not seem to need «historical reflection» in order to assess the «ultimate sense of their existence» (*Crisis, Appendix XXIV*), but also in contrast to what is recorded in the more advanced sciences, for which the result of their respective elaborations takes place in the present, without the history of science having to relive, and without it, the works and plans of the past having to be subjected to criticism (*Crisis, Appendix XXV*), the philosopher needs an explicit historical self-reflection, since the philosophical past is motivating for the philosopher of the present, in a horizon of philosophical coexistence (*Crisis, Appendix XXV*). As philosophers, being heirs to the past means that this coexistence, essentially grounded in the philosophical present, is never permanently interrupted, and that thoughts sedimented in the form of documentation come back to life by initiating a new spiritual generativity. For a philosopher, drawing on the history of philosophy does not mean, however, that this history is at their disposal like a storehouse of items, with all the stock in it (*Crisis, Appendix XXVIII*), but that the documents and works of philosophers are bearers of meanings from which one must allow oneself to be motivated in a creative manner, so to speak, treating the past of philosophy not as a chain of mere facts, but as a resource for addressing the problems of the present on the basis of a critical appropriation of the past. In this sense, the history of philosophy is not to be conceived in terms of an external succession of historical facts but is to be deepened in a sense and in a *supratemporal present* that accredits a «unitary teleological structure», thus making it possible to learn from history (*Crisis, Appendix XIII*). In this key, in which the history of philosophy is used to discover the true method of philosophy or philosophy itself, the Husserlian approach is not properly historiographical but evocatively takes on the guise of a «poetic invention», of an interpreting «poetizing» (*Crisis, Appendix XXVII; Die Geschichte der Philosophie im Konnex der historischen Wissenschaft und der Kultur*, 1934). In the face of the long-standing and deep-rooted conviction that the study of the history of philosophy must constitute the only foundation on which to be able to fulfill its philosophical task (*Crisis, Appendix XIII*), the methodological considerations expressed by Husserl go in the direction of not being able to rely on the mere re-presentation of historical facts or documents, i.e. of mere ascertainments of historically passed philosophies, but to make use of a “spiritual sedimentation” that opens up the definition of a historical method, certainly not the only one, at the height of the “construction of philosophy”, which will not be one philosophy among others, but neither a “definitive idea of philosophy”, since there is no possibility of showing, retrospectively, that it has in fact reached a “final form”.

The «Bollettino Filosofico» indicates some possible themes:

- the relationship with ancient philosophy and the idea of philosophical science

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- the theme of the foundation of logic as formal apophantics in relation to the development of phenomenological formal ontology
- the relationship with sophistics and the different forms of skepticism
- the theme of subjectivity and a science of subjectivity in its historical development
- the relationship with the tradition of empiricism
- the relationship with the tradition of rationalism
- the relationship with the Leibniz's monadology
- the relationship with kantian and neo-kantian transcendentalism
- the relationship to the different forms of idealism
- the relationship with the theme of positivism and with the main figures of empiriocriticism
- the theme of teleology in a historical-philosophical key
- the relationship with the main ethical themes
- the relationship between transcendental phenomenology and first philosophy

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