

Tanja Staehler: Hegel, Husserl and the Phenomenology of Historical Worlds

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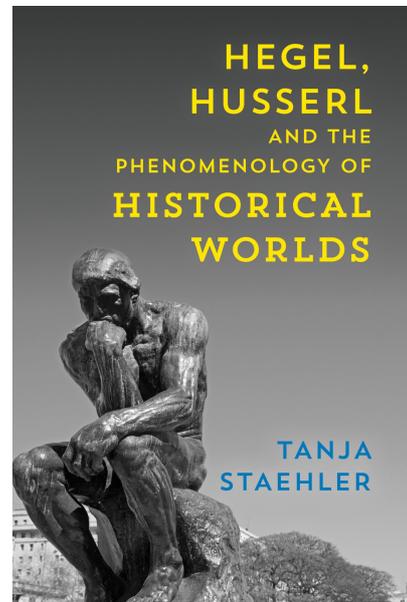
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Hegel, Husserl and the Phenomenology of Historical Worlds by Tanja Staehler is an effort of integration between the phenomenological thinking of two of the most influential philosophers in the contemporary tradition: G.W.F. Hegel and Edmund Husserl. The author's intention is to reframe a phenomenology of historical and cultural worlds by pursuing the potential of a mutual compenetration of the two German philosophers more than focusing on a static and sterile debate regarding what might make them two different thinkers. The main thesis here shows how Husserl's phenomenology radicalizes Hegel's by adding the character of infinite openness to the teleological development of historical *Spirit*, which afterwards will manifest itself as horizontally constituted. At the same time an Hegelian narrative applies to the entire "parabola" of Husserl's thought, which the author describes as a progressive development from an abstract to a concrete phenomenology that finally emerges in his later studies and that, by an effort of recollection in the most Hegelian meaning, illustrates the phenomenological development with the motivations and explanations for his abstract beginning. Important to mention is how, within the tradition of Husserlian debate, Staehler takes the side of Derrida and Steinbock by defending the presence of a third phase in Husserl's philosophy, alongside the *static* and the *genetic*, which she names *historical*. The three stages also serve as the methodological sections of the work.

Hegel and Husserl, in their different phenomenological traditions, both make clear that if philosophy wants to be recognized as a rigorous science it must be *presuppositionless* and thus, that a leap is required by consciousness in order to clarify what remains overshadowed by the *immediacy* (in Hegel) and *naïveté* (in Husserl) of our natural attitude toward the world. In this sense phenomenology takes the sceptical critique as its own starting standpoint by moving the focus of analyses from its directedness toward *being*, backward to the level of its appearance to consciousness. Scepticism then becomes a moment in the philosophical approach more than a simple school of thought (a point we credit to Hegel) and the very beginning of self-reflection. What for Hegel, however, is a *thoroughgoing scepticism*, simply “*directed against the being of sense-certainty which takes its being as true as such,*” and which points beyond the level of phenomena (although in a new mediate form), for Husserl the philosophical approach takes the shape of a refraining from positing the being in the world. We might say that while the teleological presupposition leads Hegel toward a pre-established pathway engaging in what the author calls a pedagogical dialectic between the natural attitude and philosophical consciousness, Husserl chooses the path to suspend the natural attitude itself and to assume a philosophy of a perpetual beginning. A difference in the perspective but not really in the ultimate goal, as the final idea is to have a rigorous discipline better able to disclose in a clearer way the interplay of the perception between the individual consciousness and the phenomenal world. Alongside the similarities and differences between Hegel and Husserl, Staehler lets us notice how a first problematic arises when we approach the beginning of philosophy in the form of a necessary sceptical attitude as it represents everything except a *presuppositionless* standpoint and which thus requires a given motivation and a contextual explanation. This is a question that remains open until the last part of the work where the encompassing *Spirit* (in Hegel) and the *Lifeworld* (in Husserl) will appear and will be able to give a context to the motivation by an effort of recollection.

Hegel describes the process that leads consciousness from the immediacy of sense-certainty to the understanding of itself as the one very constitutive agent of the perceptual activity in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The possibility of self-certainty is triggered by a tension between the *unity* of the object and the *multiplicity* of its properties which leaves us the feeling of a phenomenal world characterized by an ungraspable double nature. However, as the author underlines, that uncanniness is only given as a consequence of a static point of view and that when a dynamic perspective is taken the contradiction is solved. The concept of *force* is probably the best image to show how the coexistence of unity and its unfolding multiplicity is easily graspable when framed within a *process-oriented* approach. Staehler sees here a common pattern with the Husserlian image of the apple tree and the changing of its determinations in the persistence of an identical bearer. Important to notice is how the possibility of the synthesis of the *manifold* of the modes of givenness into a *phanto-matic unity* is possible only by the mediation of

time which in Husserl is constituted at the level of inner consciousness. From a *static* and descriptive methodology the analysis here starts to move slightly to a *genetic* and constitutive approach. However, while a dynamic-oriented philosophy might represent the possibility of a parallelism between the two philosophers, a basic difference between them remains in the attitude toward the nature of the unity beyond the phenomena. If Hegel, carried by his teleological impetus, does not show any refraining from positing the identity of the object, for Husserl its possibility can be given only when all its modes of appearance are taken into account, a possibility that lies in the infinite. As the author says, “*the goal of the perceptual process thus cannot be the adequate givenness of the object, but the closer determination of the thing in the process itself.*”

The fact that the absolute identity of the object might be attainable only by an ideal and infinite perspective does not mean that Husserl denies the possibility of knowledge. The author is clear on that point when she frames both philosophers in what she calls an *idealistic realism*. The tension between *unity and manifold* is a tension between the focus of the natural attitude on the identity of the phenomena and the relativity of *kinaesthetic*, individual and cultural horizons while the role of phenomenology is the achievement of a more balanced perspective. Objectivity in Husserl is always partial but anyway possible and progressively enriched not only at the level of internal consciousness but even through communication with others. The analysis on identity and differences (in Hegel) and unity and manifold (in Husserl) begins to show the emergence of the main thesis of this work, namely how the character of openness of Husserl’s phenomenology might radicalize Hegel’s historical development. In order to proceed to this new stage of analysis, however, it is necessary to enter into the debate regarding the interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology which, following Staehler, has been often too quickly enclosed in an idealistic framework as a consequence of misunderstanding the Husserlian concept of solipsism. The *genetic* approach, especially the one developed in *Ideas* and *Cartesian Meditations*, actually poses the possibility of the *otherness* of the other and it establishes the basis for what the author calls the historical Husserl. *Solipsism*, from her point of view, is not to be interpreted in the classical way but as a phenomenological reduction, exactly as the concept of the *epoché*, in order to clarify the how of the possibility of *otherness*. At the end of the genetic phase it eventually “*becomes accessible in its inaccessibility*” allowing the possibility of the foundation of the realm of intersubjectivity to be posed.

Hegel describes the development of the social and cultural world in the fourth chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* where the *master and slave dialectic* and the *struggle for recognition* are introduced. The contradiction is eventually resolved in a typical Hegelian movement by a process of sublation by which the two forces find a balance within a new encompassing level, allowing *Spirit* to emerge. One of the last chapters of the work is dedicated to the Hegelian interpretation of the *Antigone*

where the dialectical process is again described at the level of an ethical development. Far from psychologizing the characters, Hegel is more interested in the invariant pattern that *Antigone* and *Creon* carry on. In the struggle between the divine law and the political law an impasse is reached where neither of the two loses or wins. A reconciliation is only possible at an encompassing level, where the two compenetrates each other. This is expressed by the *Chorus*. Nothing similar appears in Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity, which never thematizes the Lifeworld as encompassing realm. Staehler states however that Husserl in his later studies, specifically the ones figuring into the *Crisis*, shows a plexus of phenomenological approaches which stand apart from the transcendental-psychological way opened by the epoché and by which an ontology of a *Lifeworld* is posited. The concept of the crisis is openly disclosed and serves as a catalyst in a recollection of the entirety of Husserl's philosophy.

European man in Husserl's terms lives in a contextual crisis that is rooted in the forgetfulness of the subject and of the Lifeworld, which are overshadowed by objective and scientific thinking. The role of philosophy is to find again a balance by the re-establishment of the subject as a real active agent of history. The role of phenomenology and its motivation, which were left suspended at the beginning of the work, are now finally explained. If the psychological-transcendental way, following the author's analyses, leads us to the threshold of the ontology, the ontological way by historical reflection shows us the necessity for a better understanding of our inner consciousness. The recovery of the active role of subjectivity and intersubjectivity allows Husserl to move from history as a pure objective science of facts to what he calls ideal-history and toward a more horizontal and culturally-constituted historical development.

Cultural worlds are described by the author as a plexus of products, norms and values and also as "a world of custom, laws and regulations which the individual needs to consider." They manifest themselves with the double nature of being established (*stiftung*), re-established and changed by man but at the same time at work as contextual constraints. There is a kind of Hegelian process in this circularity of an endless creation of new institutions and their establishment as new habitualized norms. The modern crisis can be seen as a consequence of the scientific attitude which eventually led to the forgetting of the primordial philosophy of the Greeks. The possibility of "re-inventing" history makes clear how there is an inner teleology at work in the Husserlian *ideal-history*. Goals conceived as norms and values are continuously posited anew thus offering the possibility of an open historical development in contrast with the Hegelian absolute teleology.

Staehler's work gives so many causes for reflection that it is really difficult to give a complete account of it. It is worth mentioning that her insight on the phenomenology of historical and cultural worlds is not reduced to the simple

encounter between Hegel and Husserl's phenomenology. Other authors are discussed. The concept of event by Derrida for example and Levinas's idea of an ungraspable future as something *Other* in regard to the *Sameness* of the intentional consciousness introduce a more radicalized character of *nonlinearity* to the historical development. More, a postscript is entirely dedicated to Heidegger's primacy of moods and Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility and ambiguity in the dialectical process. Not to mention Eugen Fink's different approach on the motivation for the beginning of philosophy.

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