

Fidelity to the matter and method of phenomenological reduction

(Some observations on John E. Drabinski's *Sense and Singularity* [New York: State University of New York Press, 2001])

For Classroom Purpose Only

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For Levinas, the 'matter' of phenomenological reduction is to be found in lived-experienced (*Erlebnis*) which is to be had, from a necessarily theoretical disposition (prescribed by phenomenological science), as the sense of the concrete, pre-predicative life of intentionality. It must be noted here that intentionality is the proper matter of phenomenological reduction, if only to say that intentionality localizes the otherwise assumed precedence of things themselves in terms of rendering their constitutable sense, their concreteness, to reflection. By localizing we mean the setting out of a possibility from the will to constitute it, which in phenomenological science heavenly leans toward the faculty of the intellect, a will to truth, so to speak. Intentionality is thus the proper matter of phenomenology (or phenomenological reduction) in virtue of the transparency of "actional or positional" acts of consciousness—a transparency all the more rendered to presence and recognizability owing to their dynamic and indeed transformative character in terms of summoning up the "forgotten and unsuspected horizons of things." Husserl therefore understood phenomenology as a reduction of intention to its originary power of delivering to presence or theoretical vision these forgotten horizons.

It is once claimed that Levinas agreed with Husserl that the matter of phenomenology is intentionality but later radicalized the direction of the reduction in terms of extending its trajectory. This supposes that Levinas had to start phenomenologizing with a quite different goal in mind and had to apply a different thrust appropriate to the anticipation of the path that his phenomenological project would make through the movement of its projectile, so to speak. The projectile is no less the 'Husserlian intentionality' whose target is different from the Husserlian. Instead of the 'transcendental ego' Levinas would have the "interhuman intrigue" as the target of phenomenological discovery. Rejecting Husserl's argument for the transcendental ego as the culmination of the movement of theoretical disposition from the suspension of the natural attitude into the self-discovery of the sense-bestowing power of the ego vis-à-vis the world, Levinas's next step was to pursue to its limits the immanent reductive goal of reduction that he believed suffered in the Husserlian logic of noematic structure according to which noetic intentions are pre-arranged and pre-motivated. This means that subjective intentionalities follow a transcendental logic of sense-bestowal which by virtue of the *sui generis* status of the noema cannot exceed the latter's sense. Consistent with its Cartesian bias, Husserlian phenomenology is premised on the decisive paradox (decisive from the point of view of the phenomenologist who is the ego-subject/intentionality technically performing self-reduction) that the noema is itself an intentional structure. For the noema to make sense as an

intentional structure that precedes the noetic intention whose intentionality is immediately verifiable it must itself be an intention though of a different kind, other than the empirical subjectivity that intends, hence, the transcendental ego whose intentionality can otherwise be verified by the self-constituting act of reflection. It must itself be a noetic intention and yet not a noetic intention in the empirical sense. The paradoxicality of the noema-noesis relation is thus resolved in the justification of intention as intending the *Same*.

But as already within the reduction, otherwise an operation that commits itself to suspension, the phenomenological epoche is said to be not intending the *Same* in the metaphysical sense, or in the sense of expanding itself into a transcendental reality as metaphysics is often associated with, rather it intends its self-deferral. Out of this we obtain a different sense of the same, the difference of the *Same*. This difference is the *difference* that theoretical vision makes vis-à-vis the natural attitude.

This difference bestows a sense to *Erlebnis* our fundamental awareness of which (that is, before the reduction took place) was limited in and by the natural attitude, otherwise the pre-theoretical standpoint. This is where the noema-noesis relation takes a decisive turn. The pre-theoretical disposition as a natural attitude or standpoint becomes recognizable as such after a transition into the theoretical is accomplished by the reduction. Nevertheless, it is no longer as pre-theoretical in the sense of the naïve and the naturalistic, rather as the necessary beginning of theory and vision. As a necessary point of departure for the theoretical vision, the pre-theoretic landscape of the concrete (or the concrete itself as pre-predicative) *does not resist* the theoretical look, rather it attracts the gaze of being in whose intentionality it reveals itself as concrete, as pre-predicative, as the bare content ('matter') of the presuppositions of all intentionality. The pre-predicative is re-cognized as such (the act of cognition that cannot claim to be originary, that is to say, it is cognized as an afterthought) as it existed before the reduction. It is already concrete before the epoche; however, it is the task of phenomenology to make it concrete for reflection.

Reflection makes this concrete useful for theoretical vision, for the concretion of the life of concept, for self-examination, in terms of which the theoretical standpoint confers the ego-intentionality a sense of originary difference. The theorist or the phenomenologist acquires a sense of being as the one who performs the reduction of the concrete to its useful configuration for the life of *homo philosophus*. A contemplative life is thus announced by the self-revelation of being to itself, otherwise expressed as the positive culmination of the immanent goal of reduction in self-discovery. It is on this ground of self-discovery that the philosopher acquires a meaningful sense of his or her practice of subjectivity (also, the eventuation of the difference of philosophy with other disciplines though preferably in the quiet mode of actualization) through the appropriation of the sense of difference of the *Same*, of the *concrete lived-experience*.

Needless to say the appropriation is theoretical in character. It is *this* appropriation, however, that can also indiscriminately suggest that the concrete can be lived *more concretely* through the contemplation of the theoretical horizon of the pre-predicative. In other words, the philosopher may appear as imposing a standard for living a life of the concrete, and especially at a time when the practice of subjectivity in which everyone has interest is dominated by the non-philosophical or the nemeses of the philosophical (Plato identified housekeeping and moneymaking as these nemeses) philosophy may be tempted

to impose a strict standard not only upon others wishing to take advantage of its method (who are also capable of announcing their own philosophies at the expense of philosophy itself such as the challenge that sophistry raised against philosophy) but also upon its own practice in order to differentiate it from within. The result, among others, would be the sophistication of the reductive technique, the sophisma of the philosophic techné. This is of course no longer philosophy but sophistry which emerged out of the *mise en scène* of philosophy setting out on a strict differentiation of its practice on the public ground of knowledge where it sought the legitimacy of its discipline. Philosophy's practice of subjectivity was overburdened by the need to exhibit the sophistication of its technique in the face of the threat of irrelevance. For the most part, however, philosophy was forced by the non-philosophical to justify its sense of originary difference, in terms of the originary *mise en scène* that brought philosophy into a defensive mode, by, and this is well-known in history, accusing philosophy of impiety and blasphemy. In this sense one may look at the death of Socrates as a scheme to render philosophy irrelevant as a discipline, even before it became a discipline whose method is publicly known. The accusers of Socrates made it a point that Socrates's defense of his unique practice of subjectivity would be interpreted by the public as his defense of philosophy as a discipline. After the death of Socrates philosophy is still defending its discipline even if the actual threat of the death penalty (at least in the West) no longer forms the background of its apology. The threat of absolute penalty is therefore proportional to the practice of subjectivity whose life is at stake in the jury. Thus in the absence of the death penalty philosophy defends only its discipline. Philosophy is no longer a practice of risking one's life for the right to originary difference nor is philosophy a work of originary difference anymore.

Rather it has become a rigorous phenomenology (not attributable to Husserl but to the beginnings of the codifications of philosophy starting with Aristotle) of theoretical intention to make a difference for the discipline of philosophy. Levinas is therefore right in claiming that philosophy has lost sight of the original site of reduction (love/affection—*philein*) which risked transforming philosophia into sophisma whose emphasis is upon the rigor of knowing as a path that one takes to make oneself different. The decision to test oneself against the rigors of scientia (*Wissenschaft*), of scholarship, so to speak, vis-à-vis the internal practice of one's subjectivity has far-reaching implications for philosophy in general, which started to intensify with the medieval appropriations of the essence and meaning of truth. Though much of scholasticism had leaned towards the side of the extra-theoretical, by strict phenomenological standard (by which we mean the reduction as the standard itself), the defense of faith by rational means for which scholasticism administered the curious marriage between theology and philosophy remained within the ambit of phenomenological reduction which philosophy as sophisma strictly oriented to the rigors of *scientia*, that is to say, regardless of the objective content (the 'matter') of reduction which is intentionality. The reductive endeavor of scholasticism concentrated on the methodic richness of phenomenology ignoring the intentional horizons of knowledge. One would argue that scholasticism could not be blamed in terms of pursuing reduction without the benefit of Husserl. But that is beside the point. Phenomenology is not Husserl's original discovery. The emphasis on the matter of the reduction is also not originally Husserlian.

At best, the limitations of scholasticism are attributable to the historical progress of thought. For this reason, it may be argued that the naivety of scholasticism with respect to intentionality is excusable from the standpoint of a historian, but intolerable from the point

of view of a pederast championing the cause of *philein*, the originary intentionality of philosophy in terms of a unique practice of subjectivity. This internal praxis was overshadowed by the adventitious emergence of the scientific spirit (the emphasis on rigor as the way to wisdom) that defined for the *first time* the task and nature of philosophy.

Philosophy never got to the point of defining itself until the matter of definition was introduced to it by sophisma. When philosophy started defending its discipline it is therefore no longer the *philosophia* whose intentionality was *philein*, rather one whose issue has shifted into the concern for method in service of *scientia*. Deprived of its matter, philosophy gave way to sophisma that since then started assuming the sense of originary difference on its (philosophy's) behalf. Philosophy decided to operate in the quiet power of actuality and had chosen to freely assume its new life in a sub-representational sphere if only to correct the impression, by showing its tenacious self-subsistence outside of the comfort of the academia, that it has been completely voided by the arrival of science, or by the shift of emphasis from matter into method, from the quietude of intentionality to the din of the speech and the erudite iteration of scholarship. The official philosophy, one that displaced the matter of philosophical reduction within philosophy, has come to represent the new matter of reduction in the guise of the proliferation of the reductive techniques of theoretical envisioning vis-à-vis the lived-experience. But philosophy, argued in this fashion, will never understand the concrete in terms of recalling the "forgotten and unsuspected horizons of intentionality" unless it renounces the formidable equation of the theoretical with the natural standpoint. By making the natural standpoint as the first standpoint of the theoretical vision philosophy has nothing left to offer except the task of returning that vision to the things themselves shone upon by the light of ocularity which exposes into full view the bare essential of the concrete, its fundamental receptivity to reflection which exposes the nakedness of the truth of *Erlebnis*, namely, its being ultimately reflexively potentiated.

His or her paradoxical humility notwithstanding, the philosopher (this time the erudite agent of method) attempts to justify its practice of subjectivity in terms of the rigorous phenomenology of the concrete, which in Husserlian terms amounts, as we noted previously, to the mastery of the noematic structure that precedes the noetic act of intentionality. Juxtaposed to the sense-bestowing power of the noetic, the ego-intentionality, the return-awareness of the noema by the noetic accomplishes what we may describe as noetic fidelity, faithfulness to the concrete. The method proper to this return awareness is the ultimate reduction of intentionality to its founding sense, its sense-bestowing power (*Sinnggebung*).

Notwithstanding the success of discovering the limit that the reduction has reached (a limit that serves as knowledge of how to live life as concretely as possible in light of the discovery of the sense-bestowing power of the ego, no less the desired end of self-emancipation), we can still ask the question, in light of the pursuance of reduction where it may still be pursued, in this case the reduction of the reduction itself (the cunning of reduction is what ultimately escaped Husserlian reduction)—is the discovery of *Sinnggebung* exclusive to phenomenological reduction?

If as Levinas once said that phenomenological reduction finds the originary difference that philosophy makes vis-à-vis the non-philosophical, we may further ask—is sense-bestowal the secret that philosophy has discovered? When Levinas departed from the

matter of phenomenology, and yet still faithful to its method, declared to the effect that this secret is not the actual secret of philosophy (Western philosophy) is this not also a declaration to the effect that philosophy must not betray its secret? For Levinas a certain kind of philosophizing has failed to see the secret owing to the very limitations of ocularity on which its theoretical vision depends. It may also be the case that it harbors no secret at all. It has no secret except what everyone can do given a sufficient amount of leisure time and the means to sustain a leisurely life of concept (*Begriff*)—to examine oneself *concretely*. Nonetheless, it may be argued that Husserlian reduction betrayed the secret (of the non-secret, that is, the secret that there is no truth, only being) by simply failing to reduce reduction to interminable reductions in order to prevent the secret from settling into a localizable site. For in the interminability of reduction the secret is obscured by the detailed procedurality of reflection to such an extent that the secret becomes reducible to the question—*what is the correct method?* Subsequently: *Who has the correct method?*

Nietzsche almost had the same thing in mind when he warned philosophy of the consequence of its obsession with self-awareness (*nosce te ipsum*). The philosopher's declaration of ignorance, the intended rhetoric notwithstanding, can indeed become a recipe for ruin in terms of exposing one's vulnerability, that is, one's singularity and irreducibility (all the more when it is single-mindedly rhetorically posed: isn't it that the rhetorical for strategic reasons not only conceals strength, but also, and as is more often the case, a fundamental weakness?), that is, to the gaze of the other whose singularity and irreducibility are matters to be withheld from a vision of difference, or the gaze of the philosopher whose method of seeing, and by virtue of the accusative direction of seeing, of ocularity, is, what else, the reductive, that is to say, as reductive as the supposedly non-philosophical. In the final analysis *Sinnggebung* is not exclusive to phenomenological reduction. Nor is sense-bestowal to philosophy. It goes without saying that the non-philosophical assumption of difference can compete with the difference that philosophy makes with respect to accounting for one's life in which everyone has interest, philosophers or non-philosophers.