Philosophy of Consciousness

Topic 4
Husserl’s First Cartesian Meditation
Why the Cartesian Meditations?

• In the Cartesian Meditations Husserl is introducing one of the ways he has proposed to enter into phenomenology
  • By a consideration and radicalisation of Descartes’ Meditations

• Two other ways he proposed were:
  • By a consideration of the meaning of psychology
  • By a consideration of the meaning of the life-world in the Crisis of the European Sciences

• We are looking at the Cartesian way because we have already studied Descartes’ Meditations
Introduction

• Descartes’ significance:
  • Positive science has largely ignored his attempt to ground science in the ego cogito.
  • But Descartes revolutionises philosophy, making the subject and subjectivity central.
• Since Descartes, after a period of optimism and collaborative endeavour, philosophy has become splintered into philosophies and has lost the inner coherence of a shared inquiry – in contrast the positive sciences have flourished.
• Husserl proposes we start again, by going back to Descartes’ radicalism, to see if we cannot clarify the fundamental ground that Descartes glimpsed but did not fully understand.
Meditation I: The Cartesian Overthrow

• Repeating Descartes method of doubt we overthrow (put out of action) all the convictions we have held until now.

• We are guided by the idea of an ultimately all-embracing science – not the positivistic sciences that we already possess.
  • We do not accept the findings of existing science, or its methods of logical reasoning and construction.
  • And, unlike Descartes, we do not embrace the ideal of an ultimately mathematical science (as a deductive system)
    • Descartes’ used the certainty of the cogito (I am, I exist) as an axiom upon which the rest of scientific knowledge was to be based by means of deduction.

• But this leaves us unclear as to what it could mean to ground science – and surely we need some guiding principle?
Meditation I: Genuine Science

- Husserl wants us to ‘immerse’ ourselves in scientific ‘striving’ in order to ‘clearly and distinctly’ see what is being ‘aimed at’

- He has an idea of genuine science that is guiding him
  - Genuine science is concerned with truth – i.e. with making judgments whose truth can be shown or demonstrated (grounded)
  - Grounding in truth occurs in cognitions that show a judgment agrees with the evidence
  - Judging is meaning that such and such exists, evidence is a having of the state of affairs itself that the judgment judges

- Scientific knowledge consists of grounded judgments – judgments that can be freely re-actualised by means of repeatable acts of grounding (i.e. of having evidence)
Meditation I: Evidence

• ‘Evidence is, in an *extremely broad sense*, an “experiencing” of something that is, and is thus; it is precisely a mental seeing of something itself’ [p. 12].

• ‘*Perfect evidence* and its correlate, *pure and genuine truth*, are given as ideas lodged in the striving for knowledge, for fulfilment of one’s meaning intention’ [p. 12].

• ‘Science looks for truths that are valid, and remain so, *once and for all and for everyone*; accordingly it seeks verifications of a new kind, verifications carried through to the end’ [p. 12].

• However, science, at least in so far as it is concerned with judgments pertaining to an empirical or external world, is ‘obliged to modify its “truths” again and again’ while ‘it nevertheless follows the idea of absolute or scientifically genuine truth; and accordingly reconciles itself to an infinite horizon of approximations, tending towards the idea’ [p. 12].
Meditation I: The First Methodological Principle

It is plain that I, as someone beginning philosophically, since I am striving toward the presumptive end, genuine science, must neither make nor go on accepting any judgment as scientific that I have not derived from evidence, from "experiences" in which the affairs and affair-complexes in question are present to me as "they themselves". Indeed, even then I must at all times reflect on the pertinent evidence; I must examine its "range" and make evident to myself how far that evidence, how far its "perfection", the actual giving of the affairs themselves, extends. Where this is still wanting, I must not claim any final validity, but must account my judgment as, at best, a possible intermediate stage on the way to final validity.

Because the sciences aim at predications that express completely and with evident fitness what is beheld pre-predicatively, it is obvious that I must be careful also about this aspect of scientific evidence. Owing to the instability and ambiguity of common language and its much too great complacency about completeness of expression, we require, even where we use its means of expression, a new legitimation of significations by orienting them according to accrued insights, and a fixing of words as expressing the significations thus legitimated. That too we account as part of our normative principle of evidence, which we shall apply consistently from now on [pp. 13-14].
Meditation I: Perfect and Imperfect Evidence

• Pre-scientific experience generally provides us only with imperfect or incomplete evidence:
  • one-sidedness, relative obscurity and indistinctness, infectedness with unfulfilled components, expectant and attendant meanings

• Perfect evidence requires further sequences of harmonious experience that fulfill the expectant and attendant meanings:
  • E.g., my visual experience of a table only shows one side of the table, whereas I have expectant and attendant meanings concerning the hidden sides of the table, its interior, its weight, the texture and temperature of its surface, that could only be fulfilled on the basis of the harmonious (lawful, regular) unfolding of further experiences of walking round the table, looking at it more closely, touching it, lifting it, etc.
  • Even then there is a possible infinity of further ways I could investigate the table (e.g. with an electron microscope...) meaning absolute perfection of knowledge (in this case) is only an ideal to which I strive
Meditation I: Apodictic Evidence

Any evidence is a grasping of something itself that is, or is thus, a grasping in the mode "it itself", with full certainty of its being, a certainty that accordingly excludes every doubt. But it does not follow that full certainty excludes the conceivability that what is evident could subsequently become doubtful, or the conceivability that being could prove to be illusion - indeed, sensuous experience furnishes us with cases where that happens. Moreover, this open possibility of becoming doubtful, or of nonbeing, in spite of evidence, can always be recognized in advance by critical reflection on what the evidence in question does. An apodictic evidence, however, is not merely certainty of the affairs or affair-complexes (states-of-affairs) evident in it; rather it discloses itself, to a critical reflection, as having the signal peculiarity of being at the same time the absolute unimaginableness (inconceivability) of their non-being, and thus excluding in advance every doubt as “objectless”, empty. Furthermore the evidence of that critical reflection likewise has the dignity of being apodictic [...]. And the same is true of every critical reflection at a higher level [pp. 15-16].
Meditation I: Non-Apodictic Certainty

- Husserl has a notion of certainty as ‘a grasping of something itself that is, or is thus, a grasping in the mode "it itself", with full certainty of its being, a certainty that accordingly excludes every doubt.’
- Then he says, even though we are certain of the being of what is grasped we could still conceive that we are under an illusion – does this not mean we are not certain after all?
- Here Husserl is indicating the phenomenological fact that we do, in fact, experience the certainty of the being of the things that appear before us now in the room. He is speaking of a certain attribution of meaning that determines how these objects are experienced – one that we do not choose according to our whim.
- If something becomes questionable for us – such as when the bird we experienced as being in the tree turns into a twig moving in the wind – then we can observe this attribution of certainty in the moment it is withdrawn (note: Husserl would not speak of attribution but of intentionality).
Meditation I: 
The Phenomenon of the World

On the Cartesian basis of starting with apodictic evidence Husserl suspends his acceptance of the being of the world: [...] we now have neither a science that we accept nor a world that exists for us. Instead of simply existing for us - that is, being accepted naturally by us in our experiential believing in its existence - the world is for us only something that claims being. Moreover, that affects the intramundane existence of all other Egos, so that rightly we should no longer speak communicatively, in the plural. Other men than I, and brute animals, are data of experience for me only by virtue of my sensuous experience of their bodily organisms; and, since the validity of this experience too is called in question, I must not use it. Along with other Egos, naturally, I lose all the formations pertaining to sociality and culture. In short, not just corporeal Nature but the whole concrete surrounding life-world is for me, from now on, only a phenomenon of being, instead of something that is [pp. 18-19].
Meditation I: Non-Intuitive Phenomena

[The world] goes on appearing, as it appeared before; the only difference is that I, as reflecting philosophically, no longer keep in effect (no longer accept) the natural believing in existence involved in experiencing the world - though that believing too is still there and grasped by my noticing regard. The same is true of all the processes of meaning that, in addition to the world-experiencing ones, belong to my lifestream: the non-intuitive processes of meaning objects, the judgings, valuings, and decidings, the processes of setting ends and willing means, and all the rest, in particular the position-takings necessarily involved in them all when I am in the natural and non-reflective attitude since precisely these position-takings always presuppose the world, i.e., involve believing in its existence. Here too the philosophically reflective Ego's abstention from position-takings, his depriving them of acceptance, does not signify their disappearance from his field of experience [...] everything meant in such accepting or positing processes of consciousness (the meant judgment, theory, value, end, or whatever it is) is still retained completely but with the acceptance-modification, "mere phenomenon" [pp. 19-20].
Meditation I: The Phenomenological Epochē

This universal depriving of acceptance, this "inhibiting" or "putting out of play" of all positions taken toward the already given Objective world and, in the first place, all existential positions (those concerning being, illusion, possible being, being likely, probable, etc.), - or, as it is also called, this "phenomenological epochē" and "parenthesizing" of the Objective world - therefore does not leave us confronting nothing. On the contrary we gain possession of something by it; and what we (or, to speak more precisely, what I, the one who is meditating) acquire by it is my pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up, and everything meant in them, purely as meant in them: the universe of "phenomena" in the (particular and also the wider) phenomenological sense. The epochē can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me that is to say, is accepted by me in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like. Descartes, as we know, indicated all that by the name cogito. The world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious cogito. It gets its whole sense, universal and specific, and its acceptance as existing, exclusively from such cogitationes. In these my whole world-life goes on, including my scientifically inquiring and grounding life. By my living, by my experiencing, thinking, valuing, and acting, I can enter no world other than the one that gets its sense and acceptance or status in and from me, myself [pp. 20-21].
Meditation I: Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction

If I put myself above all this life and refrain from doing any believing that takes "the" world straightforwardly as existing - if I direct my regard exclusively to this life itself, as consciousness of "the" world - I thereby acquire myself as the pure ego, with the pure stream of my cogitationes.

Thus the being of the pure ego and his cogitationes, as a being that is prior in itself, is antecedent to the natural being of the world - the world of which I always speak, the one of which I can speak. Natural being is a realm whose existential status is secondary; it continually presupposes the realm of transcendental being. The fundamental phenomenological method of transcendental epochē, because it leads back to this realm, is called transcendental-phenomenological reduction [p. 21].
Meditation I: “I” am not a piece of the world

This Ego, with his Ego-life, who necessarily remains for me, by virtue of such epochē, is not a piece of the world; and if he says, “I exist, ego cogito,” that no longer signifies, "I, this man, exist.” No longer am I the man who, in natural self-experience, finds himself as a man and who, with the abstractive restriction to the pure contents of "internal" or purely psychological self-experience, finds his own pure "mens sive animus sive intellectus"; nor am I the separately considered psyche itself. Apperceived in this "natural" manner, I and all other men are themes of sciences that are Objective, or positive, in the usual sense: biology, anthropology, and also (as included in these) psychology. The psychic life that psychology talks about has in fact always been, and still is, meant as psychic life in the world. Obviously the same is true also of one's own psychic life, which is grasped and considered in purely internal experience. But phenomenological epochē […] inhibits acceptance of the Objective world as existent, and thereby excludes this world completely from the field of judgment. In so doing, it likewise inhibits acceptance of any Objectively apperceived facts, including those of internal experience. Consequently for me, the meditating Ego who, standing and remaining in the attitude of epochē, posits exclusively himself as the acceptance-basis of all Objective acceptances and bases, there is no psychological Ego and there are no psychic phenomena in the sense proper to psychology, i.e., as components of psychophysical men [pp. 25-26].
Meditation I:  The Transcendental Ego

The Objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me - this world, with all its Objects, I said, derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, from me as the transcendental Ego, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoche [...].

Just as the reduced Ego is not a piece of the world, so, conversely, neither the world nor any worldly Object is a piece of my Ego, to be found in my conscious life as a really inherent part of it, as a complex of data of sensation or a complex of acts. This "transcendence" is part of the intrinsic sense of anything worldly, despite the fact that anything worldly necessarily acquires all the sense determining it, along with its existential status, exclusively from my experiencing, my objectivating, thinking, valuing, or doing, at particular times - notably the status of an evidently valid being is one it can acquire only from my own evidences, my grounding acts. If this "transcendence", which consists in being non-really included, is part of the intrinsic sense of the world, then, by way of contrast, the Ego himself, who bears within him the world as an accepted sense and who, in turn, is necessarily presupposed by this sense, is legitimately called transcendental, in the phenomenological sense. Accordingly the philosophical problems arising from this correlation are called transcendental-philosophical [pp. 26-27].