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Radical *Besinnung* as a method for phenomenological critique

Abstract. The paper discusses Husserl's method of historical reflection, radical *Besinnung*, as defined and used in *Formale und transzendente Logik* (1929). Whereas *Formal and Transcendental Logic* introduces and displays Husserl's usage of *Besinnung* in the context of the exact sciences, the paper seeks to develop it as a more general critical method with which to approach any rational goal-directed activity. Husserl defines *Besinnung* as a method that enables understanding agents and their actions by explicating agents' typically implicit goals. It leads to the inclusion of historical-teleological activities as part of Husserl's natural understanding of the world. The transcendental reflection radicalizes *Besinnung* by clarifying the kinds of evidence sought for in activities and then suggesting revisions to the concepts and principles used. The result is inner critique, which means that the activities are criticized against the norms that arise from reflection on these activities themselves, and not from a comparison with external standards or measures.

Keywords: *Besinnung*, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critique, reflection, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, *Crisis*

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Introduction

Husserl famously explains the phenomenological attitude by means of the natural attitude. The natural attitude is characterized by a ‘*Generalthesis*,’ a general positing of existence that gives us the naïve certainty that the world exists. In the epoché, the natural attitude changes into the phenomenological one, in which the *Generalthesis* is interrupted; the natural attitude is thus ‘bracketed,’ as Husserl puts it, so that we can examine how the world is given to us. The phenomenological reduction thus reveals the ‘conceptual’ clothing of the world, and thereby reveals how the world and everything in it comes to be constituted.

In the *epoché*, the givenness of the world of natural attitude is examined. In *Ideas II*, Husserl explains how the phenomenological attitude helps to find additional, different kinds of attitudes, as elaborated, for example, by Andrea Staiti (2014). The task of phenomenology is, then, a study of the constitution of the various worlds given in different kinds of attitudes.¹ The first aim of this paper is to argue that *Besinnung*, explicitly defined as the method used in *Formale und transzendente Logik* (1929), gives an access to a world, namely a teleological-historical world, analogous to the worlds given by various other natural attitudes. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, *Besinnung* thematizes specifically the world of the exact sciences as the scientists find it in their natural theoretical attitude.

The other aim of this paper is then to show how *Besinnung* and transcendental phenomenology are connected to each other so as to make phenomenological philosophy critical. Transcendental phenomenology is a metaphysically, and *a fortiori* also normatively, neutral method: the credo is that its task is only to describe, not to postulate, reduce, nor criticize.²

However, especially in his later texts, Husserl makes stronger and stronger normative claims to the extent that in the *Crisis*, written in the 1930s, he claims that philosophers are functionaries of humanity (Hua VI, §7). In the midst of a host of crises (in science, culture, psychology, rationality, humanity, and existence), philosophy is called to take the lead and assume the responsibility for the fate of humanity.³ Husserl's critical endeavor increases correlatively with his emphasis on historicity, both of which have been considered foreign to transcendental philosophy in general, and the descriptive transcendental phenomenological method in particular (see for example Carr 1970, xxxi-xxxviii; 1974). Yet Husserl is far from renouncing the phenomenological method and the transcendental dimension accessed by it in the *Crisis*. Smaranda Aldea (2016) has shown how the tension between the two approaches can be solved in phenomenology by elaborating on the role of transcendental eidetics in Husserl's approach. In a similar spirit, in this article, I will explain how the relationship between *Besinnung* and transcendental phenomenology makes possible a critical approach to understanding human action, in which the critique is not based on external principles, but arises from a consideration of activities, along with their goals and purposes.

I have elaborated on the central role of *Besinnung* in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and for Husserl's view of mathematics in detail elsewhere (Hartimo 2018, 2021).⁴ The purpose of this article is more general: I hope to show how an explication of *Besinnung* along the lines proposed here yields a re-reading of Husserl's philosophy as a critical enterprise – one that may find useful applications both within and without phenomenological and/or mathematical circles. In §1, I will focus on the way in which transcendental phenomenology can be construed as a study of correlation, and how this understanding of the correlation necessitates an elaboration of the method(s) with which to address the objective end(s) of the correlation. In §2, I will briefly

explain Husserl's background in the 1920s debates about psychology, and how Husserl's *Besinnung* is designed to respond to them. This discussion will also situate *Besinnung* within the hermeneutic tradition and will clarify the precise sense in which Husserl's approach is hermeneutical. The discussion should be regarded as complementary to, say, Staiti's discussion of neo-Kantian philosophers, especially Dilthey and Simmel (2014). I will draw attention to the fact that in his usage of *Besinnung*, Husserl's view bears the greatest resemblance to that of Edouard Spranger, who was Dilthey's student. In §3, I will explicate Husserl's notion of 'radikale *Besinnung*' as Husserl uses it in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. It is my contention here that Husserl's transcendental phenomenological clarification of the goals and concepts used in formal logic renders *Besinnung* 'radical' insofar as it not only aims at describing human action, but also entails revisionary, critical aims seeking to make these goals and concepts *genuine* [*echt*]. The last section, §4, discusses the nature of the resulting composite method that combines *Besinnung* and transcendental phenomenology. For cultural critique, both methods are needed: while *Besinnung* aims at understanding actions and practices in terms of their historically developed goals or purposes, transcendental phenomenology has the task of clarifying these goals, explicating the assumed presuppositions, and removing the possible confusions related to them. Considered individually, the critical potential of both methods easily goes unnoticed, but, in combination, they yield *radical Besinnung*: an explicitly critical evaluation of the existing practices.

1. Transcendental phenomenology as the study of correlation and the role of *Besinnung* as natural attitude toward intentional history

Husserl repeatedly describes transcendental phenomenology as a study of correlation. However, without further specification, this characterization is ambiguous due to the variety of correlations found in his views: any act is correlated to its object; an act of perceiving is correlated with what is perceived; ‘noesis’ is correlated with the ‘noema,’ and so the act of constitution is correlated with the constituted sense. However, in the following passage from the *Crisis*, Husserl explains that investigation of the correlation between the experienced object and its manners of givenness is the main task of transcendental phenomenology:

[t]he first breakthrough of this universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness (which occurred during work on my *Logical Investigations* around 1898) affected me so deeply that my whole subsequent life-work has been dominated by the task of systematically elaborating on this a priori of correlation. (Hua VI, 170n./166n.)

In this passage, Husserl refers to the correlation between the objective world and our subjective ways of constituting our sense of the world. This means that transcendental phenomenology examines the way in which the objective world is given to us. Consequently, phenomenology is about the phenomena as they are naturally experienced ‘out there’ in the world, and not about some independent realm generated by the phenomenological reduction. The natural attitude and its description of the world provide the transcendental phenomenological attitude with the ‘data’ on which it reflects.

The natural attitude is the naïve attitude in which we find ourselves originally within our experiences. The natural attitude gives us the world “prior to any ‘theory’” (Hua III, §30), or prior to any meta-philosophical doctrine or principle. Hence, natural attitude does not recognize itself as a specific limited attitude (Hua IV, §49d). The world of the natural attitude is what we take the world to be when we go about our lives prior to philosophizing about it.⁵ Thus, the

phenomenological attitude looks at the world given to us in the natural attitude and tries to make philosophical sense of it. In the natural attitude, one tries to make sense of the world in terms of common sense and various other more specified attitudes (such as, naturalistic, personal, and aesthetic attitudes). Alternatively, in the phenomenological attitude, one is able to thematize the various attitudes and clarify how we have constituted the worlds given in these various other attitudes. The difference between the two attitudes lies in their points of view.

Describing transcendental phenomenology as a study of the givenness of the objective world presupposes a prior conception of the objective world. Husserl's account of it develops considerably from his discovery of correlation in 1898. In the *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901), Husserl's analysis is restricted to logic (understood in a rather specific way as a theory of science). The idea of logic is first discussed in the *Prolegomena*. In the subsequent six investigations, the idea of logic is subjected to descriptive psychological, epistemological or phenomenological analyses. In *Ideas I*, the objective end of the correlation is the world (i.e., the object of the natural attitude) or the object of the natural theoretical attitude (i.e., the world(s) of sciences). For example, here Husserl points out that the world includes objects of our theoretical investigation of various forms and levels, such as the arithmetical attitude and the world of arithmetic (Hua III, §28). These worlds and the phenomena pertaining to them are the 'same phenomena' that are examined in the phenomenological attitude so as to find out how they are constituted (Hua III, 3/xvii). In *Ideas II*, Husserl further distinguishes among theoretical, valuing, and practical attitudes (Hua IV, §§3, 5) – all species of the natural attitude insofar as they are all naïve and unreflective. The practical attitude is a personalistic attitude, which is our natural attitude when "we live with one another, talk to one another, shake hands with one another in greeting, or are related to one another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse

and discussion” (Hua IV, §49e). In the personalistic attitude, persons are related to their intentional objects by relations of motivation rather than causality (Hua IV, §50).⁶ These different attitudes give us different kinds of worlds. Obviously, these worlds are not separate, constructed worlds, but different kinds of cognitive standpoints, or ‘stances’ with respect to the same world, rather like the same flower can be viewed from the point of view of botany, but also as an object of aesthetic appreciation (Staiti 2014, Ch. 3).

In *Ideas II*, Husserl speaks about empathetic understanding of the life of other egos (§51) and discusses the role of empathy in general, but it is only in the later *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) that he properly discusses empathetic understanding of the purposes or goals that other agents aim at in their activities. In *Ideas II*, Husserl mentions the scientific, aesthetic, ethical, or other aims that may be set by an individual or a social subjectivity (Hua IV, §51), and also mentions goal-directed activities (Hua IV, §55), but his view of the human world is not yet explicitly teleologico-historical, as it is in his later writings. In these latter works, Husserl’s analyses of the human world also include accomplishments of individual people who work toward realizing certain goals that they typically inherit from their predecessors. In summary, then, we can see that as his career progressed, Husserl’s analyses of the world of the natural attitude became more and more nuanced and differentiated, finally developing to include the teleological-historical world prevalent in Husserl’s writings especially in the 1930s.⁷

My main claim in this paper is this: that to account for the teleologico-historical world(s), Husserl needed another attitude or, better yet, a method, namely *Besinnung*.⁸ Accordingly, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), Husserl introduced the methodological concept of ‘*Besinnung*’ to account for people’s historically formed goals and aims: “*Besinnung* signifies

nothing but the attempt actually to produce the sense ‘itself,’ ..., it is the attempt to convert the ‘intensive sense’ ... the sense “vaguely floating before us” in our unclear aiming, into the fulfilled, the clear, sense, and thus to procure for it the evidence of its clear possibility.” (Hua XVII, 13/9)

Here Husserl *defines Besinnung* as a kind of reflection with which the ‘intensive senses,’ or ‘goal-senses’ of the sciences are explicated. As it later turns out in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, these ‘intensive senses’ are the goals or aims people set for themselves, whether implicitly or explicitly. The word ‘sense’ [*Sinn*] thus acquires a meaning that refers, beyond a sentence meaning, to the purpose or a goal of an activity. *Besinnung* thus aims to understand the purpose of the activity in question. The awareness of the goal of the practice gives a sense of purpose for the agent, hence *Besinnung* has ‘existential’ implications. Ordinarily, we are not necessarily explicitly aware of the purpose of our activities. *Besinnung* is an attempt to explicate what is typically only ‘vaguely floating before us,’ thus gaining clarity with respect to the ‘goal-sense’ or purpose of the activity in question. What is particularly interesting is that in order to find out about mathematicians’ goals, Husserl claims, one should stand in, or enter, “a community of empathy with the scientists” [Mit den Wissenschaftlern in Einfühlungsgemeinschaft stehend oder tretend] (Hua XVII, 13/9). Husserl’s method thus implies an imperative to be attentive to what *others* are trying to do.

Like the natural attitude, *Besinnung* as such has nothing to do with transcendental attitude.⁹ As Staiti (2014, 175) points out, Husserl distinguishes between the historical world as a subjective achievement and the transcendental subjectivity whose workings give rise to the constitution of such a world. However, in the end of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl ‘transcendentalizes’ *Besinnung* by raising transcendental questions about the nature of inquiring

reason itself (Hua XVII, §101). This takes him ultimately to transcendental or phenomenological *Besinnung* (ibid., §§101-105) and the general problems of transcendental phenomenology, such as intersubjectivity and time-consciousness. On this level, Husserl's aim is explicitly to *understand* the world and the cooperating and creative human beings in it (ibid., 282/275); he does not aim to criticize them. However, insofar as one wants to engage in the phenomenology of culture, science, mathematics, or of any other historical-teleological accomplishments of humankind, one has to stay on a level on which one can identify the activity in question and distinguish it from other such activities. On such a level, 'natural' *Besinnung* is needed, and, on such a level, Husserl's method is explicitly critical (not only in the Kantian sense in examining the conditions of possibility, but also in the sense of aiming at a revision of practices, as we will see in §4). On such a level, Husserl's phenomenology is intimately and urgently connected to the affairs of the world. Here, *Besinnung* enables and obligates the transcendental phenomenologist to critique the existing norms governing human culture.

To sum up, *Besinnung* is a hermeneutic endeavor to understand the purposes of others' (including one's own) intentional activities within their historical nexus. It is hermeneutical in particular in the sense that it aims to *understand* the activity in terms of its purpose (as opposed to giving a mechanistic explanation, cf. the next section of this paper). *Besinnung*, like the natural attitudes discussed in *Ideas I*, thus gives us a grasp of the objective end of the correlation. The world it gives is the teleologico-historical world, which includes the goals and purposes of people's practices. These goals are not necessarily realized or even realizable.

Husserl's account of logic in the *Prolegomena* serves as a good example of this. In the *Prolegomena*, Husserl does not merely describe the mathematicians' view of logic; instead, he engages in a description of the *idea* of logic. Importantly, Husserl's account of logic is a

normative account: it is a description of what mathematicians think logic *should* be like. Thus, for example, Husserl describes the idea of logic to be a theory of theories, something which is only partially realized in various existing theories such as Riemann's theory of manifolds, Cantor's set theory, Lie's theory of transformation groups, Grassmann's theory of extensions, and Hamilton's theory of quaternions. According to Husserl, none of these theories manages to capture the ideal perfectly (Hua XVIII, §69). For him, mathematics is a goal-directed activity aiming at something that has not yet been achieved.¹⁰ Similarly, Husserl's *Crisis* description of Galilean mathematized nature is a description of a set of norms that guide scientists. Scientists did not actually view nature as a mathematical manifold, but such an ideal guided their conception of rationality and of what the world should be like if it were rationally conceived.

2. Teleological vs. mechanistic explanations in the humanities and biology in the 1920s

Husserl's development toward considering teleological history appears to be tied to general developments in the human sciences and the philosophical discourse concerning them after World War I. Husserl, as we know from a letter to Mahnke in 1927, claims to have been strongly influenced by Dilthey, having formulated the first synthesis between his own and Dilthey's attempts already in 1904-1905 (HuaDok III, 459-460). Husserl's indebtedness to Dilthey, and also to Simmel, has been discussed elsewhere (e.g., Staiti 2014). However, Husserl explicitly introduced *Besinnung* as a method only in the 1920s, which suggests that Dilthey alone was not enough to inspire him to do so. In this section, I wish to draw attention to one potentially important figure for Husserl's development, namely the psychologist Eduard Spranger, a disciple of Dilthey's, who used *Besinnung* in a way that resembles Husserl's approach. In a book we know Husserl had read entitled *Lebensformen: Geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie und Ethik*

der Persönlichkeit (1921), Spranger distinguished between two kinds of psychology: natural scientific and human scientific psychology. An example of the former is the psychology of elements (*die Psychologie der Elemente*), which examines the elements of psychic activity without attempting to see them as parts of larger wholes. Natural scientific psychology examines, for example, representations (*Vorstellungen*), feelings (*Gefühle*), and desires (*Begehungen*) as meaningless (*sinnloses*) material (Spranger 1921, 19). In contrast, human scientific psychology (*die geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*] takes into account the peculiarity of the psychic formations as they belong to meaningful human life. In this kind of psychology, the historical world is understood through the totalities that make human activities meaningful.

The starting point of the humanistic psychology is the totality of the spiritual structure. As structure, we understand a totality of activities; as activities, the realization of the objective valuations. Now, however, the spiritual total structure is meaningfully divided into sub-structures, e.g., the structure of knowledge, the structure of technical work, the structure of the specifically religious consciousness. (Spranger 1921, 18)

Some years later, Karl Bühler explains that such humanistic psychology was originally founded by Dilthey already in 1894 in his *Ideas Concerning a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology* (*Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie*, 1894) (Bühler 1927, 18). Be that as it may, the description of the human scientific world through totalities of human structures is, for Spranger as well as for Husserl, still within the limits of the natural attitude. The meaningfulness of the experiences is not a theoretical construction or a meta-philosophical postulation. The claim is that in ordinary life, we spontaneously see phenomena as meaningful prior to theorizing about the phenomena. In the words of Spranger, in a passage which Husserl marked with a horizontal line:

... however, I emphasize that nothing in the subsequent pages is merely speculative or merely constructed: the classification is based on the faithful daily observation of real life, whose contents one cannot philosophize about without engaging with them in deed and with deep devotion and the dealing with history in which the responsible best life is rooted. (Spranger 1921, vii)

Spranger thus held that his human scientific approach was based on faithful daily observation, which suggests something like Husserl's natural theoretical attitude towards people's endeavors. The attitude of faithful daily observation is natural because it describes our common sense attitude toward other people's activities. It is theoretical, because it involves an effort to achieve a correct (faithful) understanding of them.

In biological writings the vitalists defended a similar approach during the 1920s. In a book written by Adolf Meyer entitled *Das Wesen der antiken Naturwissenschaft mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Aristotelismus in der modernen Biologie*, which Husserl likewise read, vitalism was identified with an Aristotelian, teleological approach (Meyer 1929, 9). In general, and somewhat roughly put, the humanities as well as biology, in the 1920s, were divided according to whether they took their subject matter as '*sinnlos Erlebnismaterialien*' or whether life was regarded as '*sinnerfüllten Leben*.' In terms of explanation, the debate was among those who sought for mechanistic explanations as opposed to those who sought for teleological understanding of the subject matter. Husserl's usage of *Besinnung* in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* thus appears to be his way of appropriating the human scientific, teleological approach to the exact sciences. Like Spranger, Husserl approaches the phenomena as they are given in ordinary experience. In ordinary experience, we normally understand people as having goals, aims, and values. This is also the heart of Husserl's view of intentional history. Human history in this ordinary sense tells the story of purposeful people who create, re-create, and aim to realize

the goals or the ideals that give their activities and their lives the sense that they have. The task of *Besinnung* is to make these goals explicit.

3. Radical *Besinnung* in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*

In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), after having defined ‘*Besinnung*’ or sense-investigation, as Dorion Cairns has translated the term, Husserl specifies that *Besinnung* should be ‘radical’ *Besinnung*, which implies critique of the scientists’ activities to find out whether these activities are genuine. He writes:

Radical *Besinnung*, as such, is at the same time criticism for the sake of original clarification. Here original clarification means shaping the sense anew, not merely filling in a delineation that is already determinate and structurally articulated beforehand” ... “original *Besinnung* signifies a combination of determining more precisely the vague predelineation, distinguishing the prejudices that derive from associational overlappings, and cancelling those prejudices that conflict with the clear sense-fulfilment – in a word, then: critical discrimination between the genuine and the spurious. (Hua XVII, 14/10)

The notion of radicality with regard to *Besinnung* makes the latter evaluative and requires reflection on what the exact scientists should do, that is, reflection on what would be the genuine goal of their activities.¹¹ In order to make *Besinnung* radical, Husserl combines it with a transcendental phenomenological point of view.

In the first part of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl explains in detail how this takes place regarding the exact sciences. Husserl introduces *Besinnung* to understand the exact scientists’ ultimate goals. This presupposes excavating the history of formal sciences, from the ancients onwards, in the attempt to capture the ‘point’ of these sciences and how these goals are situated within the tradition of the formal sciences. The result is his view of formal logic that is

characterized by two normative aims: *non-contradictoriness* and *truth*. In other words, it is an examination of mathematicians' and logicians' epistemic values as well as more specific normative goals.

Transcendental logic (i.e., the transcendental phenomenological examination of formal logic), discussed in the second part of the work, brings Husserl to examine the kinds of evidence connected to these goals. Husserl's transcendental reflections showed that pure mathematics is guided by what he calls *Evidenz* of distinctness [*Deutlichkeit*]. In contrast, logic, aiming at critically verified judgments, aims at having the objects themselves in the *Evidenz* of clarity [*Klarheit*].¹²

Clarification and reflection on these different kinds of evidence will then take Husserl to criticize the basic concepts of the sciences and to uncover different kinds of presuppositions of logic.

Transcendental logic reveals that mathematicians and logicians are not always clear about what they are doing, and, consequently, 'internal shiftings of intentionality' may lead to equivocations (Hua XVII, §70a):

Every productive doing involves intention and actualization. One can consider this doing itself and what it involves, and assure oneself of the identity between its purpose and the actualization that fulfils its purpose. In naïve intending and doing, the aiming can shift, as it can in a naïve repetition of that activity and in any other going back to something previously striven for and attained. Turning reflectively from the only themes given straightforwardly (which may become importantly shifted) to the activity constituting them with its aiming and fulfilment – the activity that is hidden ... throughout the naïve doing and only now becomes a theme in its own right – we examine that activity after the fact. That is to say, we *examine the evidence* awakened by our reflection, *we ask it what it was aiming at and what it acquired*; and, in the evidence belonging to a higher level, we identify and fix, or we trace, the possible variations owing to vacillations of theme that had previously gone unnoticed, and distinguish the corresponding aimings and actualizations, - in other words, the shifting processes of forming concepts that pertain to logic. (Hua XVII, §69)

This passage captures the main idea of the transcendental logic. It is to turn from the straightforward, natural attitude to reflecting on the way it is constituted. This reflection clarifies the shifts that lead to problematic verbal equivocations. Once the transcendental phenomenology has revealed and clarified these confusions, the phenomenological philosopher may correct such equivocations (Hua XVII, §70a). Thus, Husserl declares explicitly that the transcendental logic has a critical aim: “[...] that such evidence – evidence of every sort - should be reflectively considered, reshaped, analyzed, purified, and improved; and that afterwards it can be, and ought to be, taken as an exemplary pattern, a norm.” (Hua XVII, §69)

These clarified kinds of *Evidenz* are then taken as a norm for subsequent inquiry. Critical reflection on the kinds of evidence sought in logic and mathematics led Husserl to distinguish between three different kinds of evidence and, consequently, between the three levels of logic (grammar, non-contradiction, and truth), and respectively three different modes of empty expectant intention and of fulfilment (Hua XVII, §70a).¹³ These clarifications are normative; they suggest revisions of existing practices. This critique results in a “concomitant fixing of terminology” so that the concepts may then persist “as acquisitions in the realm of habit” (Hua XVII, §70b). The phenomenological philosopher is thus supposed to fix the concepts used in the existing practices. The ultimate purpose of transcendental phenomenology is thus to criticize and clarify the fundamental concepts of sciences so that they accord with the clarified normative aims. The revised concepts should then be adopted so that their use becomes habitual in scientific practices. Thus, Husserl’s ultimate aim is to revise scientific practices and transcendental logic is assigned the task of seeking “the pure essential norms of science in all its essential formations, to give the sciences fundamental guidance thereby and to make possible for

them genuineness in shaping their methods and in rendering an account of every step.” (Hua XVII, 3/3)

For it to be able to give the sciences the necessary guidance, transcendental logic has to rely on prior *Besinnung* of the goals and aims of the sciences. This ties phenomenological critique to the reality of scientific practices (see Hartimo 2020). Transcendental logic then examines these goals and their presuppositions so as to find out whether they are genuine (*echt*), to use Husserl’s term. The primary aims of transcendental logic are to sort out conceptual confusions and to ensure that the ‘points’ of the activities, found out by means of *Besinnung*, make genuine sense.

Transcendental logic thus reveals and clarifies what mathematics and logic should aim at and should be about. It thus radicalizes Husserl’s *Besinnung* in the sense that it aims not only to understand scientific practices but also to evaluate and revise them.

4. Phenomenology as critique

Husserl thus uses *Besinnung* to explicate the goal-senses that direct and motivate the scientists’ work. However, its use is not limited to science, but it is a method with which to evaluate any rational, goal-directed activity. It is a hermeneutical method in attempting to understand the activities as goal-directed doings. Transcendental phenomenology, in turn, reveals the kinds of evidence and the presuppositions these activities exhibit. Together these two methods enable the philosopher to engage in inner critique, that is, critique on the basis of the reflection on these activities themselves instead through a comparison with some external standards or measures. Using these both methods, the philosopher may suggest revisions to the activities to correct them. This will take place by raising transcendental questions about straightforward goal-

directed activities. In the transcendental attitude, the constitution of senses and goals revealed by *Besinnung* are studied in their intentional historicity. They are typically sedimented in our consciousness as habitual beliefs that we have learned from previous generations. In transcendental analysis, these implicit presuppositions are made explicit so that their ‘genuineness’ can be evaluated. The role of transcendental phenomenology is thus to provide an alternative point of view to the results of *Besinnung* so that, in combination, the two methods yield suggestions for revision and renewal of our goals and concepts, and eventually practices.

Transcendental phenomenology does not provide us with an incorrigible foundation with which to criticize activities. The reason is that transcendental phenomenology offers nothing more than an alternative point of view from which we can examine what is given in the natural attitude.

Hence, it includes everything, even the false ideals that keep us captive in the natural attitude.

They are sedimented in our consciousness in passive layers that are then clarified in transcendental phenomenology. Once clarified they can be revised. The virtue of transcendental phenomenology is the way in which it provides a point of view from which we can hope to notice the one-sidedness of some of our concepts and goals. It enables looking at them from outside the naïve natural attitude, hence in relation to other goals, to evidences, and to the life-world, but without fabricating an artificial external measure of objectivity. This reflection is never finished: there is no ideal state or mechanism that could conclusively settle the correctness of our thought.

In the *Crisis*, Husserl presents philosophers as ‘functionaries of mankind’ who engage in *Selbst-Besinnung* and *Rückbesinnung* of the sense of modern rationality. In short, this means explicating and renewing the original goals that determine the modern project, which precedes us and yet is given to us as *our* project. Hence *Besinnung* takes on the prefixes ‘*Selbst*’ and ‘*Rück*.’

The task of philosophy thus understood is to explicate and evaluate the normative commitments, goals, and values that we have inherited from the previous generations. Explicating them brings them ‘to light,’ so that they can be questioned. The ultimate aim is to free us from unexamined normative ‘iron cages’ (to borrow an expression from Weber’s *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930)), so that we can use our own reason genuinely and responsibly. Husserl’s original or radical *Besinnung* is thus a critical enterprise. It is what the philosophers as ‘functionaries of humanity’ (*Funktionäre der Menschheit*) (Hua VI, 15/17) have a responsibility to practice.

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¹ This view of phenomenology is clearly and concisely presented in Sokolowski (2000): "Philosophy begins when we take up a new stance toward our natural attitude and all its involvements. When we engage in philosophy, we stand back and contemplate what it is to be truthful and to achieve evidence. We contemplate the natural attitude, and hence we take up a viewpoint outside it. This move of standing back is done through the transcendental reduction. Instead of being simply concerned with objects and their features, we think about the correlation between the things being disclosed and the dative to whom they are manifested. Within the transcendental reductions, we also carry out an eidetic reduction and express structures that hold not just for ourselves, but for every subjectivity that is engaged in evidencing and truth" (p. 186).

² To be sure, the neutrality of description does not preclude phenomenologists from describing metaphysical and normative beliefs. The neutrality of the descriptive method means that phenomenologists are not supposed to take any stands about what there is. The metaphysical neutrality of phenomenology has been emphasized, for example, by David Carr (1999, esp. 134) and Steven Crowell (2001, esp. 237).

³ See, e.g., Buckley (1992), Moran (2000), and more recently Heffernan (2017).

⁴ Some parts of this article draw from Hartimo 2021, and especially its Chapter 1. Reprinted with permission.

⁵ A very nice and concise introductory description of the natural attitude can be found in Sokolowski (2000, 42-47). For a detailed view about the importance of the natural attitude and, for example, how it makes the subjectivity human, see Staiti (2015, 69-85). See also Luft (1998).

⁶ For further discussion on the distinction between the naturalistic and the personalistic attitude see, e.g., Nenon (2010), Jacobs (2014), and Heinämaa (2018). A helpful discussion of the motivational causality as opposed to natural causality can be found also in Staiti (2014, 214-219).

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the development of Husserl's concept of the world, see Carr (2014).

⁸ The importance of *Besinnung* is missing from Staiti (2014). Consequently, Staiti views phenomenology ultimately as a humanistic world-view "characterized by a deconstructive genealogy of naturalism (*pars destruens*) and a positive affirmation of the operative, world-constituting nature of transcendental subjectivity (*pars construens*)" (2014, 288). In contrast, the present claim is that phenomenological philosophy as a radical *Besinnung* is a method for active critical reflection on the affairs in the world. Whereas Staiti's phenomenologist looks at the world with heightened understanding, the phenomenologist, construed along the present lines, actively participates in the worldly affairs and is called to suggest revisions if needed.

⁹ If one wants to insist that all *Besinnung* is transcendental (which does not follow from Husserl's definition of it in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*), the structure of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* cannot be understood. The first part of the book is about the historically given sense of mathematics as opposed to that of logic. It aims at the explication of the "proper sense of formal logic," which is explicitly said to be the aim of *Besinnung* (Hua XVII, 14/10). Only in the second part does Husserl start to raise transcendental questions about the topic of the first part. To be sure, the two parts are interrelated, so that for example the kinds of *Evidenz* referred to in the first part are clarified kinds of *Evidenz*, thus they presuppose the second part.

¹⁰ In fact, then, Husserl was pursuing an intentional history already in the *Prolegomena*. He was explicating the intentional sense of the mathematicians of his time. He viewed human activities and especially the sciences as developing in a certain direction, towards a goal. This goal, as he might later have put it, gave mathematical activities their ‘final’ sense (*Zwecksinn*). Thus, for Husserl, mathematics, and the sciences in general, do not merely develop and grow blindly, but they are intentionally developed by individuals in certain ways and with certain goals in sight. Accordingly, in Husserl’s view, mathematicians do not construct unrelated theories of matters that arbitrarily interest them, but they are actually trying to achieve something that contributes to a comprehensive goal. In the *Prolegomena* Husserl identifies one of these goals to be a theory of theories— that is, the construction of a formal framework within which the mutual relationships of different formal theories can be understood (Hua XVIII, §72).

¹¹ Right after the above quoted passage on radical *Besinnung*, Husserl concludes: “[s]o much by way of a most general characterization of the aim and method of this essay. It is, accordingly, an intentional explication of the proper sense of formal logic.” (Hua XVII, 14/10). Thus, Husserl explicitly claims that *Besinnung* of the genuine sense of logic is his aim and method in *Formale und transzendente Logik*.

¹² For a detailed discussion of Husserl’s view of evidences, see Heffernan (1983; 1989); see also Hartimo (2021).

¹³ Accordingly, for example, he explains his progress with the following words in the Introduction: “It struck me that the evidence of truths comprised in formal mathematics (and also of truths comprised in syllogistics) is entirely different from that of other apriori truths, in that the former do not need any intuition of objects or predicatively formed affair-complexes as concrete examples, even though they do relate to these, albeit with the universality of empty forms.” (Hua XVII, 16/12).