

Presence of our Common Past: Husserl's Return to the Ancient Ideal of Research

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Abstract

Husserlian phenomenology examines its subjects by bringing them to their own presence. It is not immediately obvious how this is done when we are dealing with the past occurrences but actually our past does shape the way we see the world today. Galileo's inventions in the past guide our understanding of nature at present. In *Crisis of European Sciences* Husserl explicates this but the actual phenomenological study is done in his working manuscripts from that time. In the manuscripts he does not only study how Galileo's view is present today, but also shows how this naïve point of view of sciences is to be overcome by returning to more original views. In his manuscript D17 Husserl ends up with one of the perhaps the most controversial views presented by an eminent researcher in the 20th century and opposes Galileo's views directly. Husserl knew that others would laugh at him and think that he has gone out of his mind, but that did not prevent him from pursuing his investigations. The aim of this study is to search for the sense in Husserl's manuscript and to explicate how the phenomenological method turns to our common past, that is, history.

Keywords: phenomenology, history, earth, ethics, crisis

We live in a time, in relation to past, present and future. We also share a common understanding of these aspects. Our common view of past is called history. Edmund Husserl was originally not very interested in history, but as he developed his phenomenological method further, history became more and more important. It is not, however, immediately evident how the phenomenological method takes our common past into account. The method concentrated originally on how something absent becomes present. To use Husserl's early example, an amount of something (a number that is absent) becomes present when I count it and end up

with a number that is present. How can this kind of approach reach out to historical events?

The presence of our common past is a two-way street: We can either try to place ourselves in the position of people from the past, or we can try to figure out how past ideas still influence our common present. I, for example, structure language starting from sentences. The idea of doing that was invented by Aristotle in the past, and it influences the way we structure language today. The presence of the past in what is currently present is of particular interest to Husserl. Through using the phenomenological method it became more and more evident to him that the way phenomena are present to us has been formed in the course of our common history. Therefore, we should study that history in order to see what elements do make a difference between absence and presence.

The way we understand reality has been influenced a great deal by natural sciences over the last four hundred years. It is, thus, not a surprise that Husserl took Galileo as a primary example in his later work *Crisis of European Sciences*. Let us start with that. The work was partly published during Husserl's lifetime (1936), but the edited and supplemented version was published posthumously in 1954. There is, nevertheless, a problem with these published versions of the *Crisis*. In these versions Husserl explicates a research project rather than does phenomenological research. In order to find out how Husserl really works with the problems presented in the *Crisis*, one needs to study his working manuscripts from that time.

In his famous (or infamous) manuscript D17, Husserl explicitly takes Galileo's case up. D17 is something of a hot potato in Husserl-research. It was chosen to be the first publication of Husserl's huge *Nachlass* but was not published in *Husserliana*. The editor of the sequel of the D17, D18 saw it as necessary to explain to the readers that Husserl is not trying to substitute scientific accomplishment with primitive speculation (Schütz 1940). Husserl himself knew that his results would be seen as ridiculous or crazy. The reason for that is clear: Husserl states outright that the Earth does not move. It is difficult to imagine any other statement that would be more difficult to

accept for Western-educated people to accept. The statement at least seems to be as impossible as the claim that the earth is flat, which was known to be clearly untrue already in antiquity. Some researchers have, however, taken Husserl's study seriously and seen it as an important contribution to modern cosmology. I will return to that later, but we will start from the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.

1. The Galileo affair and the phenomenological method

We all know the story of Galileo Galilei and the Catholic church. Galileo defended the Copernican view of the Solar system and the Roman Catholic Inquisition condemned and sentenced him in 1633. Usually we think that Galileo's views were right and it was a mistake of the church to sentence him. However, it took over two hundred years before Foucault's pendulum demonstrated that the Earth rotates (Darwin 1994, 421). It then turned out that Earth's movement in its orbit around the sun cannot be demonstrated (Michelson-Morley experiments, cf. HuaVI/128–129). Einstein solved this with his theory of relativity, but that re-opened the problem of rotation. How can Earth's rotation be relative? I will return to this question shortly.

In the famous section 9 of the *Crisis*, entitled *The mathematization of Nature by Galileo*, Husserl studies Galileo's case. For Husserl, Galileo was the first one to use method of modern physics, that is, to interpret nature through mathematics and measurements. Nowadays this approach is obvious, but what Husserl wants to do is to demonstrate that there was a time when the approach was new and not at all self-evident. His aim is to show how this new view came about before it became taken for granted.

Husserl's approach in itself does not differ significantly from the established views about the origins of the modern or mathematical natural sciences. We certainly could elaborate on events in greater detail and seek to understand better other researchers involved in the process of inventing modern physics, but in general most would likely agree with Husserl

until the end of the section. Instead of glorifying Galileo's invention Husserl saw it as a starting point for a naïve interpretation of reality. Galileo was a genius who at the same time discovered and covered. Husserl thought that Galileo started the development which led us to set aside the lifeworld, the world where we live, and replace it with some kind of a model of reality. James Garrison explicates this: "The experimental method of Galilean natural science is not ascent from life-world but rather the geometrically prefigured world of experiments substituted for it." (Garrison 1986). The task from the point of view of phenomenological research is then to "nullify the ideal that cover life-world" by using phenomenological reduction (Ibid.). This actual work, however, is done rather in the working manuscripts of that time rather than in the parts of *Crisis* published during Husserl's life time.

2. Husserl's Manuscript D17

It is tempting to judge manuscript D17 as a work where Husserl went astray. The quality of the studies in Husserl's *Nachlass* varies, as he himself also admits: "When I'm tired I fall back into old ways of working" (Cairns 1976, 69). In order to understand how phenomenology works one should find the texts where Husserl is not "tired". Alfred Schütz compares the possibility of seeing Husserl at work in these texts to having a recording of improvisation by Beethoven (Schütz 1940). But sometimes improvisation does not work and such a recording might as well have been about Beethoven accidentally sitting on piano keyboard. Some Husserl-scholars have, however, managed to hear "music" in D17.

Paul Ducros uses D17 to interpret Husserl's views, particularly ethical ones, in general (Ducros 2007, 2011). Maurice Merleau-Ponty mentioned the study already in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 359, 453) and studied it intensively during his later years (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 1970, 1992). Pierre Kerszberg saw the study as an important contribution to modern cosmology (Kerszberg 1987). Klaus Held uses the text in his cultural studies (Held 1998). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop their geophilosophy in a different direction but also for them Husserl is an

important forerunner (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). I myself have tried to show how Husserl's argumentation in D17 is phenomenologically solid and a good example of the phenomenological method (Himanka 2005). How then could Husserl's argument make sense?

As I have reconstructed Husserl's argumentation in an earlier paper mentioned above, here I will give here just a short version of his argumentation. Husserl starts by describing the starting point, the Copernican world view that people, at least in the Western world, share. The task then is to accomplish phenomenological reduction and set aside views that we have adopted as these views have become naturalized through repetition. That does not mean that they must be wrong, but our aim is to concentrate on that which is given to us as itself, in its own presence (Heidegger 1977, 383) and "evidence" is not based on repetition. How is the Earth, then, given as itself?

The Earth appears to me originally as a reference background for movement. When I move this cup, it moves in relation to my body, to this chair, to this building, to the Sun but ultimately, I "see" the movement in relation to the Earth. This is how the Earth is given as itself, as a reference background for movement and rest. From the Copernican point of view, I know that the earth circles around the Sun at the speed over 100 000 km/h, but this does not at all effect my original view of the Earth. From the scientific point of view, I can certainly understand that earth's movement should not influence my daily affairs, but that is not relevant in the phenomenological attitude. The movement of the Earth does not appear to me. Some might argue that the situation has changed since Husserl's time.

We know from astronauts' accounts of their experience that it has been a wonderful experience to see the earthrise (Chaikin 2007). Pierre Kerszberg, however, states: "The motion of the earth, as it revolves about its axis or around the sun, is never perceived as such." (Kerszberg 1987, 196) How are we to understand this statement? I can stand up here in my office and jump. In this process the earth moves in relation to me, but I do not claim that it actually moved. I can also connect to the Internet connection and find film footage from the surface of

the Moon. On it I can see the earth rising from Moon's horizon. But as I do not have to state that Sun moves when I see the sunrise I do not have to state that Earth moves in the earthrise. When I see the Earth move, I can always state that it is actually me and not the Earth moving. Let us return to Husserl's argument.

From this original point of view, it does not make sense that the Earth moves, as it is the background in relation to which things can move or stay at rest. This possibility is not open to the reference background itself. But if this is true, how have we adopted the Copernican view which now seems to be impossible? In order to understand this, we need to lay out the possibilities of movement according to Husserl.

According to Husserl there are the following basic possibilities of movement and rest:

A thing – can move or stay still

A basis-body – it can move me (a car, for example)

My body – I can move it

Others bodies – they can move them

The Earth – does not move or stay still

According to Husserl the basic statement of the Copernican view is actually not about earth's movement *per se* but about the statement that the Earth is a body, or more accurately in Husserl's terms, the Earth is a basis-body, a thing that moves in a way that we are moving along with it. In order to create the view according to which the earth moves we change the reference point of movement to the Sun, for example. The earth then moves in relation to the Sun in a similar way as a car moves in relation to the Earth. For us this does not seem strange at all, but things were different in the times of Galileo. Martin Luther, for example, found this idea silly and made fun of it in his Table Talk (Luther 1967). He mentioned that there was a scientist (Copernicus) "who wanted to prove that the earth moves" and continued: "this would be as if someone were riding in a cart or a ship and imagined that he was standing still while the earth and the trees were moving."

The crucial question for Husserl then is: Can we take the "sense" of being a reference to movement from the Earth and move it somewhere else? He studies this carefully but

finally ends up with the result that it cannot really be done. In Western civilization, however, we have changed the reference point of movement from the Sun (Aristarchus / Copernicus) to the landscape of stars (Mach), to ether (Maxwell), and have finally realized that one can move that reference point freely and have entered into the theory of relativity (Einstein). From the scientific point of view, it seems obvious, that we can change the reference point of movement from the earth, but I will point out some problems in this shortly. Husserl himself did not bother to take the naïve point of view of science seriously and deal with Foucault's pendulum, for example.

3. Husserl's Earth and natural sciences

Contrary to what is often thought, perhaps D17 is not that naïve even from the scientific point of view. This is actually the stance taken by Kerszberg in his article "The Phenomenological Analysis of the Earth's motion."

Kerszberg is well familiar with modern cosmology and states the following about D17:

"In fact, the manuscript contains the fullest analysis of Einstein's theory to be found anywhere in Husserl's writings. In this paper, I shall suggest that we view Husserl's phenomenological investigations of space in the light of their actual purpose which is to give critique of the theory of relativity." (Kerszberg 1987, 179)

In the article Kerszberg explicates the thoughts of Ernst Mach, W. de Sitter, Herman Weyl and Albert Einstein showing how D17 is a relevant study when we turn to basic questions of modern cosmology. He, for example, reads Husserl's exposition of the flying arc in relation to Einstein's famous 'elevator' example. I will not discuss this at length here, but instead, will briefly describe how the questions of modern physics are perhaps not that far removed from the view presented in D17.

People in the Western world tend to think that the Copernican interpretation of the Solar system is superior to the earth-centered Ptolemaic model. If we turn to consider scientific evidence this is far from the truth. After comparing these two models from different perspectives (kinetics, dynamics, theory

of relativity) Fred Hoyle arrives at the following result: "Today we cannot say that the Copernican theory is 'right' and the Ptolemaic theory 'wrong' in any meaningful physical sense." (Hoyle 1973, 79) From the point of view of the theory of relativity this is actually rather obvious: if movement is relative, how can we state that the Earth absolutely circles around the Sun (cf. Einstein & Infeld 1938, 223–224)? Earth's rotation, however, still seems to pose a problem.

Foucault's pendulum is an intuitive and a really convincing experiment. If one sets the pendulum at the pole, the earth below it moves just as it is supposed to move and if we move the pendulum to the equator that does not happen. In addition, there are Coriolis forces and one, for example, decides the best places to launch a rocket taking the earth's rotation into account. For us modern people this is really a convincing case and it is difficult to doubt the obvious fact of earth's rotation. But if this is the case we do have an absolute movement and that certainly is a problem from the point of view of theory of relativity.

In his 1918 article, Hans Thirring presented an alternative explanation to Foucault's pendulum and other similar phenomena (Thirring 1918). If the earth stays still and the universe revolves around it, the pendulum moves as it is seen to move.¹ This solves the problem but opens up another one. The problem was presented to Einstein by Nobel laureate (in physics) Philippe Lenard in the 86th meeting of the *Gesellschaft Deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte* in Bad Nauheim in 1920. Lenard asked:

"[I]f the earth rotates, then, according to Einstein, one can just as well say that the earth is at rest and all matter rotates around it. Then, however, the distant stars take on velocities that far exceed the speed of light. According to the theory, however, that [velocity] should be a limiting velocity. This is a contradiction in itself." (Einstein et al 2002)

Einstein's answer can hardly be seen as satisfactory:

"No, the speed of light is a limiting velocity only for the uniform, rectilinear motions of special relativity; arbitrary velocities of light can occur in system that undergo arbitrary motions." (Ibid.)

At about that time Einstein returned to the ether – which would have been one way to give a real answer to Lenard – and never gave up this view. This means that Einstein finally basically chose an ether-version of relativity theory supported by his scientific role model Hendrik Lorentz. One does not necessarily need to see this as a dramatic change, as Einstein and Lorentz had been working on the theory together, and the versions are so close to each other that it is difficult to say whether it is possible to create an empirical test to compare them (Erichson 1973). It is, therefore, possible to state that with the theory of relativity, physics did not get rid of the ether after all (Wilczek 1999). Einstein is very clear on this: “According to the general theory of relativity space without ether is unthinkable.” (Einstein 2002) Einstein, however, wanted to understand the ether in a new sense – one in which we “take from it the last mechanical characteristics which Lorentz had still left it.” (Ibid)

Encyclopedia Britannica defines mechanics as a “science concerned with *motion* of bodies under action of forces.” (Goodstein, “mechanics” in *Britannica*; my emphasis) We can now take a look at the views of Husserl and Einstein. Einstein wanted to get totally rid of science concerning motion from his version of ether. Husserl, for his part, stated that his reference point (the Earth) does not move. Hopefully we can now understand Kerszberg’s point of view that Husserl’s thematization, although coming from different direction, actually deals with the basic question of modern cosmology. One could also make distinguish between the earth of physics (physische Erde; HuaXXXIX/512) and the cultural Earth (Kultur-Erde; HuaXXXIX/530), but, as we will see, according to Husserl, at the end (or rather, at the beginning) there can be only one Earth.

Husserl’s view probably still seems unacceptable to most of us, but perhaps it has more to do with our worldview than with the problem of there being a clash with science. It is difficult for us to question our basic views concerning the earth: it moves, it is a globe and not at the center of the universe. The shape of the Earth was a well-known fact already in antiquity and that is not a problem for Husserl. It was, for example, clear

already in antiquity that in certain situation we can see the Earth's shadow on Moon. The questions of Earth's movement and it not being at the center of the universe are from Husserl's perspective after reduction, mere opinions of a natural attitude and need to be based on evidence. And that is, from the point of view of the phenomenological attitude, a much more difficult problem than is usually thought. In order to see the full scope of the problem, we, however, need to first see how this relates to ethics.

4. D17 and ethics

At the time of Husserl, Germany was the leading country of scientific progress in the world. This did not, however, prevent the country from giving birth to a political movement that wanted to destroy an ethnoreligious group. Husserl himself had a Jewish background and it must have been obvious to him that Western civilization had taken a wrong turn before it entered its present stage. Husserl's aim in this situation was not turn his back Western civilization but to return to its origins in Antiquity. His aim was to renew (*Erneuerung*) these earlier origins and return to the early days of research (HuaXXVII).

For Husserl it was Plato who invented research. At the beginning each nation or tribe had their own understanding of the world and its origin. There were different myths about the world and its origin and it was not a problem that the myths interpreted reality differently. According to Husserl's history then came strange persons (*Sonderling*), most notably Plato, who had an idea: it is the same Sun, the same Earth and the same Moon that these myths interpreted differently (HuaXXIX/386–387; Miettinen 2013, 256–257; cf. HuaXXVII/189). There is only one reality which is the same to all nations and tribes. Research was invented.

It is perhaps not immediately obvious how D17 is an ethical study and what the interpretation of Plato above outlined has to do with ethics. Let us search for help from another philosopher who also criticizes the narrow scientific perspective of our culture. In his *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* Richard Rorty writes “we can always enlarge the scope of

‘us’ by regarding other people, or cultures, as members of the same community of inquiry as ourselves.” (Rorty 1991, 38) This actually describes well the attitude of Husserl’s Plato. We should enlarge our community of inquiry by taking others from different groups, nations or tribes into it and acknowledge that we share the same reality. This inclusion, however, must according to Rorty be done from **our** perspective. “We must work by our own lights” as he puts it. But, as Rorty admits, we cannot avoid ethnocentrism. How could Husserl’s renewed Platonic perspective solve this problem?

Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen asks Rorty: “But if your principle is to evaluate other’s suggestions ‘by our own lights’ are we not locked into some kind of dogmatic imperialism of our own culture?” (Kuukkanen 2015, 191) When we figure out what kind of rationality governs our research and therefore also our behavior and politics, we consider others from the point of view of **our** rationality and take an ethnocentric or imperialistic view. Kuukkanen, for example, in his search for governing concepts of rationality in historiography tries to overcome this by stating that our concepts of rationality should be community-transcending (197).

From Rorty’s point of view the aim is to form an unforced agreement between us and them. Just before our accepting necessarily ethnocentric starting point, Rorty asks who forms this group which aims at an unforced agreement: “Us? The Nazis?” (Rorty 1991, 38) The problem here, obviously, is whether these two possibilities are the same – whether we are Nazis. One might argue that if our rationality is community-transcending it prevents us from turning into Nazis. That might be the case but it will not give us guarantee that it will not happen. Our rationality might be open to some others (for example Aryans) while being closed to others (for example Jews). In order to avoid this, we should be open to all cultures and it is not at all obvious that we can do that. Rorty writes: “What we cannot do is to raise above all human communities, actual and possible. We cannot find a skyhook which lifts us out of mere coherence – mere agreement – to something like ‘coherence’ with reality as it is itself.” (Ibid)

Husserl's ethical statement in D17 is that he had found such a "skyhook" or perhaps rather an anchor. He states that there is only one Humanity and one Earth. On the other hand, Husserl does mention sky in the text and it also forms a common "ceiling" to all creatures on Earth (Held 1998; HuaXXIX/38,43; HuaXXXIX/153–154; 184–189). All cultures ever have had at least these two not-things in common: Earth and Sky. One community on Earth has, however, made a far-reaching interpretation and established the Copernican interpretation of the earth. Even they (that is we) have, however, started from the original Earth that is not a thing and does not move. In order to avoid the ethnocentric view, we should not impose this developed, Copernican view, on other cultures. We, however, are tempted to state the Copernican view as an objective fact that should be accepted by all subjects. Is this kind of education an ethical thing to do?²

There is, however, a methodological problem in Husserl's attempt to reach for the early days of research. The aim is not to state facts about the culture in Plato's days and at least we know that the culture in those days was not an ethical ideal. The aim is to reach for the origins of research and it is not obvious how it should be done. Husserl had to turn his method, phenomenology, towards our common past dozens of generations away.

5. D17 and history

Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in his notebooks:

"What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and only world! I want to report how I find the world. What others have told me about the world is a very small and incidental part of my experience. I have to judge the world, to measure things." (Wittgenstein 1961, 82c)

This view can be called anti-historical. Husserl, in his later writings, represented the opposite view. He writes:

"To think absolutely, every Ego has its own history, and exists only as the subject of his only history ... History is the great fact of absolute Being. The ultimate, metaphysical and teleological question is nothing other than the absolute question of history." (HuaVIII/506)

So, we can give Wittgenstein Husserl's answer: history has to do with me as I only exist in history and final ontological

and epistemological questions should be answered through history.

From Husserl's perspective, the starting point of me serves only as a preliminary phase. In order to enter into historical perspective, one needs to adopt a generative viewpoint. Anthony Steinbock explicates Husserl's generative approach as follows:

“generative phenomenology treats phenomena that are geo-historical, cultural, intersubjective, and normative. For Husserl, generativity suggests both the process of becoming, hence the process of generation, and the process that occurs over the generations as socio-geo-historical movement.” (Steinbock 2003)

There are two essential elements here. First, we are dealing with the process of becoming, constitution. Second, the study is intersubjective in that it not only covers others but understands them as constitutive and reaches even to those “who are no longer with us”.

The first element, the process of becoming, basically means that we distance ourselves from objective approaches. As we saw at the beginning of this study, Husserl's phenomenology aims to bring things to their own presence. Instead of searching for the correlation between immanence and transcendence or the subjective and the objective the correlation (adequate evidence, truth) takes place – or rather happens – between appearance (*noema*) and appearing (*noesis*), for example between number and counting. (Himanka 2006, 2019)³ Different phenomena appear in different ways. For example, world and language appear in a different way than a thing. That is why Heidegger used rather strange verbs to describe the particular way these phenomena appear: the world worlds (*die Welt weltet*) and speaking speaks (*die Sprache spricht*). The task here is to understand how history “historizes” or, in other words, understand history as history (“Geschichte als Geschichte”, HuaXV/397).

As we turn from the natural attitude to the phenomenological, we will leave the subject-object setup behind, or rather we will dig our way under it. Merleau-Ponty is more explicit in this aspect than Husserl and it is therefore no wonder Shigeto Nuki quotes Merleau-Ponty in his study on

Husserl and history: “it is a common error of mobs, heroes and historians to treat the *social matters* as an *object*.” (Nuki 2002) Nuki continues by pointing out that the “same holds true also of history.” No wonder, Husserl does not care about the objective data – datum of events – on which we often construed our studies of history. From the point of view of conventional historical studies, another strange procedure of Husserl is to write from the point of view of someone – Plato, Galileo – who creates, constructs the new way of understanding which will then pass through generations to us. Husserl uses the expression “my Plato” (*meinen Plato*, HuaXXIX/49) when he explicates how the Plato he is writing about is not an objective, factual one. These characters are not even meant to refer to the historical person who was born on certain day, for example. The approach is generative in a sense meant by Steinbock, as discussed above: there is a process of becoming and of generations through which new ideas pass to us. Let us turn back to D17.

D17 is not an easy text to read and we do not have a chance to close read it here, but let us take a preliminary look at a couple of paragraphs. The difficult aspect in reading Husserl is to see the difference between sections describing things from the natural and from the phenomenological attitude. The following section is a description from the natural attitude:

“... the earth, there was once no ‘life’ on it, long space-times were needed until highly complicated substances were fashioned and subsequently animate life emerged on the earth. And that also takes for granted that the earth is only one of the accidental world-bodies, one among others, and that it would be well-nigh amusing to want to believe after Copernicus that the earth is ‘the midpoint of the world [Welt]’ merely because by accident we live on it.” (229)

Husserl then mentions that phenomenology might (*vielleicht*) have backed up Copernican physics and likewise “anti-Copernicanism according to which God has fixed the earth at a place in a space.” (229) Husserl further continues by signaling that he now tries to enter into phenomenological attitude: “Therefore let us reflect: [*Überlegen wir*]”.⁴ It is after

this that Husserl starts to write about history and he starts the paragraph by giving a strong emphasis on it: “But everything comes to this:”. In what follows, we read the results of contrasting the natural and phenomenological attitude:

“We must not perpetrate the absurdity of then seeing human history, the history of the species anthropologically and psychologically within the evolution of the individual and people, the cultivation of sciences and the interpretation of the world as an obviously accidental event of the earth which might just as well have occurred on Venus or Mars.”

In the next chapter Husserl then goes on to present the main result of the study: “There is only one humanity and one Earth.”

What can we make out of this? Husserl distances phenomenological approach from both the scientific view (the earth could be replaced) and religious views (God has placed the earth at the center) of the Earth. The Earth in the phenomenological sense is tied to humanity and is essentially unique. Furthermore, that has always – throughout history – been the case for all of us. Husserl’s view is not geocentric in a religious manner but certainly the Earth takes the center stage for us humans and non-human others on Earth.

We can now join together ethical and historical perspectives of D17. In his study of phenomenology and history Nuki distances himself from narratological approach to history. Narratological approach is often used as an “instrumental device to establish our national, cultural or individual identity, which in turn works to eliminate the others that do not participate in the story concerned.” (Nuki 2002) The story of Galileo, for example, strengthens the Copernican identity and eliminates other interpretations of the Earth. Husserl, too, tells this story but his aim is to dig deeper through the sediments of history to the story of Plato, and in D17, his aim is to see behind all the stories backing up different identities: “it is the same Earth” (cf. HuaXXIX/16, 44; HuaXXXIX/524). In his late reading of D17 Merleau-Ponty develops a kind of archeology, which is in line with the interpretation given here. Husserl digs⁵ through sediments of history until he reaches the bedrock, the Earth, which will finally be reached in every excavation.

6. Conclusion

Nowadays the Western world identifies itself as the inventor of the scientific method, that is the mathematical approach to nature. This is connected to our understanding of the earth as a globe that is not the center of the universe and moves. These views form our identity and have come to appear as unquestionable. Indeed, questioning them rarely takes place and may even be unwelcome. The *differentia specifica* of Western culture can, however, be understood differently. We worshiped an already vanished culture, antiquity for about a half a millennium. We educated our youth to learn languages in which there has now been no native speakers for centuries and as late as at the time of Foucault's pendulum it was still possible to state that to think correctly is to think like Aristotle (Newman 1907 [1858]). This approach is still alive in phenomenological studies of Heidegger and Husserl.

According to Heidegger our concept of time is vulgar and unusable (*unbrauchbar*) (Heidegger/Wisser 1988). We tend to think that, primarily, time is to be studied within physics. This view was construed at a point in our history where Aristotle's lectures on time were posited within a collection called TA PHYSIKA, physics. Heidegger proposed that instead of considering time through the framework of physics, it should be approached through the framework of Being in general – an idea that made him start the project *Being and Time*. Husserl's D17 can be read as a similar kind of project in relation to space. Influenced by the natural sciences, we understand space as kind of homogenized, neutral matrix where no 'point' is, in principle, prioritized over another. Husserl wanted to return to history, passing all the way through "Galileo" to reach an earlier understanding of "space" where the Earth does have a special role. These studies are not historical in the contemporary sense of the word, but rather studies that both value our common past highly and rely heavily on it.

As these phenomenological approaches – for obvious reasons – turn their back on objective approaches these studies will certainly face opposition from those who favor objective methods. David Bell spelled this out by stating that there is

something “dismal and dogmatic” about phenomenological approaches (Bell 1990, 180). This certainly is understandable, and Husserl’s manuscript D17 is perhaps one of his most difficult ones to accept as a study to be taken seriously. My aim here, however, has been to take it seriously.

NOTES

¹ It is not immediately obvious from Thirring’s text that he is dealing with the earth, but this comes clear when one turns to correspondence between Thirring and Einstein (Einstein, Collected Papers).

² I do not here enter into Heidegger’s view of Earth but from the ethical side this cast a dark shadow over considerations. Heidegger returns to this theme of earth frequently after *The Origin of the Work of Art* (especially in GA4, GA5, GA7, GA12, GA39, GA60 GA73 and GA75) and does that also in his notorious Black Notebooks (GA94 179, 316, 382; GA95 73, 213; GA96 59, 83; GA97, 124).

³ Husserl performs reduction from immanence/transcendence to appearance/appearing in his *The Idea of Phenomenology* -lectures (Himanka 2011, 2019), but does sometimes seem to limit the study within immanence also after that, for example at the end of the Cartesian Meditations (cf. also Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxiv). In my interpretation I have followed Heidegger’s advice to concentrate on what Husserl does, on how his thinking proceeds instead of giving emphasis on the more programmatic declarations or self-interpretation (GA17/81).

⁴ Jacques Derrida misses this signal (“überlegen wir”) in his reading of the “Origin of the Geometry”. (Himanka 2011)

⁵ Husserl once told to Dorion Cairns: “My work is not that of building but of digging.” (Cairns 1976, 10)

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