

The Broader Horizon of Passivity in Husserl's Phenomenology

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Throughout Husserl's entire work, phenomenology turns out to have two distinct moments: static phenomenology and genetic phenomenology. If static phenomenology is concerned with the constitution of meaning into the realm of immanent consciousness regardless of the temporal dimension of consciousness, genetic phenomenology gives an account of the primal institution of meaning in the ego's experience of the world. As far as the latter is concerned, Husserl distinguishes between two types of syntheses, the active and the passive genesis. While the active geneses refer to the original egoic production of meanings through active syntheses, passive geneses denote a synthetic formation of meanings which, although not entirely independent from the ego's participation, are not the results of the ego's activity. In considering this distinction, Husserl tends to have a hierarchical understanding of it, subordinating passivity to activity. Victor Biceaga's book *The Concept of Passivity in Husserl's Phenomenology* comes to challenge precisely this understanding of the distinction, arguing that despite Husserl's bias for it, he refuses a clear separation of activity and passivity, thus questioning the

advance of the former over the later. To support his argumentation, Biceaga will uncover three of Husserl's strategies in weakening the hierarchical advance of activity over passivity. The first one takes into consideration the level of originary passivity, trying to soften the opposition activity/passivity by turning it into a matter of degree rather than a matter of kind. The second strategy brings to the fore the inseparability and mutual dependency of activity and passivity at the level of secondary passivity. The last strategy consists in disengaging passivity from its opposition to activity by revealing its role in the experience of the alien (*Fremderfahrung*) (p. xxi). The pinpoint of all these strategies is not to reverse the hierarchy, but rather to show that Husserl supports a broader view of passivity than most of his interpreters tend to acknowledge.

The first chapter of the book is concerned with time-consciousness. Since this is the fundamental phenomenon of passive geneses, this means not only that it grounds all the other passive synthesis – those which belong to originary as well as to secondary passivity – but all the three strategies mentioned above will be found implicitly or explicitly at this level.

After distinguishing between temporal and associative synthesis, Biceaga turns to the way Husserl describes the three levels of time-consciousness. Since the first level – transcendent time – belongs to the natural attitude, it concerns the phenomenologist only as reduced. This brings into view the second (subjective time) and the third (absolute flow) levels. For a better understanding of the distinction between the last two levels of time-consciousness, Husserl not only calls the absolute flow pre-phenomenal and pre-immanent, but he also forges the distinction constituting/constituted to point that the absolute flow is constituted and constituting at the same time. At this point, Biceaga states that the bending of this conceptual couple opens the way for rethinking other conceptual couples including activity/passivity.

Returning to the self-manifestation of the flow, the author notes that its peculiarity consists in that it blocks, from the beginning, any attempt to present it reflectively. This case

is proved by Husserl's employment of transversal and longitudinal intentionalities: whereas the first synthesizes the content of the actual now with the contents of the retention and protention, the second synthesizes the actual intending with its corresponding retainings and protendings, that is, the flow itself. Nevertheless, Biceaga points that since the longitudinal and transverse intentionalities are not separated but intertwined, they come to name the same process from a different perspective. This means that the self-affection of the absolute flow is intertwined with "some kind of preoccupation or affection from objects other than itself" (p. 9). This fact shows that there is an intrusion of the alien into the primordial sphere, either through affection, as the hyletic core of every living present, or as openness to the experience of the alter-ego or cultural world. The end of the chapter brings to the fore the affinity between passivity and rhythm which links the a priori form of the flow with the associations of concrete contents of consciousness.

The next chapter follows the lead of the first and gives an account of the second phenomena from the sphere of originary passivity, that is, primordial associations. As the author notes, Husserl defines primordial associations as "associations between passively pre-given sense contents belonging to the sphere of the present" (p. 19). Husserl is concerned with this type of associations as far as they are establishing the laws and regularities of passive syntheses which found judicative acts. Since primordial associations never appear in ordinary experience, their meaning is unveiled only through reduction. This brings to the fore the fact that the ego never perceives pure sense data, but rather meaningful unities, that is, affective tendencies belonging to the present impression organized by original associations. Nevertheless, Biceaga points out the fact that the pre-givenness of meaningful unities does not necessarily imply that the ego is simply acted upon on the level of passive receptivity; rather, it could mean that in the formation of sensorial unities, passive and active components conjoin each other. To sustain this last point the author will engage in a large discussion about associations of similarity and contrast and the relation between affection and prominence.

The major outcome of this inquiry is that it brings to the fore two interpretations of the passivity of primordial associations. According to the first, primordial associations are independent from categorical acts and reproductive associations and therefore independent from the ego's participation. On the second interpretation, primordial associations govern the propagation of affective awakenings, therefore determining the passive response of the ego to the affective pull of what is alien to it. But this response of the ego is not purely passive, since it involves the constant effort of opening its horizon of receptivity.

The third chapter is a foray into the sphere of secondary passivity. If distinct profiles of the same object are to form objective evidence, then an account of memory as sedimentation and recollection must be brought up. The author claims that, instead of joining the distinction sedimentation/recollection with the distinction passive/active, Husserl prefers to describe memory as a compound of passive and active components.

Biceaga starts by analyzing the two Husserlian accounts of memory, the image memory account and the account of memory as reproductive presentation. Due to the lack of differentiation between perception and recollection and to the passivism sedimentation, the first account proves unsatisfying. The second account defines remembering as a quasi-perception in which the object itself is presentified, thus describing remembering as positing acts. On this account of memory, the problem of the present awareness of the past is solved by the double function of retention. Since reproductive acts must reap the benefits of primordial givenness, it comes to retention to transfer evidence to reproductive consciousness thus spilling presence into absence, and also gradually erase the affective force of the present and infiltrate absence into presence. Due to the double role of retentions, the sphere of present is not closed upon itself but opened toward absence. This points to the idea of a double track consciousness. Roughly, it states that in an act of remembering, I remember my experience of a past X, a fact which brings a form of alterity to the primordial sphere. Ultimately this means that every act of remembering involves forgetting and vice versa.

Since memory has a similar structuring/organizational function as the perceptual field, the double role of retention also brings light on how associations work at the level of memory, thus describing them as regularities which prescribe typical forms of connection. The same double role of retention recasts the problem of forgetting in more positive terms.

The forth chapter deals with the problem of the intersubjective level of sedimentation as another major topic of secondary passivity. First the author focuses on the theme of habitualities and their hybrid nature. Although their acquirement requires constant involvement and effort on the part of the ego, they end up in erasing this involvement characteristic to the ego's engagement with its environment. The hybrid nature of habitualities signals a combination of active and passive components. Translated into epistemological terms, habitualities ensure the constant advance of judicative acts but also obscure, through continuous storage of multiple layers of meaning, the task of scientific and ethical renewal. For Husserl, this last operation ends up in cultural crises. To elude this negative role of passivity, Biceaga points out that, although traditions encourage the "taking-for-granted-ness", they also establish a rigorous pattern of meanings that can be reiterated by future generations. This reiteration is not a mere repetition, but rather a re-construction of meaning.

As far as the problem of habitualities and sedimentation is concerned, Biceaga shifts his focus to the case of language and documentation. Documentation is a kind of sedimentation since writing records constituted meanings by covering their sense giving acts. An important factor in the covering up of sense giving acts is the "seduction of language", which ultimately encourages the free play of associative construction (p. 82). To rule out this constant tendency of the natural language, Husserl proposes a pure logical grammar as a science of a priori combination of meaning. This would make the case for activity overcoming passivity if it wasn't for the unsatisfying account of translation provided by Husserl's pure logical grammar. Roughly it states that translation is a reiteration of the original meaning. But, Biceaga notes, this migration of meaning from the foreign to the domestic language (*Sprachleib*)

is made possible by the fact that the later already harbours in itself a space for foreignness. Thus translation appears as a balance between a passive reception of the foreign and an active incorporation of it, revealing a model for resolving cultural crisis.

The last chapter focuses on showing that ultimately, the role of passivity is to mediate the relation between ownness and otherness. The author will pinpoint this with reference to the phenomena of the body, alter-ego and cultural alien world.

Biceaga starts by emphasizing the two meanings of body passivity: as being affected by the outside world, and as self-affection. This last sense brings into view the distinction between the physical body (*Körper*) and lived body (*Leib*). This self differentiation that accompanies all intuitive experience brings to the fore the bodily self-awareness that not only accompanies perception but also makes it possible. The passivity of bodily self-awareness has two meanings: it is marginal and pre-reflectively involved in any perception and to gain it interaction with the external surroundings is necessary. This reveals that the meaning of body passivity does not rest with receptivity, but rather with the space it offers for the confrontation of ownness and otherness. But there is more to the distinction between lived body and physical body. In order to objectify itself, the lived body must suffer a transfer of sense from the physical body. As the case of double sensation shows, the bodily reflection splits the body into two co-present poles that leave the body as imperfectly constituted. Again, this shows the body as the place where the proper and the alien pass into one another. This meaning of passivity as mediator between ownness and otherness is even more prominent when it comes to the constitution of the alter ego. The author notes that the mirroring of the alter ego into my primordial sphere denotes an unwanted hierarchical relation. To rule out this understanding, Biceaga will highlight two things. Firstly, my body points to the alter ego's body through the passive synthesis of pairing. Since this synthesis is not between asymmetrical terms, the transfer of sense is inconceivable. Therefore Biceaga's second point is made by analogical apperception. This form of synthesis not only transfers the

meaning of my lived body to the other's physical body, but also the meaning of the other's physical body to my lived body. This process of alienation of the ego brings together passive and active elements; passive elements, since the alter ego interpellates and alienates the ego; active elements since it is the ego that must carry through the act of alienation.

At the end of the chapter, Bicega focuses on the interaction between different cultural worlds. In order to avoid Husserl's idea of cultural totalization, Bicega forges the concept of accessible inaccessibility. He states that in cultural encounters not only the foreign culture is pinpointed as accessible inaccessibility, but also the home culture. Thus, the experience of the encounter shows not only that both cultures are modified, but pinpoints to the partly active, partly passive becoming alien of the home culture.

As a final consideration, Victor Bicega's book is not simply an inventory of different meanings of passivity, but a carefully guided phenomenological analyses that leads to the last chapter, one that circumscribes passivity as a mediator between ownness and otherness.

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