



THE PROBLEM OF
GENESIS
IN HUSSERL'S PHILOSOPHY

Jacques Derrida

Translated by Marian Hobson

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JACQUES DERRIDA is professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and author of more than a dozen books published in translation by the University of Chicago Press, including most recently *The Work of Mourning* (2001).

MARIAN HOBSON is professor of French at Queen Mary, University of London and the author or editor of several books, including *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (1998). Her previous translations include articles by Jacques Derrida, Jean François Lyotard, and Werner Hamacher.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This is a translation into English of Jacques Derrida's *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*, Paris: PUF, 1990. The work, previously unpublished, was written in 1953–54 as a dissertation [*mémoire*] for the “diplôme d'études supérieures,” as Derrida's preface of 1990 explains. The *mémoire*'s notes referred to the editions of Husserl's work available in German and French at the time of its writing. Again as the 1990 preface explains, these references were brought up to date by Elisabeth Weber, using Husserl's collected works, the *Husserliana*,¹ still in course of publication, and translations from the German into French which had become available since 1954. Her contribution is marked both in 1990 and in this present translation between angle brackets < >. The bibliographical and textual situation of the published dissertation becomes even more complicated when translated into English, because the published translations of Husserl in English are frequently different from the French. My remarks are between square brackets [].²

This translation has attempted at some points to advertise its complex linguistic situation. “Devenir,” “originaire,” and “vécu,” for example, are common words in Derrida's French text, and ones that would have been more naturally translated by, for instance, “development,” “original,” and plain “experience” than as they have in fact been—as “becoming,” “originary,” and “lived experience.” But Derrida himself chose words in French that referred directly to Husserl's German and to the distinguished translation by Paul Ricœur of Husserl's *Ideas*. These words in the French do not merge back into everyday common philosophical terms, but wear their side-on relation to ordinary language openly, and I have tried to keep that quality in the English. Philosophy written in English has a different history, and frequently different interests and different style from that written in French, not to speak of

German. If it is wished, and it is, for the translation to be connectable to the philosophic tradition of English, it is difficult to avoid the word “mind” sometimes, at least in relation to “psychique”; yet the English word has no clear-cut translation into either French or German and has a heavy philosophical past. Moreover, certain much-used words in French (and German) philosophy group senses in different ways to English: the interesting and important example of “unité” can translate the logical sense of *Einheit* in Frege, as well as the wider quality of “unity.” In English, a choice has to be made between “unit” and “unity,” which certainly have different areas of use at least, whereas French and German can leave the sense undivided. “Motif” in French is perhaps a similar example in Derrida’s own text (see chap. 3). To my mind Derrida moves, without making this move explicit, between “motif = reason” and “motif = subject” in a way suggesting that a problem is surfacing that will figure in his much later work, the question of what happens when ideas are “thematized,” that is, when ideas are turned into themes overtly itemized and expressed. Thence, they may harden into compacted constructions, semantic accretions that are no longer inquired into.

A striking thing about this *mémoire* is how intellectually rich it is, and yet how much it remains a thesis. It recognizably belongs to the genre, and yet, in a way to be discussed briefly below, it has extraordinary pointers forward, to the philosopher that Derrida is becoming. But, surprisingly, an inverse remark could be made about its style: it is straightforward—completely different from the way Derrida would write less than ten years later. Here the pointers forward in style are missing. The syntax used is at points even formulaic, building sentences out of syntactic molds that are repeated many times.

That may be so, but the overlaying of texts and languages, and even the interweaving of times, given the gap between writing and publication, is pretty complex in the present translation. This might seem a matter of inevitable accident, what happens when a work of philosophy is translated later into another language. But is it? And what did happen? Looking forward from the dissertation, into the 1960s and beyond, it seems crucial that Derrida began in this cross-lingual, cross-textual fashion, writing in French on a philosopher whose German was notoriously convoluted, with its own distinctive vocabulary; most of whose published works were unavailable in translation at that time, and a considerable part of which was actually unpublished. Derrida visited Louvain to consult the unpublished manuscripts in the Husserl archive and later translated into French *Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem* [“The origin of geometry as an intentional-historical problem,” first published posthumously in German

in 1939], published in 1962. His introduction to this work was his first extended publication, and in style and content it is part of the kind of work for which Derrida became rapidly famous in the 1960s. This turn in style, and possibly in what Derrida expected of philosophy, is clearly visible from upstream when reading this dissertation. Why it happened is another matter. Derrida has said that he prepared and wrote *Genesis* very fast, in the academic year 1953–54. There is among his papers at the University of California, Irvine, at least one essay written as a student at the *Ecole normale supérieure*, on the back of which there is a comment by his teacher, Louis Althusser. Althusser warns him, in friendly, indeed concerned, fashion that the style he is writing in is not obeying the rules of the academic genre he is working in: preparatory writing for the formidable French exam, the *agrégation* (year 1954–55). One can wonder whether the assembling of syntactic formulae noted above reflects not just the extreme urgency with which he wrote this *mémoire* but also a phase of heeding this warning, no doubt not the first of its kind.

Yet this dissertation, so remarkably abundant in ideas, clearly foreshadows his later work in several ways. First, it involved movement between Husserl's German and the existing translations, and must have made apparent the need to find adequate French versions of texts then untranslated from the German. Working on it must have heightened his awareness of the role of particular natural languages in philosophy. We are used to the idea that a poem is a different entity in different languages—but a piece of philosophy? I suggest here that Derrida at the outset of his philosophical work had to grapple with the question of language not just in general, but in relation to the different ways of generating philosophical meaning in two languages, French and German. This is not a question that can be subsumed under the word “translation” as commonly conceived, but one much wider and more fraught, one that points to fundamental questions about language.³ Derrida has several times spoken of a “nonclassical dissociation of thought and language”⁴—that is, not one where thought is wordless, like the language of the angels, and then clothed in human language, not a match of thought with word or phrase, not an encoding. Instead, there is a molding of what is expressed both through the particularities of the natural language and through the constraints of the need to express in general; both of these play against the push of the new, of something being displaced from the past, as it irrupts into language. Language then brings with it not just the question of the possibility of sense in general, but of the possibility of sense in a particular language or system of languages.

Then, there is the relation to Husserl. Further to that, the dissertation shows a stratum of concern that was not easily visible before 1990, from the

work Derrida actually published; this dissertation makes this concern more discernible. Husserl's first writings were on logic and on the philosophy of arithmetic; he corresponded with Gottlob Frege, the father of analytical philosophy, at a moment when, as Michael Dummett has pointed out,⁵ two of the main strands in Western philosophy could meaningfully discuss questions of sense and reference with each other. Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901) is still evidently working in a logico-mathematical context. *Ideas* (1913) is not. It is the problem of origin, and thus of genesis, the dissertation concludes, that acts as one of the drivers of Husserl's thought and yet is never fully clarified and rendered presuppositionless, that is, constituted transcendently through reduction. ("Reduction" is the putting into brackets, the suspension of natural positings about the world, if a transcendental viewpoint is to be attained.) Derrida's introduction to his translation of the late Husserlian text, the *Origin of Geometry*, will show how it is language that is the object of Husserl's final attempted reduction. But the dissertation itself gives a detailed and sympathetic account of the earlier Husserl and his philosophy's relation to logic; this may come as a surprise to some, as may the understanding of the constant renewal Husserl felt philosophy demanded of him even on his deathbed (see the moving last words of the dissertation, quoted by Derrida from a report given by Husserl's sister).

In his 1990 preface Derrida picks out some of the themes that he sees as having been developed in his later work, in particular the question of origin and its synthetic *a priori* nature (a Kantian question, be it noted). He also picks out the name that served in the dissertation to cover the discussion of this origin: "dialectic." To this, one might add two further comments. First, the structure assigned to what is called dialectic is not one of balanced opposition; it limps:

the question we will put to Husserl could become the following: Is it possible to ground, in its ontological possibility and (at the same time) in its sense, an absolute dialectic of dialectic and nondialectic? In this dialectic, philosophy and being would blend together the one in the other, without definitively alienating themselves from themselves. (p. xxix)

This dialectic (at least that is the idea on which we want to throw light in this work) is at the same time the possibility of a continuity of continuity and discontinuity, of an identity of identity and alterity, and so forth. (p. xxi)

This structure, where one side of an opposition is prolonged into a tree-form by a repetition of that opposition, will prove to be fundamental for what is later called “differance.” For the opposites in “differance” are not stable and cannot be held still; the process of differentiation is continuous. We do not stay with a pattern in which oppositions are recuperated in some way, as in Hegelian logic, but must face constant movement, continuous division and loss.

My second further comment is on the question of the infinite. Derrida matches different forms of the idea of the infinite to different stages of Husserl’s thought (introduction, note 12). Later, he points out the essential role of the idea of the infinite for Husserl (chap. 3, note 73). The importance for Derrida of Husserl’s struggle with the infinite that this note suggests is in fact glimpsed throughout the dissertation, and it throws light on what will be the end stages of the argument in his introduction to the *●origin of Geometry*. Note 89 of chapter 5 of *Genesis* explicates this problem for Husserl by contrasting it with a theme in existentialist thought. For the intuition of the infinite in the form of the indefinite is impossible, but the idea of the infinite can still be seized because its form is finite; yet Husserl does not explore this contradiction. Derrida will.

PREFACE TO THE 1990 EDITION

Was it necessary to publish this writing dating from 1953–54? In truth I must say that even today, though it is over and done with, I am not sure.

In the months preceding this publication, the idiomatic quality of the French expression “to listen to oneself” [*s’écouter*] seemed to me more unstable than ever, even threatening sometimes. To listen to oneself, can that be pleasant? Can one find that pleasant without the nasty taste of a poison, or the foretaste of an illness? I doubt that more and more. Certainly, in giving in to the temptation to publish, one is always listening to oneself. How can that be denied? Or to put it differently: How can one do anything else than deny it? One is listening then to one’s desire, that’s right, and one is still listening to, at least one accepts hearing, the voice which speaks in the text resound again for a while. But is that still possible after nearly forty years?

In rereading this work, along with the worries, the reservations, even the objections which multiplied in me, along with the bouts of ill-ease that I felt then, I was most disturbed by the listening to myself, in the experience that consists of hardly hearing myself, with difficulty, as on tape or on screen, and of recognizing without recognizing, I mean without accepting, without even tolerating, through the memory of shifts in philosophy, in rhetoric, in strategy, a way of speaking, hardly changed perhaps, an ancient and almost *fatal* position of a voice, or rather of tone. This tone can no longer be dissociated from a gesture that is uncontrollable even in self-control: it is like a movement of the body, in the end always the same, to let itself into the landscape of a problem, however speculative it may seem. And yes, all that seems like an old roll of film, the film is almost silent, above all one can hear the noise of the machine, one picks out old and familiar silhouettes. One can no longer listen to oneself at such a distance, or rather, if one can, on the other hand alas,

begin to hear a bit better, it is also because one has the most trouble in doing it: pain in front of a screen, allergy at the authoritarian presence of an image of oneself, in sound and in sight, about which one says to oneself that in the end, perhaps, one had never liked it, not really known it, hardly run across it. That was me, that is me, that?

I had not reread this student essay for more than thirty years. The idea of publishing it had, of course, never crossed my mind. Since here I am not worried about saving appearances, should I say that if I had only listened to myself, I would not have listened to my friends? Should not I have resisted more firmly the advice of certain readers (notably that of certain colleagues in the Center for the Husserl Archives in Paris, first of all Françoise Dastur and Didier Franck) as well as the generous proposal of Jean-Luc Marion, director of a collection in which I had already published other Husserl studies while it was directed by its founder? For Jean Hyppolite had also read this work with his usual solicitude and had encouraged me in 1955 to get it ready for publication. Whether I was right or wrong in the end to let myself be persuaded, this remains: I alone retain all the responsibility for taking the risk, that goes without saying. But in remembering what this publication owes them, I want to thank these friends for their confidence, even and especially if I hesitate about sharing it.

This work corresponds to what then was called a dissertation for the diploma of advanced studies. I prepared it in 1953–54 under the vigilant and kindly direction of Maurice de Gandillac, professor at the Sorbonne, when I was a second-year student at the *École Normale Supérieure*. Thanks to M. de Gandillac and to Father Van Breda, I had been able to consult certain unpublished Husserl material in the archives at Louvain.

If someone approached this old book, I ought now to leave him alone, not anticipate in any way his or her reading, and immediately tiptoe away. In particular, I ought not to allow myself philosophical interpretations, nor confidences. I ought not even to mention the thing which has seemed to me in the end the most *curious* in this document, namely, to answer a kind of *concern* as a *concern for knowledge*, what confers on this work today some *documentary* significance. That is my only hope, and I hope I will be forgiven for saying a couple more words about it.

1. This panoramic reading, which here sweeps across the whole work of Husserl with the imperturbable impudence of a *scanner*, refers to a sort of law whose stability seems to me today all the more astonishing because, *since then, even in its literal formulation*, this law will not have stopped commanding everything I have tried to prove, as if a sort of idiosyncrasy was already negotiating in its own way a necessity that would always overtake it and that would

have to be interminably reappropriated. What necessity? It is always a question of an originary complication of the origin, of an initial contamination of the simple, of an inaugural divergence that no analysis could *present, make present* in its phenomenon or reduce to the pointlike nature of the element, instantaneous and identical to itself. In fact the question that governs the whole trajectory is already: “How can the originarity of a foundation be an *a priori* synthesis? How can everything start with a complication?”¹ All the limits on which phenomenological discourse is constructed are examined from the standpoint of the fatal necessity of a “contamination” (“unperceived entailment or dissimulated contamination”² between the two edges of the opposition: transcendental/“worldly,” eidetic/empirical, intentional/nonintentional, active/passive, present/nonpresent, pointlike/non-pointlike, originary/derived, pure/impure, etc.), the quaking of each border coming to propagate itself onto all the others. A law of differential contamination imposes its logic from one end of the book to the other; and I ask myself why the very word “contamination” has not stopped imposing itself on me from thence forward.

2. But through these moments, configurations, effects of this law, the originary “contamination” of the origin then receives a philosophical name that I have had to give up: *dialectic*, an “originary dialectic.” The word comes back insistently, page after page. A “dialectical” escalation claims to go farther than dialectical materialism (that of Tr  n Duc Thao, for example, often quoted and deemed insufficiently dialectical, still a “prisoner . . . of a metaphysics”³), or further than the dialectic that Cavaille  s thinks he should invoke against Husserl in a phrase that was famous at that time (“the generating necessity is not that of an activity, but of a dialectic”⁴). That in the course of a very respectful critique, this hyperdialecticism often takes issue with Tr  n Duc Thao or with Cavaille  s (rather than with other French readers of Husserl: Levinas, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ric  eur);* that several years later, even when in the introduction to [Edmund Husserl’s] *Origin of Geometry* (1962) and in *Speech and Phenomena* (1967) I was pursuing the reading started in this way, the word “dialectic” finished either by totally disappearing or even by designating that *without which* or *separate from which* difference, originary supplement, and trace⁵ had to be thought, all these are perhaps a kind of road sign:

* Jean Cavaille  s, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ric  eur. *Trans.*

about the philosophical and *political* map according to which a student of philosophy tried to find his bearings in 1950s France.

One rule was a matter of course for such a publication, and allowed of no exception: that the original version should not be modified in the slightest way. This rule has been scrupulously respected,⁶ every kind of imperfection could, alas, bear witness to this, in particular in the translations of which I am the author.* Where it was a question of translations and reference to the works of Husserl in general, it was at least necessary to bring up to date the bibliographical indications; since 1953, the publications of the works of Husserl have multiplied, in German and in French, as is well known.

Elisabeth Weber is the author of the notes which she judged necessary to add and to indicate by brackets [angle brackets < >].† She also checked the references, brought the bibliography up to date, and checked the proofs of this book. I should like to express here my deep gratitude to her.

Jacques Derrida
June 1990

* This present translation has referred to the Husserl translations into English generally available. See the list of Husserl translations following the bibliography. *Trans.*

† Notes or remarks for this present translation are in square brackets. *Trans.*

PREFACE TO THE 1953/54 DISSERTATION

*The Theme of Genesis and the Genesis of a Theme*¹

“History of Philosophy and Philosophy of History”

Running throughout this work, there will be two sets of problems that will continually mix with and imply each other. Were these to be susceptible of distinct definitions that could be strictly placed side by side, we would have to speak here of a “historical” set of problems and of a set of problems that is “speculative” or philosophical in a very wide sense. But from the start we must say that we shall finish by adopting a philosophy of genesis which precisely denies the possibility of such a distinction; both through its conventions and its method, this philosophy will reveal to us [what are] the radical implications of this essential inseparability of these two worlds of meanings: history of philosophy and philosophy of history.

On the one hand, indeed, we will seem to be working on the philosophical problem of genesis, considered as such, that is to say, as essentially lifted out of the historical soil in which it was able to take life; the Husserlian texts will then take on the shape of pretexts. They will, in their historical outline, be the singular routes of access to a problem treated in its philosophical specificity and extension: with it, we will be at the heart of the great classic questions of objectivity, of the validity of foundations, of historical becoming,* of the relations of form and matter, of activity and passivity, of culture and

* The present translation keeps particularly close to Derrida's French in two cases, “originary” and “becoming,” which both refer to Husserl's German. Derrida has adopted the translations used by Paul Ricœur, which deliberately do not naturalize the terms into the more straightforward “originality” and “development.” *Trans.*

nature, and so forth. Questions which it is enough just to evoke in order to unveil the horizon of philosophy in its totality.

On the other hand, the interest that we will take in the problem of genesis, in its philosophical significance, will in one sense appear as secondary and mediate; it will be used as a line of approach; it will be what links together research of a more immediately historical style: Should we conclude that there is a unity or a discontinuity in Husserlian thought as we find it presented to us in its becoming? How should the one or the other of these hypotheses be understood? What is the meaning of what is at least apparently a transformation of these Husserlian theses and themes?

The notion of genesis is thus at the center here in a double way: first, it puts into question the relations of philosophy and history. In a very general way, in its universal as well as its individual sense, history² in describing the successive appearance of rational structures, of “consciousnesses” (in the sense in which Sartre uses this word), of systems of original meanings, seems to imply that all knowledge or all philosophical intention is dependent in relation to the reality of its historical moment. Thus it seems to disappoint every claim to an objectivity which is absolute, to a foundation which is autonomous. By situating Reason and philosophical consciousness in a time which is natural and objective, genesis seems to pose the problem of the possibility of philosophy as a search for autonomous foundation, along with the problem of philosophy’s relations to the physical and anthropological sciences, which, before any philosophy, seem to give us the spectacle of real geneses.³ But is not this spectacle originally possible for and through a philosophical consciousness that not only finds its scientific value but also makes itself arise there, be engendered there, comprehend itself there? It is the whole of philosophy which seems to be asking itself here about its own sense and dignity.

It might seem interesting to look at the way Husserlian thought studies the posing or the treatment of this problem, through this philosophy which simultaneously takes as a theme the demand for absolute beginning⁴ and the temporality of lived experience⁵ as the ultimate philosophical reference; which at the same time claims for philosophy a new scientific rigor⁶ and refers it to the purity of concrete lived experience; which, having torn absolute subjectivity away from the constituted sciences, be they psychology or history,⁷ tries to found a philosophy of history⁸ and to reconcile in a certain sense phenomenology and psychology.⁹

Now it is indeed the theme of genesis that drives all Husserl’s concern, which looked at superficially in its main methods of approach, seems to follow

two vast movements, one forward, one back: first, the refusal of psychologisms, of historicisms, of sociologisms; the logical and philosophical ambitions of the natural or “worldly” sciences are illegitimate and contradictory. In a word, the existence of a “worldly” genesis, if it is not denied as such by Husserl, nevertheless does not attain in his eyes either the objectivity of logical meanings or, correlatively, the being or the dignity of phenomenological or transcendental consciousness. It is this latter which is the constituting source of all genesis; in it, originary becoming makes itself and appears to itself. The “transcendental” reduction, end and principle of this movement, is the reduction, the farewell to every historical genesis, in the classical and “worldly” sense of the term. But after this retreat to a philosophical purity of an idealist style, there are announced a kind of return, the outlines of a movement of broad reconquest:¹⁰ it is the notion of transcendental genesis¹¹ which, resistant in principle to every reduction, revealed perhaps by every reduction properly understood, will oversee a kind of philosophical recuperation of history and allow a reconciliation of phenomenology and “worldly” sciences. The first will be the foundation of the latter. For from the beginning of his career, Husserl had formulated the demand for such a synthesis. How did he safeguard the unity of his search during his maneuvers of approach, with their movement that was, at least apparently, uneven or oscillating? In a word, if the theme of transcendental genesis appeared at a certain moment in order to understand and found the theme of empirical genesis that preceded it in natural time, we need to ask ourselves about the meaning of this evolution. How was it possible? We want to show here that this is a question that does not belong to the pure history of philosophy, but rather one that in its historical specificity refers with the greatest precision to the meaning of every genesis.

Duality and Dialectic

It could indeed be objected that our set of problems is dual, that when put forward in its most schematic and abstract form, it is of a piece with the method of any history of philosophy; for is not the latter, being at the same time history and philosophy, by definition destined to be caught in an oscillating dialectic, in an original and insurmountable reciprocity of referrals and references between the historical singularity of someone’s thought, taken at the root of their discourse and their writing, and philosophical universality, considered here as its claim and its intentional significance? The idea of this dialectic, set out in this way, is not only banal and vague; it is insufficient and

false as well. It is not a question here for us of obeying a fatality, of applying the laws of a history of philosophy constituted as a science, of following through to its conclusions a problem that will have been discussed elsewhere: this problem will be our problem. We already need to put into practice a Husserlian attitude in placing ourselves before or beyond the specific problems of a constituted science in order to test its dependence in the very experience of its original constitution. The dialectic whose idea we are underlining here will not be a “method,” a viewpoint, a praxis; we will try to show that it is “ontological” insofar as ontology is not an already constituted worldly science; it is precisely transcendental in the Husserlian sense of the word (which we shall have to distinguish from the scholastic sense or the Kantian sense). This problem will be the unity of the problems evoked above. What this introduction would wish to foreshadow is that this unity will be a dialectical unity: it will distinguish itself first from a formal or artificial unity that could be imposed from the outside on the real content of the work, an accidental unity of two perspectives or two lines of research conducted in parallel. Nor will this unity be an analytical identity that would reduce the historical content of Husserl’s philosophy to its philosophical meaning, or conversely. A philosophical examination of Husserl’s thought will impose on us a conception of genesis that, in return, will itself oblige us to adopt a certain understanding of Husserl’s philosophy in its process of becoming. The expression “in return” this time has only a methodological sense. It will be constantly impossible to determine the real beginning of this dialectic; one could affirm at the same time the distinction and the solidarity of the two movements without ever being able to reduce this simultaneity and this complexity to a pure and simple succession. In the last resort, one will not be able to give to either of the terms a value according to principles, be they chronological, logical, or ontological. The ultimate sense of the philosophy of genesis that we will try to define in the conclusion to this work will be the impossibility of all real determination of a real beginning; though we will still have to show that this impossibility, as the ultimate philosophical conclusion, is a formal and not a transcendental conclusion, that is, that it does not immobilize dialectic and that it allows us at the same time to remain faithful to Husserl in his reference to an originary absolute¹² and to go beyond the interpretations of phenomenology that would determine these dialectics in a metaphysical sense, be it materialist or idealist.

The way in which we will understand the successive connection of the diverse moments of Husserl’s thought, their correlation and their mutual implication, will thus simultaneously presuppose and call for a philosophy of

genesis. It will not be in any sense a question of a conclusion, or a deduction, or again of a putting into action, of a technical exercise of a method given by one or the other of these approaches. It is always an application, a dialectical making-complex of a principle that is revealed as formally primordial and simple, as really ambiguous and dialectical. The two terms will put each other in question at each moment without allowing us to conclude that there is a real secondarity in the case of the one or the other. Better, we propose to show that it is only from Husserl on, if not explicitly with him, that the great dialectical theme which animates and motivates the most powerful philosophical tradition, from Platonism to Hegelianism¹³ can be renewed, or if not renewed then at least rounded, authenticated, and completed.

The Contradictions of Genesis

How does the irreducibility of this dialectic present itself in its most general form in our work? First of all, genesis, when it is examined naively and in the most formal way possible, brings together two contradictory meanings in its concept: one of origin, one of becoming. On the one hand, indeed, genesis is birth, absolute emergence of an instant, or of an "instance"¹⁴ that cannot be reduced to the preceding instance, radicalness, creation, autonomy in relation to something other than itself; in brief, there is no genesis without absolute origin, originarity if it is envisaged ontologically or temporally, originality if it is envisaged axiologically; any genetic production makes its appearance and takes on meaning by transcending what is not it.

But at the same stage, there is no genesis except within a temporal and ontological totality which encloses it; every genetic product is produced by something other than itself; it is carried by a past, called forth and oriented by a future. It only is, it only has its meaning, when it is inscribed in a context which on the one hand is its own, that is to say, to which it belongs and in which it participates, with which it is in continuity, which in a certain sense it implies and at the limit entails, comprehends, knows, but which, on the other hand, goes beyond, which envelopes it from all sides. Genesis is also an inclusion, an immanence.

The existence of any genesis seems to have this tension between a transcendence and an immanence as its sense and direction. It is given at first both as ontologically and temporally indefinite and as absolute beginning, as continuity and discontinuity, identity and alterity. This dialectic (at least that is the idea on which we want to throw light in this work) is at the same time the possibility¹⁵ of a continuity of continuity and discontinuity, of an identity of identity and alterity, and so forth. This identity and this continuity are neither

absolutely formal nor absolutely real; the opposition of formalism and realism is here formal, in antithesis not to the “real” but to the “transcendental”; in a word, it is “worldly.” Or, if it is preferred, the formal absolute of the absolute and the relative is neither absolutely formal nor absolutely real, that is to say, already constituted in some way. The dialectical logic of this dialectic is a constituted “formal logic” referring to the genesis of a constituting “transcendental logic” at whose level, we will see, the word “dialectic” has only an analogical sense. The weakness of the great dialectics and the great classical philosophies of becoming might be said to be their formalism, their “worldliness”: they are said to have always instituted themselves on the basis of an already formalized “secondary” opposition between form and matter, sense and the sensible, and so on, so that genesis, as it is presented in traditional metaphysics, under pretext of being perfectly intelligible or meaningful (within a Platonism or a Hegelianism), perfectly historical or effective (within a dialectical materialism), severs the link that attaches it to transcendental genesis; this, being “originary,” is dialectic only in its constituted products. But so that a “nondialectic” may constitute a “dialectic,” without this constitution being a pure creation *ex nihilo* or a simple construction through association, does it not “already” have to be dialectical? This is the question that we will set ourselves about transcendental genesis as Husserl conceives it. If the “origin” is dialectic, is not it secondary in relation to a “primitivity”? The distinction between the transcendental and the worldly would collapse and with it the possibility of any radical foundation of philosophy; phenomenology would become phenomenism. But we already know that Husserl would have considered this dialectic of the nondialectic with dialectic as a formal and “empty” meaning, a hypothesis that has been derived, a concept not referring to any essence, to any originary presence, as an inauthentic intention. It will often be difficult to grant this to him, but the problem is an important one, and it remains posed. It is at one with the second ambition of the present work: to show that the originary movement constituting this dialectic, as it is described by Husserl, dictates to us at the same time a “dialectical” comprehension of the development of Husserl’s philosophy; in a word, this infinite contradiction would be at the same time the motivation and the final sense of the phenomenological enterprise.

Anticipation and “A Priori” Synthesis

It is no matter of chance if we need to give the ultimate sense of these reflections right from the beginning. It is not here a question of a necessity of

method or of technique, of a constraint of an empirical order; for it really is true that, as we were saying, the shape that we will give to our account is intimately and dialectically linked to an answer to the problems posed speculatively; this constant anticipation is not artificial nor accidental. For every genesis, every development, every history, every discourse to have a sense, this sense must in some way “already be there,” from the beginning, without which one would fail to make comprehensible to oneself both the apparition of sense and the reality of becoming; a certain anticipation¹⁶ is thus faithful to the sense of every genesis: every innovation is a verification, every creation is a fulfilling, every emergence is tradition. Let us pause an instant at this series of pronouncements. It can be seen straight off that, without one or other of these terms, no human becoming is possible either in its content or in its significance. An invention without verification could not be assimilated; it would be pure accommodation; at the limit, it would not even be “for a consciousness.” There is no consciousness that does not perceive every sense as a sense “for self” (this “for self” being one of a transcendental subjectivity, not a psychological one). Every sense being for a consciousness, by definition not being able to make itself a stranger to a “transcendental ego,” an intentional ego, it always reveals itself as “already” present. At the limit, an invention without verification would deny the intentionality of consciousness; it would be invention “of” nothing or invention (of) itself (by) itself, which would destroy the very sense of any inventions, which is a synthetic sense. The paradox and strangeness of transcendental intentionality¹⁷ reappear at the core of every invention, symbol of genesis: it is through a “synthetic” value that a becoming and a temporal act are acts of verification and at the limit analytic. But just as invention without verification is only conceivable in the myth of consciousness without intentionality, of thinking torn from the world and from time, so verification without invention is not verifying anything by anything, is a pure tautology, an empty and merely formal identity, a negation (of) consciousness, (of) world, (of) time, where every truth appears; it is thus through the “analytic” essence of every verification, of every aiming at sense, that this latter must refer out in a synthetic act to something other than itself. It is in the same sense that the solidarity between every creation and every fulfilling, every arising and every tradition, can be experienced. However, from the point of view of a formal logic or of an absolute logic, these judgments bear within them an irreducible contradiction. For it is not a question of attributive judgments of the type “A is B,” in which B is the predicate of A; here the very sense of each of these terms is such that the subject and the predicate are given together in each of their respective moments. Even before these are

attributed one to the other, from an apparently analytical point of view, invention is “already” verification, verification is “already” invention. It is thus an *a priori* necessity that the two terms of these judgments be interchangeable; both are at the same time subject and predicate. The necessity that links them is absolute. But at the same time the obviousness of these judgments is not analytic; if it were, it would be in contradiction with each of its terms; indeed, both have a genetic or synthetic value; both aim at, take in, produce something other than themselves. The explanation, that is, the unveiling, the explicitation that would be held to be an analytic act in a logic is here a synthesis in the ontological or transcendental sense that founds logic. But to the degree that this synthesis is revealing, it is made *a priori*. For this synthesis to be synthesis, it must be productive, generative; so that it appears to us as a meaningful synthesis, it must be *a priori*. Without that it would present no sense and would not be knowable as such. Every passage from one moment to another would take on the figure of a miracle, of an exception to history, of an unheard of novelty; genesis or synthesis would not be real stages of becoming, but explosions and expropriations of time. Kant, in refuting Hume, showed convincingly that without the intervention of an *a priori* form of the understanding, any judgment loses its necessary character. We will not here go into historical analyses; let us just note that Kant called “synthetic *a priori*” judgments only those of a mathematical order. These judgments are precisely those which escape from genesis. Their synthesis is not “real,”¹⁸ at least not in the eyes of Kant. Insofar as they are not born in effective historical experience, insofar as they are not “constituted” by this, they are *a priori*.¹⁹ In a sense, for Kant, the empirical and the *a priori* are mutually exclusive. The sense of every genesis is a phenomenal one. Invention is not absolute verification. Hence it is not real invention. The sense of every empirico-genetic judgment is the object of a construction, thus by definition dubious. On this point at least, it is surprising to see the precision with which Hegel’s²⁰ criticism of Kant points to Husserl’s perspective: far from the experience of the real which is called “phenomenal,” excluding *a priori* synthesis, it is *a priori* synthesis²¹ (of thought and the real, of sense and of the sensible, for example, and in a very general way) which makes experience possible, and every meaning of experience. It is too obvious that the idea of this originary synthesis, as a real principle of every possible experience, is closely linked with the idea of the intentionality of transcendental consciousness. We shall often have to test the strange depth of certain resemblances between Hegel’s and Husserl’s thought. For the moment, it must suffice to remark that it is only in the perspective of these two thinkers that the problem of real genesis can be posed;

this latter is a synthesis; while, with Kant, it could as such only be, on occasion perfectly intelligible, *a priori* necessary, but “irreal”²² and atemporal in the world of mathematical rationality, on occasion effective and temporal but *a posteriori*, contingent, and doubtful in empirical becoming, when the indubitably originary and fundamental experience of intentionality reverses the “critical” attitude, it inscribes the *a priori* synthesis into the very core of historical becoming; such an *a priori* synthesis is the originary founding of every experience, which is delivered in and through experience itself. This is the interest and the difficulty of the problem of genesis, considered as synthesis: How can the absolutely originary foundation of sense and of being²³ of a genesis be comprehended in and by this genesis? For if it is true that any synthesis is founded on an *a priori* synthesis, the problem of genesis is that of the sense of this *a priori* synthesis; if an *a priori* synthesis is at the source and foundation of any possible judgment and any experience, are we not referred to an indefinite dialectic? How can the originarity of a foundation be an *a priori* synthesis? How can everything start with a complication? If any genesis and any synthesis refer to their constitution through an *a priori* synthesis, then has not the *a priori* synthesis itself, when it appears to itself in a constituting, transcendental and supposedly originary experience, already taken on sense, is it not always by definition “already” constituted by another synthesis, and so on infinitely? How can a phenomenological originarity lay absolute claim to the first constitution of sense if it is preceded by what could be called a historical “primitiveness”? a primitiveness which, it has to be said, only “appears” as such through an originary constitution. Is there not some trick in any going beyond of this dialectic? Does one not fall back into the formalism that one claims to be going beyond, by referring the philosophical thematization²⁴ of this dialectic to the originarity of its transcendental constitution, to intentionality, to perception? Is not phenomenological temporality, at once transcendental and originary, “temporalizing,” constituting, only in appearance and starting from a “natural” time, indifferent to transcendental consciousness itself, preceding it, enveloping it? Husserl, especially in the last years of his life, would not perhaps have absolutely disputed this; perhaps all his last efforts were for saving phenomenology by assimilating to it this new relation. However that may be, it is clear from now on that it is always through an “anticipation” which is at least formal, that any signification, founded on an *a priori* synthesis, appears, and appears to itself originally. Let us leave open the question of how the absolute sense of genesis can be at once “originary” and “anticipated”; whether this anticipation occurs about the future as such, or about a past always reconstituted by the originary present and

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