

Hegel and Husserl on the emergence of the I out of subjectivity¹

Abstract: Modern philosophy tends to conflate subjectivity and ego (I-think, cogito, and alike). One lesson we can draw from Hegel is that the I emerges out of a natural and habitual state in the form of a return to itself through an opposition between self and world. In turn, Husserl has an interesting take on the anonymity of an ego-less subjectivity submerged in an affective and initially passive life out of which an ego-pole first constitutes itself. In both, a latent, functioning subjectivity which forms an unconscious ground is to be kept distinct from the several activities of a wakeful and self-conscious mind.

I wish to compare and contrast Hegel and Husserl on this theme. The primary texts for my examination will be Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit and the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit in the Encyclopaedia, and Husserl's Ideas I, Ideas II, Cartesian Meditations and Experience and Judgment.

1. Self and I

By and large, modern philosophy tends to conflate subjectivity and ego. Descartes's cogito is literally translated into Kant's I-think; their differences to one side, for them philosophy seems founded on an I who thinks. Both Hegel and Husserl insist that the thematic implications and theoretical consequences, indeed even the vocabulary, concerning self or subjectivity on the one hand and the I or ego on the other do not overlap. Subjectivity and self are said in many ways, whereas the I has what at first appears as a narrower and more neatly defined identity. More to the point, both Hegel and Husserl insist that the I is somehow derivative and not an original starting point or an ultimate foundation as many modern philosophers would think.

In Hegel the concept of subject is substantially wider than that of I. Subject is whatever potentiality to remain in relation to itself in its development and relation with its own other. That implies that natural organisms are subjects even though they cannot say of themselves they are Is. In other words, it is possible to be a subject without having an I. There is a natural subjectivity before a more complex, human egological subject is formed; and in turn a human egological subject is itself made possible by a pre-egological ground in prereflective consciousness, sensibility and the animated body that is not shaped by the I in any way. Furthermore, this does not exhaust the range of meaning of subject or self. To recall one of Hegel's most famous statements, substance must be understood as a subject because it must show itself in its

¹ Abbreviations:

AT = C. Adam and P. Tannery (eds.), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 11 volumes, Paris 1996;

HUA = E. Husserl, *Gesammelte Werke*, 43 volumes (so far), Dordrecht: Kluwer (now Springer), 1956 ff.

W = G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Red. E. Moldenhauer und K. M. Michel, Frankfurt a. M. 1969-71.

Translations from Hegel and Husserl are my own except for the following works:

Cartesian Meditations (= CM), transl. D. Cairns, The Hague 1967;

Experience and Judgment, ed. by L. Landgrebe, transl. J.S. Churchill and K. Ameriks, Evanston 1973;

The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (= Crisis), Transl. D. Carr, Evanston 1970;

G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Logic. Berlin, 1831*, transl. C. Butler, Bloomington 2008.

movement of progressive self-realization. The philosophical science of the absolute itself must take on the form of a self (“in dieser selbstischen Form,” as he writes of science at the end of the Phenomenology: W 3, 588-89). In sum, ‘subject’ covers a wide spectrum of senses, while ‘I’ refers to human self-consciousness.

When he reflects on his Cartesianism and widens his perspective on the cogito to include what the Cartesian Meditations calls the monad (a concrete totality of lived experiences richer than and going beyond the pure I) for which he finds inspiration in Leibniz’ notion of monad as that which encapsulates a system of potentialities, Husserl writes: “maybe instead of ‘I’ I should always say ‘self’” (HUA 14, 48-50). Self, monad, ego as substrate of habitualities and pure I do not coincide. What demarcates these notions is sometimes far from clear; what is clear is that an active I presupposes a passive self. In Experience and Judgment Husserl states concisely what most of his lectures and writings from the 1920s intend. Before we behave cognitively and form explicit judgments, we have objects presumed in the certainty of belief (§ 7). A domain of pregiveness is a modification which precedes cognitive activity and affects us with greater or lesser force. Cognitive activity in turn is an “apprehending turning-toward which arrests what is given in the flux of sensuous experience” (§ 13, p. 60). Passive synthesis already constitutes unities for us, but only “objectification [... as] an active achievement of the ego” (§ 13, p. 62) which fixates (Feststellung) the existent in a declarative judgment is a confirmation on the part of the ego. A confirmation is indeed needed: the ego is affected by pregiveness, which exercises a tendency to modify us and call our attention to it; when the ego yields to the tendency, it becomes active and complies with a stimulus it now considers its own, and arising from the ego itself. The appearance that acts emanate from and are accomplished by the ego rests on the passivity and receptivity from which we start (§ 17, pp. 77-8). The active I who objectifies and arrests presupposes a passive being affected in pregiveness.

It is especially in Husserl’s later phase, that of genetic phenomenology, that certain thematic affinities with Hegel come to light. Because we are always immersed in a world which is the source of all certainty and presumption of evidence and we live in the unreflected ground of doxa, we awaken as self-conscious reason starting from what Hegel would call an unconscious logos or a natural logic, that is, from connections established in the realm of passivity. This means that the wakeful and philosophical life of reason has as its object its own latent and functioning constitutive activity. If empirical reality is structured in objective relations and internal connections, and sensible syntheses are systems of predelineated potentialities, it is wrongheaded to frame them as products of a self-conscious cogito active on a supposedly formless reality existing in-itself. Both Hegel and Husserl aim at overcoming the traditional dichotomy between the passivity of sensibility and the activity of consciousness and at understanding the spontaneity at work in receptivity. Both believe a rigorous philosophy should be free from all presuppositions, especially such a weighty one as the preliminary assumption of

an egological pole as ready-made. On this score they even share polemical targets. For example, they tend to identify such a stance with Kant's I-think and believe they must oppose Kant's faulty and one-sided conception of reason as marred by internal divisions taken for granted uncritically, for they believe that Kant is an epigone of Hume who depends on an obsolete psychology of faculties and shows — before the analogous remark made famous by Heidegger — timidity and lack of radicality.²

The shortcomings of a ready-made I, assumed as a condition of possibility for experience or foundation for all knowledge, are far-reaching. Not only are self and I far from overlapping. Over and above the conflation of self and I we must be wary of the way we conceptualize the pure I. For it now appears that as long as the I is Kant's I think we obtain an impoverished and one-sided I, not only because it is ready-made and assumed from the start as a condition, but also because its purity is an abstraction: the I is construed as theoretical only, and not as practical as well.

For Hegel in the Phenomenology consciousness is directed outside itself, to the objects of its sensible certainty, perception, understanding. When it becomes, or discovers it is, self-consciousness, it is not only because it discovers it is an infinite self-relation, but at the same time because it strives to affirm itself as desire (Begierde). Cogito and conatus go together, as it were, which means that a pure I as a theoretical subject of knowledge alone is insufficient.³ Likewise in Husserl's Ideas II: the ego-pole must be shown to animate the psiche, the lived body, and spirit. But it can only do so if it is conceived as an "I-can" (§ 59, p. 253), not as an "I-think." An I-can has its motivations, affections, and is the zero-point of bodily orientation and movement, before it is the subject of understanding. Kant's I think proves to be an irremediable abstraction.

Before we delve deeper into the I in the next section, one last background affinity between Hegel and Husserl must be mentioned. They both deny that the category of causality applies to the self and ego, and they do so, I suggest, for similar reasons. For Hegel, when it comes to subjectivity causality is not pertinent. Causality is a relation that assumes a passive side and an active force exercising itself on it. This does not work for organisms, let alone for Is. Subjectivity can only respond to what it recognizes as a stimulus; it is not enough to be struck by something, I need to let it acquire relevance for me, to turn to it and consider it important, which can only

² By so doing they both fail to realize that they are themselves guilty of what they ascribe to Kant, i.e., the reduction of reason to the understanding. I have discussed this reductionism in Husserl in my «From the World to Philosophy, and Back», in J. Bloechl e N. de Warren (eds.), *Phenomenology in a New Key: Between Analysis and History. Essays in Honor of Richard Cobb-Stevens*, Cham-Heidelberg-New York-Dordrecht-London 2015, pp. 63-92, and *The Powers of Pure Reason. Kant and the Cosmic Concept of Philosophy*, Chicago 2015, pp. 169-85, and in Hegel in *Il pensare e l'io. Hegel e la critica di Kant*, Rome, pp. 171-234.

³ For a fuller treatment of this point see my Il pensare e l'io, op. cit., pp. 35-70.

happen when I endorse something as motivating me. This is true of living beings,⁴ and of spirit more particularly. Hegel's examples in the Science of Logic involve history (Hegel denies that the Ionian climate or Caesar's character can be considered causes of the Trojan war or the demise of the Roman republic: W 6, 227-28) and life (pain does not operate on us as a cause but only as a stimulus exciting us to overcome a lack: W 6, 480-82). What spirit does when it allegedly yields to causes is in truth interrupt the natural course and suspend them so as to transform them into motivations it can adhere to and make its own. Unlike dead nature, life and spirit are self-enclosed systems that find in themselves the motivation to change. Biology, psychology and logic are on a different plane than mechanism.

For Husserl causality works in the spatio-temporal realm of material nature studied by modern science (Ideas II, § 16): in transcendence, not in the immanence of intentional consciousness. But nature can only be experienced by us, and therefore sends us to the study of subjectivity (Ideas II § 18h, HUA 4, p. 90). A transcendent thing, being spatial, has infinite ways of manifestation to me; an immanent lived experience, instead, has a 'now' for me, a duration. I can always go back to a transcendent thing, as it is there for my inspection; when in turn I reactivate a now, I do so in a different now. That is, the problem of identity is posed differently in things and in consciousness. In time-consciousness the repetition made possible by the transcendent identity of the thing is ruled out; all we have is interlaced temporal layers that refer to one another (HUA 11, § 4, p. 16). Therefore the thing comes in its adumbrations, has properties and constitutes itself as the unity of schemata (Ideas II § 32, HUA 4, p. 127), i.e., as the identity of its different adumbrations, "a rule of its possible manifestations" (Ideas II, § 18g, HUA 4, p. 86). By contrast, consciousness has no inner or outer; it is an indivisible unity that admits of no perspective; it is a flux which, having no spatial properties, has no parts. In fact, for consciousness there are only lived experiences that refer to one another. And if consciousness is not made of parts, it is nothing but its own history (Ideas II § 33, HUA 4, p. 137-38). Things are a reality without a history, consciousness is a history without materiality. This is why for consciousness causality is replaced by motivation. A decision cannot be seen as if it were the natural effect of motives: only what I know and endorse as a motivation has the value of determination for the psiche and spirit (Ideas II § 56f, HUA 4, p. 231). While the thing is an index of its schemata, a clue for intentionality insofar as it is its correlate, consciousness exists in its intertwined layers as identical to itself. If things are the result of a constitution and an objectification, we constitute ourselves in the unity of a history. Unlike things, which are the identity of their manifestations, consciousness is the subject of itself and the unity of its layers. It is the identity of an absolute that lacks nothing in order to be ("nulla re indiget ad existendum," Ideas I § 49, HUA 3: 1, p. 92).

⁴ In Hegel's view this is key for a true idealism in § 359 of the Encyclopaedia: "nothing whatever can have a positive relation to the living being if this latter is not in its own self the possibility of that relation."

If things are our objectifications, they are given as objects around us. They are for us. Grammatically speaking, things exist in the accusative, we in the nominative. But upon closer inspection, the inflection of the nominative is striking: we are indeed subjects that can be declined in all cases. Most significantly for Husserl, we are a dative: things appear to us. When in mundane experience others like us appear at first as objects and come in the accusative, they pose the specific problem that we must be able to find the subject in the object: to apprehend their lived body as animated by a subjectivity analogous to ours. A special grammatical case, however, is the genitive. It is my contention that whereas the self covers all grammatical inflections, the I is an example of self declined in the genitive, because the I is an I-of: a de jure claim to ownership. Issues of antagonism (conflicts and their resolution), responsibility, choice begin to surface once we adopt the legal language of the I as proprietor of its modes.

Turning what is passive into an activity is a form of appropriation, an endorsement. For both Hegel and Husserl we have an I when a splitting of the given unity of the self occurs and the I emerges as the rightful claim to appropriate and structure partial, non-independent moments which the I treats as its properties. The I comes forward and offers itself as a center organizing different moments around itself and as a source of acts.

2. The I

The thesis of this section is that the I is originally in relation to itself, whereby 'relation' entails a duality. Let us see how this works for Hegel and Husserl.

(a) Hegel. For Hegel categories of being precede categories of essence. Being is immediacy, i.e., lack of mediation and opposition. Unities differ in complexity depending upon their being immediate and undivided or the result of a return after an opposition has been sublated. The former are poor and elementary as they show no inner complexity, the latter are rich because they are the determinate solution of a relationality and contain in themselves the negation they have overcome and internalized.

We have seen how in the Phenomenology of Spirit self-consciousness is not a starting point but arises out of consciousness. In fact, it contains in itself consciousness as sublated; the world of the initial consciousness, directed outside itself, is negated and inwardized in and by self-consciousness. The generic, undifferentiated other of consciousness is now self-consciousness' own other; i.e., self-consciousness has acknowledged that it is but a relation, and specifically a return to itself ("die Rückkehr aus dem Anderssein," W 3, p. 138). Its dialectic, which contains the famous pages on the struggle for recognition, develops precisely insofar as it starts from the object in order to negate it and return to itself. At first what it does not realize is that it considers its other as subordinate and dependent, so that when it finally meets an independent other like itself its whole life is suddenly endangered. As we can see, the I that

affirms itself as a center of desire and will and must struggle to make its rights valid is derivative from and subsequent to a more naive consciousness occupied with the world around itself.

A more rigorous and systematic illustration of this point occurs in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit in the Encyclopaedia. It is divided into Anthropology (the soul), Phenomenology (consciousness, self-consciousness, reason), Psychology (theoretical and practical spirit), but it turns out at the end that the different stages and subjects of this development are but the ways of appearing of a unitary underlying subject, spirit, and must therefore be understood as moments of spirit's self-realization and self-knowledge. Consciousness is but one such moment, i.e., it is not the source of meaning or the origin of anything. The I is a mediation and retroactive formation which defines itself relative to the objectivity which now first arises as its correlate; that is, I and objectivity are correlative, but they are both a product of earlier phases. More fundamentally, the I arises as the theater of a conflict, the stage of an opposition to corporeality.

The soul, the all-encompassing subject of the Anthropology, is in immediate unity with the natural determinations it finds itself in. It is the forms of life of a psycho-physical animated body in which spirit lives. This is the stage of absence of opposition and undivided unity (as in the logic of being). The lived body is neither an object among objects, nor yet an I, but the logos made flesh as it were, spirit embodied in affective dispositions in which we happen to live and upon which we find ourselves dependent. When the need arises to dominate our affections, the soul makes itself I: it distinguishes itself from what it at once relates to; it takes a distance from itself to address (train or silence) its bodily states (and this is the logic of essence). Through these different practices of habituation and control over itself, the I arises as the progressive victory of the soul over its corporeality (“der Sieg der Seele über ihre Leiblichkeit”, W 10, § 387 Z, p. 41). The body is appropriated and lowered to a sign and permeable instrument of its activity. This is how the I is formed: as a dualization of itself, a return to itself from an animated body and an opposition to objectivity. At the same time, this can only happen when the I forgets that its claim to ownership — its claim to produce, manage and monitor its properties — is a result. The I thus retains some of the traits of the impostor denounced by Rousseau in the pages of the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality on the founder of private property.

The modes of immediate life in the Anthropology are those pertaining to an animated body pervaded by a subjectivity that struggles to assert itself but is not yet master of itself. In the immediate and prereflective relation with the environment, the natural alternation of wake and sleep, the corporeization of affects and sensations, proprioception and self-feeling — in all these moments the soul is in constant relation to itself but does not yet show the division and splitting indispensable to affirm itself as an I. All these forms are equally pervaded by a dispersed subjectivity which remains opaque to itself. When it is in immediate unity with its naturalness, the

self is not self-conscious, and yet forms the basis for the subsequent forms of consciousness: i.e., the I is not a disembodied self but a return to itself out of nature.

As the soul appropriates its world by appropriating its body, which thus becomes its instrument and the sign of its dispositions, an active relation begins to form itself between the self and what begins to be objectified in the shape of an other to vanquish. That is, an opposition between subject and object is not formed until a splitting of the natural immediate unity is produced. But when it is, reflexivity and organization in the way of subordination and aggregation of modes around an identical I can develop.

At the end of the Anthropology, the soul has separated itself from its immediacy. It now opposes it to itself as a material that should no longer be recalcitrant but pliable to its activity. Thereby the soul, which was compared to sleep, awakens to itself as an abstract universality, i.e., as I which excludes from itself the totality of its natural determinations and makes it a world of objects external to itself. If the soul was a unity whose moments coexisted in a relatively indistinct flux and in the form of feelings, consciousness arises when the soul doubles itself and turns inadvertent and virtual differences among moments into genuine oppositions among objects now taken as independent. The I or consciousness is the certainty of itself and at once of a world of objects outside itself. Consciousness, in other words, divides itself as it affirms an opposition between subject and object.

When in the Science of Logic Hegel criticizes what he dubs the original beginning from the I of recent times (W 5, p. 71), his target is mainly Fichte as the end result of the Kant-Reinhold chain, but his charge is more ambitious and sweeping: modern philosophy as philosophy of reflection assumes a notion everybody is supposedly familiar with and takes as a first principle without realizing it is an abstraction. The I is an abstraction because it is a result and not an original foundation. Hegel's diagnosis of the malady of modern philosophy, the absolutization of an opposition between subject and object, I and world, could not be more straightforward: something derivative, a transitional and mediating moment, is taken as an absolute and original datum. The I is a relatively late formation, not an original condition of possibility.

(b) Husserl. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena for pure consciousness. Consciousness is pure when it brackets existence, i.e., disregards the psychological self and the real object and focuses on the correlation between a noetic and a noematic side. This consciousness is seen as the source of all constitution. Constitution, however, must not be understood as a production but as the way phenomena appear to pure consciousness, how they acquire sense and validity for us. For this reason phenomenology aims at a pure description without appeal to any theory, construction, deduction. Consciousness is not to be construed as a self-enclosed sphere populated by impressions and ideas, nor as awareness of its inner states. It is intentionality originally directed to its objects and oriented towards evidence. But evidence is

reached only if we look for it, as the correlate of a presumption of truth; and truth is the fulfilment of an intention, the confirmation of an expectation. If it is so, then consciousness is internally divided and constantly filling its gaps to come to coincidence with itself. Its internal division is essentially temporal and must be seen in terms of an original flow which constitutes itself without having to assume any condition of possibility external to it.

Consciousness is neither an aggregate of discrete elements nor an undivided unity. If it is essentially temporal, it appears to itself as internally articulated, differentiated and stratified. Its life is made possible by anticipations and retentions: a relation with its own past and future. Even the relation between the presentation of a phenomenon through perception and the presentification (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of past experiences in their absence in recollection requires the alterity of the past and the acknowledgement of consciousness' essential non-identity with itself. The living present is not the isolated undivided instant, for it is internally differentiated: between actual and potential, conscious and unconscious, between foreground and background, between retentions and protentions.

In the second of his *Meditations*, Descartes famously writes that “‘I am, I exist’ is necessarily true every time (*quoties*) I utter it or conceive it in my mind” (AT 7, p. 25). “Here I make my discovery: thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist — this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking” (AT 7, p. 27). I am always here and now. What is beyond doubt is the cogito as long as it thinks (the world is instead inferred). Consciousness appears as the temporal meeting point between thinking and thought. Before it is developed into the incontrovertible foundation of all knowledge, the cogito is a performative act. Its certainty is the awareness of its content. There seems to be no room here for unconscious representations, or a divided self, for the cogito is precisely what establishes an identity.

Unlike Descartes' cogito, in Husserl consciousness is not separate from the world because it is originally directed to it and works as its dative; it is not separate from its lived body and its kinaesthesia. But there is more: the lived body's self for Husserl does not have to negotiate the gap between actual and inactual experiences that more complex forms of self such as presentifications do. So, in addition to its embodiment, Husserl's consciousness differs from Descartes' cogito insofar as it includes its dormant and latent stages in passivity and prereflective self-awareness; and, most importantly from the point of view at hand, it differs from it insofar as it is not a temporal coincidence in a punctual cogito, because the self is constituted as identical through its acts. Its flow is made of layers that refer to one another and is not limited to its actual content.

This is how *Ideas II* begins: acts are built on lower acts and essentially refer to what precedes them. Consciousness can be a unity of actual and potential acts insofar as it implies presentification (a way to deal with absence) and every actual objectification comes with a horizon of co-intended acts. It is only by abstraction from the flow they come in that lived

experiences can be isolated in their singularity. In truth every lived experience is retained in its all-encompassing flow and sinks into passivity. I can reactivate it and make it present again, but that shows that consciousness is organized in mutually dependent layers as the unity of all acts, present and past, actual and potential. Consciousness is not presence or awareness of what is every time given or thought. In Ideas I (§ 35) Husserl had already insisted that the flow of consciousness cannot consist of pure actualities: every perception comes with what he there calls a halo of background intuitions. The concept of intentional act needs broadening, he argues (Ideas I § 115): every cogito is understandable in terms of its predelineated potentialities, so that what is each time meant is more than what is meant explicitly (CM II, § 20, p. 46). Every actual cogito is intrinsically referring to what is latent and implicit in it.

As we saw regarding Experience and Judgment and the Passive Synthesis Lectures, every objectification rests on an affection which exercises an attraction by calling the I's attention. As a consequence, only when there is a motive for something to emerge from its undifferentiated background in the form of a contrast, a prominence and a heterogeneity can it become an object for me. Receptivity and givenness imply one another, and together they are the correlate of the ego's intentional "awakening." That is, consciousness must include its latent and unconscious self: explicit attention is nothing but the bringing into relief of an egoity without ego.⁵ In fact, consciousness implies its anteriority to itself and is the becoming conscious of its inner alterity. What is first is not the I, but the flow of consciousness' constitutive life — which is to say that whatever is first eludes us and it is wrong to look for a first principle and an origin at all. This is why Husserl recurs to the paradoxical and baffling talk of a self-constitution on the part of consciousness.⁶

3. "The square root of I is I" (Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*).

The thesis of this section is this: despite all we have seen so far, the I is quite necessary. Let us see how this works for Hegel and Husserl.

(a) Husserl. Husserl's philosophy is itself a flow. He changes his mind on the self and the I many times over the years. In the fifth of the Logical Investigations (§ 8, HUA 19: 1, p. 374), the focus is entirely on lived experiences. These structure themselves as unities without any center of reference or a subject organizing them. Husserl claims — much à la Hume — that there is no need for an I: "I was unable to find Kant's I," he confesses. In 1913, however, he has. The problem of the unity of the constitutive flow had proven more elusive than Husserl thought in the Logical Investigations and in the time-consciousness lectures (i.e., as of 1904/1905). In the revised edition of the Logical Investigations, in Ideas I and Ideas II (i.e., as of 1913), Husserl

⁵ J. Bloechl, "Egoity without Ego," in A. Ferrarin (ed.), Passive Synthesis and Life-World, Pisa 2006, 93-108.

⁶ This is also why the criticisms I raised in my "Husserl on the Ego and its Eidos (Cartesian Meditations, IV)" (in *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 32:4, 1994, 119-133) are misguided.

inverts his position, recognizes a transcendence to the ego he now finds indispensable and begins to speak of a pure I. Transcendental phenomenology is thus inaugurated.⁷

Why can we not say, as for example Sartre does, that we should replace statements such as ‘I am conscious of this chair’ by its anonymous equivalent ‘there is consciousness of this chair’? Why not say that pure consciousness belongs to nobody (Niemandem), as does Husserl in 1907 (Ding und Raum, HUA 16, § 13)? Are we sure we need an I? Are we not introducing a transcendent opaque core into a lived experience that can account for itself?

If I am aware of this perception and relate it to a memory of a similar phenomenal content, I must be able to synthesize a past and a present; these are moments that belong in an underlying temporal unity. But this unity must be mine. I must be able to ascribe this and that experience to myself as mine. It is as if these acts came with an egological tag: they imply an exclusive center of individuation and orientation. Were the I at most empirical, as Husserl thought in the Logical Investigations, it would be the product of a cogitatio. Here instead Husserl realizes the I is not a product but a source. The ego enters and withdraws from the scene (Ideas II, § 23, HUA 4, p. 103), but not in the way a contingent and empirical event happens: it is identical and abiding. Speaking of anonymous experiences is only possible in isolation and abstraction from consciousness’s life, which, as the constant appropriation of itself in reflection, postulates a pure I. The I is originally relation to itself and constitutes itself as a relentless appropriation of its experiences. Lived experiences must be able to be brought under an exclusive and individual owner.

Ideas I never explains why it introduces a pure I, and yet it has much to say about it. In his groundbreaking study, Marbach writes that reference to the I becomes necessary when Husserl begins to consider the problem of other consciousnesses like mine shortly before Ideas I.⁸ At that point the temporal unity is no longer sufficient; exclusivity becomes no less indispensable. Mine-ness (Meinheit) needs individuation: the I as a center and pole of organization (HUA 15, p. 351).

It is easy to misunderstand the I as center and pole. What Husserl does not mean is a fixed center around which satellites revolve; rather the I is insofar as it centers itself and its modes, as it constantly readjusts and organizes itself relative to them. It is not as if there were an I on the one side and its modes on the other: the I is nothing but its own centering (Ichzentrierung). And this I is not invoked to make sense of the unity of consciousness — it is not the condition of

⁷ The secondary literature on the ego in Husserl is replete with many valuable essays. I have found particularly useful, among others, the works by E. Marbach (Das Problem des Ich in der Phänomenologie Husserls, Den Haag 1974), R. Bernet (La vie du sujet, Paris 1994), D. Zahavi (Self-awareness and Alterity, Evanston 1999), A. Pugliese (Unicità e relazione. Intersoggettività, genesi e io puro in Husserl, Milano-Udine 2009), D. Lohmar, “A History of the Ego” (unpublished manuscript), and A. Altobrando (Husserl e il problema della monade, Torino 2010).

⁸ Op. cit., p. 60 ff. See also Bernet, op. cit., 303-4.

possibility of its acts or the foundation of a theory of experience —, but to highlight a key aspect of all acts. The I lives in and through them. All different Is (the I of lived body, psiche, and spirit in Ideas II; the I as subject and object, the psychological or mundane I, etc.) rest on this pure or transcendental I.

Even when his co-operation with Fink after the Cartesian Meditations leads him to reconsider beginning phenomenology with the cogito, Husserl does not shift to a supposed ontology of the life-world or the primacy of intersubjective practices or doxa. He does not abandon the absoluteness of transcendental consciousness as the constitutive source of the world or the necessity for the phenomenological reduction. The pregiven world of the Crisis itself depends on an original or primal I (Ur-Ich, §§ 54-55), and it is only thanks to the reduction that the transcendental constitution of experience can show itself.⁹

Let us proceed with order and focus on the pure I from Ideas I to the later phases of genetic phenomenology. In Ideas I the pure I is not one experience among others. It is not a real part of any cogito, it rather belongs to each experience as an identical pole. It is in this sense a residue, a transcendence in immanence (§ 57, HUA 3: 1, p. 110). This I, while distinct from its experiences, is not separate from them. In all my being-directed-toward, in all my cogito acts, a ray emanating from the I is insuppressable (§ 80, HUA 3: 1, p. 160). The pure I is thus personal, not a supraindividual agent at work behind our backs. It is not an abstraction for which we have no evidence, for I grasp myself as pure I whenever I suffer, I see, I do, says Ideas II (§ 22, HUA 4, p. 97).

When phenomenology becomes genetic in the 1920s, this immutable I is seen in relation to a personal I. The pure I is still active in its acts, but now constitutes itself as the substrate of its habitualities and a monad. It is constituted through its dispositions, but dispositions become abiding once certain acquisitions have been sedimented. And “acquisition,” says Husserl in the Passive Synthesis Lectures, is more than a sheer metaphor (§ 22, HUA 11, p. 96). The I, in other words, manifests itself in the tendencies it says yes to and appropriates, in the stances it adopts, in its interests and motivations, as an abiding character.

The Cartesian Meditations proposes to shift from the identical ego to its “manifold cogitationes, the flowing conscious life in which the identical ego lives” (CM II, § 14, p. 31). The flow of cogito, the consistent systems of intentionalities as stable potentialities available for uncovering, is now that through which the identical I grasps itself (CM IV, § 31). This I is not an empty pole but the subject which “with every act emanating from [it...] acquires a new abiding property. For example: If, in an act of judgment, I decide for the first time in favour of a being and a being-thus, the fleeting act passes; but from now on I am abidingly the ego who is thus and

⁹ “The natural, objective world-life is only a particular mode of the transcendental life which forever constitutes the world, [but] in such a way that transcendental subjectivity, while living on in this mode, has not become conscious of the constituting horizons and never can become aware of them” (Crisis, § 52, p. 175-76).

so decided” (CM IV, § 32, p. 66). Each acquisition, each position (*Stellungnahme*) produces a habituality of my ego. Habitualities form the deep structure of the monad. Unlike the psychological mundane self, the monad is not the sheer cumulative result of what happens to it, but the subject that takes responsibility for its decisions and lives in and through its stances. The acts that gave rise to decisions may be forgotten, but the dispositions remain. In *Experience and Judgment* (§ 25, p. 122) Husserl writes that the forgotten has not disappeared altogether. It has left a trace and a lasting result. The forgotten has become latent and unconscious in us, but can be reactivated. In the *Passive Synthesis Lectures*, Husserl says that impressions tend to become unconscious when they have collapsed into “the night” (HUA 11, p. 172) that we are.¹⁰

Let me note in passing, before we turn to Hegel again, that comparing consciousness to a night or to sleep has illustrious antecedents, from Aristotle and Plotinus to Leibniz. Different contents subsist as virtual in us, available for uncovering and becoming actual when explicit attention first makes them discrete forms of consideration. In the *Anthropology* Hegel speaks of this unconscious inadvertent retention as an ideal existence in a featureless mine (*bestimmungsloser Schacht*, W 10, § 403), and in the *Psychology* he writes that intelligence is the night or pit in which all cognitions passively acquired are preserved unconsciously (*bewusstlos aufbewahrt*, W 10, § 453).¹¹ Why does Husserl find inspiration for this thought in Leibniz’s monads? If they are windowless, are they not unlike a porous and transcendent intentionality? If they are simple substances, are they not unlike the concrete totality of lived experiences of the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*? Is it their perspectivalism, or their small perceptions, that inspires Husserl? It seems to me that a monad emphasizes the idea of virtuality: a simple substance encapsulates everything potentially in itself, conscious or unconscious.

In the *Crisis* Husserl speaks of a functioning subjectivity as the anonymous, background self constituting the experience of the pre-given world. If everything is constituted, the functioning original I operating through me unconsciously remains hidden until it is subjected to the reduction. The active wakeful ego in the natural attitude remains “blind to the immense transcendental dimension of problems... I am a transcendental ego, but I am not conscious of

¹⁰ On the unconscious, after J. Hyppolite (“Phénoménologie de Hegel et psychanalyse,” orig. 1957, reprinted in *Figures de la pensée philosophique*, Paris 1971, vol. 1, pp. 213-30) and A. de Waelhens (“Réflexions sur une problématique husserlienne de l’inconscient. Husserl et Hegel,” L. van Breda and J. Taminaux (eds.), *Edmund Husserl 1859-1959*, The Hague 1959, pp. 221-37), see especially A. Mishara (“Husserl and Freud: Time, Memory and the Unconscious,” in *Husserl Studies* 7, 1990, 29-58), R. Bernet (“Unconscious Consciousness in Husserl and Freud,” in D. Welton, ed., *The New Husserl. A Critical Reader*, Bloomington 2003, 199-219), D. Moran (“The Ego as Substrate of Habitualities: Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Habitual Self,” in *Phenomenology and Mind* 6, 2014, 27-47), D. Zahavi (*op. cit.*, pp. 203-20), D. Manca (“Husserl e le metamorfosi della soggettività inconscia,” forthcoming).

¹¹ I have written on the unconscious in Husserl, Hegel and Freud in my *Il pensare e l’io*, *op. cit.*, 37 ff. On these metaphors of the unconscious, widely debated during Hegel’s time, see A. Beguin, *L’âme romantique et le rêve*, Paris 1939, and Mishara, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6. On the soul as sleep in the Aristotelian tradition up to Hegel, see my *Hegel and Aristotle*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 239 ff., 265-68.

this” (Crisis, § 58, p. 205). The I is active when it turns to its constitutive self. This is accessible through reflection; and reflection makes thematic and objectifies its anonymous ground, whether I am already non-thematically self-aware or I reactivate something that is forgotten and has left my consciousness altogether. It is the same anonymous functioning constitution that is now the object of reflection. And yet reflection leaves nothing as it finds it: “reflection alters the original subjective process” (CM II, § 15, p. 34). The non-identity between constitutive and reflecting I cannot be lost sight of, in fact, the reduction introduces an inversion of the natural course. If in the natural attitude a wakeful conduct is identified with an actual position, in the reduction the functioning subjectivity that was sunken (Versunkenheit), anonymous and unconscious, is now reactivated and brought into relief. As a result, we must distinguish different senses of ‘wakeful’: as natural attitude, as transcendental subjectivity, as reflecting ego.¹²

Further questions begin to surface. When Husserl pushes the limits of the I in the 1920s he goes to the point of relativizing the distinction between subjectivity and the active I. If in Erste Philosophie (HUA 8, p. 90) Husserl says we must speak of a latent and a patent or manifest ego, in Experience and Judgment (§ 17) he pushes the I back into affection and even receptivity. In fact, receptivity is the lowest level of the activity of the ego. Now dormant and wakeful become correlative manners of the I, its mirror-images. Anonymity no longer denotes what comes before the I, for it is absorbed into egology. And this is also the rub of the controversial notion of an original I in the Crisis.¹³

(b) Hegel. The Phenomenology of spirit is run by consciousness’ progressive discovery of the presuppositions at work behind its back. By reflecting on what is true for it, consciousness realizes that thought-determinations — i.e., categories — are operative in everything it says or does. Eventually consciousness must be brought to see the logical nature animating everything, so that scientific philosophy, thought’s knowledge of itself, can begin. At that point we realize that we have overcome the point of view of consciousness (we have overcome the Phenomenology and entered the realm of speculation, i.e., the logic and encyclopaedic system).

At the same time, in order for this process to be immanent, i.e., for consciousness to realize on its own that it is but the several ways it deals with something pre-existing it has not produced but finds on its path, all impositions by a subjective I must be kept at bay. More generally, all philosophy can only be speculative, i.e. presuppositionless and true, insofar as the I extinguishes itself before the consideration of the thing at hand. The very notion of das Logische as objective thought unfolding and realizing itself requires the suppression of the I.

But this is not the end of the story. For, with all due respect for Hegel’s jokes on the irrelevance of his own persona for the grasp of the true, we should ask who writes the Science of

¹² See Manca, op. cit.

¹³ On this original I (and on Fink’s and other interpretations thereof) see D. Moran, Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction, Cambridge 2012, pp. 245-56.

Logic if not Hegel's I. What is the relationship between what he calls the Concept (thought, the logical element, the absolute, truth, etc.) and the I? I.e., who thinks objective thoughts if it is not finite Is? Here, too, we had better brace for surprises. Without retracting anything of what we have seen about the criticism of Kant's and Fichte's I, in the *Logic of the Concept* Hegel writes that "the concept that has developed into a concrete and free existence is none other than the I or pure self-consciousness" (W 6, p. 253). We must infer that what is wrong is not the I, but the subjective and finite I and all philosophy that grounds itself on it. It turns out that the I, too, is said in many ways, as is thought. As long as we take the I as a finite subject, a consciousness, an I-think opposed to its objects, everything goes wrong: the concept becomes the property of an I and refers to an object outside itself, and the I is opposed to the world like an empty form is opposed to all that matters. An I is presupposed and defined as given, fixed, separate from its particular modes, now taken as subjective states and acts. What this conception of thinking which is ordinary and standard in modern philosophy does not see, in its curiously oblivious arrogance, is that it thereby absolutizes the finite I which is treated as the true self-same universal whose particular modes (concepts, deeds) become its properties, the attributes it presumes to generate, guide and control.

If, instead, the I is taken as reason, the subject-object, the concept of the object for which thought and thing are the same, then the I is the only truth of things and nothing external or in-itself remains or is valued as the touchstone of truth and ultimate foundation of appearances. The I is then the thought of the thing. After our premises, it may shock us to read in the *Subjective Logic* that Kant's I-think is all truth, provided it is taken as absolute reason and not misunderstood as a psychological and empirical finite consciousness (W 6, p. 254). As Hegel puts it in the 1831 *Lectures on Logic* (p. 7), "I accompany all these representations. 'Accompany,' however, does not say enough; I am entirely invested in these representations."

The I is not the individual subject of a formal activity but — as a tätige Allgemeine, an active and concrete universal — it pervades everything it suffers and does. It is immanent in all its manifestations the way the concept is immanent in all its determinations. Likewise, the I has as little reality outside its acts as the concept outside its determinations. In Hegel's characteristic inversion, we must not therefore say "I have thoughts," but "thought thinks itself when it becomes I." The logical nature, objective logos, or the soul of all there is, in Hegel's various definitions, knows itself and becomes self-conscious as I. The objective logos would remain unconscious and not know itself if it did not take on the shape of the I. In fact, the I is the way in which the Idea enters into the shape of self-consciousness (W 8, § 159 Remark, W 6, p. 545).

This is to say that the I is nothing in itself. The I is not identified by any original attribute. It is neither universal nor particular, neither abstract nor concrete, neither finite nor infinite. Like all dialectical concepts, it means what its development dictates: it all depends on how we take it. In fact, the I determines itself as finite consciousness or as absolute reason's self-knowledge

depending on what we think when we think of the I. By grasping itself as particular and finite I or as reason's I, the I is modified by its act. Again we must invert the traditional conception. We must not say that the I is originally particular or individual and yet can rise to universality, we should rather say that because it is active universality as pure self-relation, the I makes itself particular and distinguishes itself from other Is. At the same time, we should not conclude that the truth lies either in the infinity of self-consciousness or in the finite I, for only together and as a whole are the different Is true. The particular I is itself necessary for the infinite. Without it, the concept would not be able to realize itself in the finite.

The I is not the source of individuation then, but a pure negative self-relation. You cannot start from what you presume you know about the I — as we have seen that is an immediacy which is actually a result. In fact, the I is necessarily elusive until we realize we must grasp its logic. What is first is thus not the individual self-consciousness, itself constituted by the logical mediation of self-relation. What is first is thought that realizes itself concretely. Hegel understands subjectivity in terms of logical relations. Logic realizes itself in the world, and the I turns out to exhibit the same structure and logical unfolding as the absolute, thought thinking itself.

From the point of view of speculation, what is unconscious is absolute reason in its functioning, and philosophy is about bringing the logical nature operative everywhere to knowledge of itself.

4. Conclusion

After we have compared and contrasted Hegel and Husserl on the I and its necessity, it is now easy to show why they take such divergent paths out of the same premiss.

Husserl might object to Hegel that he has abandoned intuition and contravened the first rule of truth, that things should be given in their flesh. It is no longer phenomena Hegel is talking about when he presumes to identify their true nature in the logic of thought's self-realization. The aim of phenomenology is, it now can be concluded, the transcendental experience of the I. Far from being an empty abstraction, through the phenomenological reduction the I becomes “a universal apodictically experienceable structure” (CM II, § 12, p. 28). Phenomenology aims at self-explication, “the explication of my ego” (CM IV, § 41, p. 86). Thanks to the epoche, “everything objective is transformed into something subjective” (Crisis, § 53, p. 178). The ego is eventually the exclusive focus and object of a transcendental experience.

Hegel might object to Husserl that his indecisiveness on the I is telling: he is bound to introduce phenomenologically problematic concepts such as the transcendence in immanence of Ideas I because he has a naive and undeveloped conception of thought and holds fast to the finite as he evades the most pressing question, that of the relation between I and absolute thought. The only absolute Husserl recognizes, the cogito's apodicticity, is a relative one. But

reason is more than just constitution and experience of the world, for it makes itself real in the world.