

Does phenomenology have a future?

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Writing towards the end of his life, the outlook for phenomenology seemed bleak even to Husserl: 'Philosophy as science, as serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous science – *the dream is over*.¹ This apparently gloomy assessment was echoed, some three decades later, by Heidegger, who observed, also towards the end of his life, that the 'age of phenomenological philosophy seems to be over. It is already taken as something past which is only recorded historically along with other schools of philosophy.'² What hope can phenomenology have in our own country, when, as Michael Dummett reminds us – seemingly without either irony or regret – at the outset of his Preface for this new edition of Husserl's first work of phenomenology, the '*Logical Investigations* [is] little known to English-speaking students of philosophy but well known to *most* students of the subject with a different mother tongue'?'*

The possible demise of phenomenology may be related to two prevalent tendencies in contemporary philosophy. On the one hand, as Heidegger had already anticipated, phenomenology has more and more become something to be studied as a historical event or school of thought, and this is particularly the case in departments which teach 'continental philosophy', in both the UK and the United States. On the other hand, phenomenology – or at any rate, certain, non-threatening aspects of its early, so-called 'realist', pre-transcendental incarnation – has gradually been assimilated by such representatives of the analytical tradition as Dreyfus, Putnam and Dummett himself (not to mention that whole school of analytic

interpreters of Husserl so egregiously represented by the *Cambridge Companion to Husserl*). The problem with both of these tendencies is that they stifle the essence of phenomenology as a movement, as a practice or activity of thought: namely, its '*radicality*'. For phenomenology is, first and foremost, a *way of doing* philosophy, and, as such, it makes extraordinary demands on the phenomenological philosopher. The phenomenologist finds him- or herself continually obliged to 'begin again'. Rather than relying on the authority of the 'great philosophers', the phenomenologist is entreated to focus instead solely on *die Sachen selbst*, the matters at hand. To maintain such a focus, it is essential that the phenomenologist 'relinquish the untested use of philosophical knowledge'.³ All of this goes against the grain of how we are, today, taught to do philosophy.

One of the few recent trends in phenomenological philosophy to have respected this radicality is represented by the work of the Phénoménologie et Cognition research group, in Paris. Sadly, the recent and most untimely death of Francisco Varela has robbed this group of its most distinguished and impressive thinker. The overarching objective of the group is to enable a productive *rapprochement* between phenomenology and research aiming to achieve a scientific theory of cognition. Representatives of this group are happy to grant that this project leaves no room for engaging in exegesis of Husserl's work; indeed, as they concede, success in the project would be dependent upon a 'reorientation' of Husserlian phenomenology. In many ways, theirs is an ambitious and exciting project, and

* Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay, edited and abridged with a new Introduction by Dermot Moran and a new Preface by Michael Dummett, Routledge, London, 2001. lxxxv + 422 pp. £16.99 pb., 0 415 24192 8. Routledge have also published a new two-volume paperback edition of Findlay's complete 1970 translation of the *Logical Investigations*, also edited by Dermot Moran, £18.99 each, 0 415 24189 8 (vol. 1), 0 415 24190 1 (vol. 2). Critical editions of the *Logische Untersuchungen* were published in 1975 by Kluwer as volumes XVII and XIX.i/ii (edited by Elmar Holenstein) of the magnificent *Husserliana* series. These editions were in turn reprinted in 1992 as volumes 2, 3 and 4 of the eight-volume *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Elisabeth Stréker, published by Felix Meiner.

much of the work contained in the recent collection *Naturalizing Phenomenology* is indeed stimulating.⁴ The problem with this project is, of course, betrayed by the provocative title of the collection. The editors are honest enough to confront head-on Husserl's explicit 'anti-naturalism', beginning their detailed Introduction with the following epigraph, drawn from Husserl's 1911 essay 'Phenomenology as Rigorous Science': 'We are fighting against the naturalization of consciousness.' The anti-naturalist stance worked out in detail in this essay, and further honed in *The Crisis*, was already evident in the critique of psychologism which constitutes the main body of the first part of the *Logical Investigations*, the 'Prolegomena to Pure Logic'. At this point, and despite the compelling arguments advanced by the representatives of the group, it remains a moot point whether this research can, in the long run, remain in any meaningful way compatible with phenomenology.

There have been a number of other developments, particularly in France, where new philosophical positions have emerged from a confrontation with phenomenology. Ricoeur's hermeneutics, Derrida's deconstruction and Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic ontology of the flesh all have their points of departure in Husserlian phenomenology. But it is perhaps the work of Levinas which is most explicit in continually reappraising its phenomenological roots, even as it appears to move further and further away from any possible affinity with Husserl's thought. Yet, again, what is apparent from reflection upon these thinkers, and specifically upon Levinas's writing, is that, in each case, what is distinctive and essential about their philosophical position derives from the *break* with phenomenology effected by them. In each case, much of the momentum in their thought derives from the purchase gained by *working against* phenomenology. It doesn't amount to much of a future if all phenomenology can look forward to is serving as a critical stalking horse.

However, the evidence pointing to phenomenology's demise is certainly not straightforward. It is possible, for instance, to disclose a much closer affinity to Husserl than is normally appreciated in Levinas's work of the 1970s and 1980s, to the extent that one could even argue that the critical stance adopted towards Husserlian phenomenology in *Totality and Infinity* has been more or less reversed in the later work.⁵ Moreover, as Moran reminds us in his Introduction to this new edition of the *Investigations*, Derrida 'has acknowledged that his whole philosophical impetus arises out of his studies on Husserl'. And if we return

to our earlier citation from Heidegger, we find that the claim that the age of phenomenology is over, because phenomenology is now treated historically as a school of philosophy, is immediately called into question: 'But in what is most its own, phenomenology is not a school. It is the possibility of thinking, at times changing and only thus persisting, of corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought.'⁶ Finally, we must also admit that our own citation from Husserl opens a short essay which, far from dwelling on the end of the dream of phenomenology, in fact reiterates the necessity of the new historical turn in phenomenology, which is continually worked out in all of the texts of *The Crisis*. Can there be any better evidence of the fecundity of Husserl's work than this new departure stemming from his own immanent critique, undertaken when he was well into his seventies?

It seems to me, therefore, that the question of phenomenology's future, provoked by the publication of this new edition of the first work of phenomenology, requires us to determine whether Husserlian phenomenology still possesses that potential for radicality which was previously identified as its essence.

An inseparable connection

There is no better text to study than the *Investigations* if we seek an answer to this question. On the one hand, it remains the most concrete of all the work published during Husserl's lifetime. It is a text that is overflowing with exemplary phenomenological analyses, and to that extent is distinct from texts such as the *Ideas*, which are far more concerned with questions of method, and of the philosophical status of phenomenological inquiry as such. On the other hand, it is the text which singlehandedly changed the course of philosophy in Germany. Not only were the Prolegomena successful in, as Dummett correctly observes, 'killing off the influence of psychologism within German philosophy'; the *Investigations* as a whole were, within a decade, successful in inaugurating a new 'phenomenological movement', one which was soon recognized by such influential philosophical figures as Natorp, Dilthey, Wundt and Rickert, not to mention inspiring a generation of younger philosophers such as Heidegger, Scheler, Ingarden and Gadamer, who were to have a decisive influence on the development of European philosophy in the twentieth century.

But, clearly, this historical impact of the *Investigations* is something which is lost to the contemporary reader. The stifling influences of post-Hegelian idealism at one extremity, and psychologism at the other, lie well beyond our contemporary ken. Equally, it must

be admitted that Husserl has, in his written work, done little to promote the cause of phenomenology to the modern reader. The *Logical Investigations* is both dauntingly long, at close on 800 pages, and written in a dense, unrelenting, style which offers little in the way of help or relief to the reader.⁷ In turning once again to Husserl, therefore, it is well to pay heed to Heidegger. When we read the *Investigations* today, is it still possible to discern the possibility of a response to the claim of that which is to be thought? For it is only if we are able to answer this question positively that we will be able, in turn, to affirm phenomenology's continuing potential for radicality.

It remains well enough known that phenomenology's decisive finding is that of intentionality, the underlying structure of consciousness expressed in the formula that all consciousness is *consciousness-of*. Whatever else we do, it is of the utmost importance that, if we are to *do* phenomenology, we must understand this claim in its full radicality. Strangely enough, it may well be that Deleuze, of all people, is best able to help us accomplish this. He rightly identifies a crisis in the psychology of the late nineteenth century which, in many ways, still works contemporary philosophical debates from within. This crisis emerges from the acknowledgement of an impossible position:

This position involved placing images in consciousness and movements in space. In consciousness there would be only images – these were qualitative and without extension. In space there would be only movements – these were extended and quantitative. But how is it possible to pass from one order to the other? How is it possible to explain that movements, all of a sudden, produce an image – as in perception – or that the image produces a movement – as in voluntary action?

Deleuze identifies the responses of 'two very different authors' who, at more or less the same time, undertook the task of overcoming the 'duality of image and movement, of consciousness and thing'. On the one hand, Bergson seeks to argue that 'all consciousness *is* something', working this position out by means, as Deleuze would have it, of the '*movement-image*'; whereas Husserl argues that 'all consciousness is consciousness *of* something'.⁸

Deleuze's formulation discloses the profundity of these two distinct responses to the impossible position. His appropriation of the Bergsonist position, based on the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*, has become justly famous. It underpins, I would contend, the only credible alternative to the phenomenological (and subsequently, in the case of Heidegger, phenomeno-

logical–ontological, and even, in the case of Levinas, phenomenological–ethical) response to this problem. The significance of this Bergsonist position is precisely the way in which it conceives of movement *as* an image, thereby in turn revealing the deep significance of Bergson's work on duration and movement in *Time and Free Will*. In comparison, what Deleuze's formulation gestures towards in the Husserlian position is the irreducible *relationality* underpinning the phenomenological conception of intentionality. And it is, I believe, in the fundamental importance accorded to a certain 'a priori' relationality that the *Logical Investigations* responds most importantly to the claim of that which is to be thought.

This aspect of the phenomenological inquiry as it is developed in the *Logical Investigations* is initially adumbrated in Chapter 11 of the Prolegomena, 'The Idea of Pure Logic'.⁹ Now, despite the reputation which it has gradually accumulated, the first volume of the *Investigations* does not solely consist in the critique of psychologism. (For the record, this critique comprises Chapters 3 to 9 of the Prolegomena). Its more fundamental objective is to establish the necessity and coherence of the idea of a 'pure logic' – that is, a 'theoretical science independent of everything empirical' – which would, in turn, 'render possible a technology of scientific knowledge' [Prolegomena, §57] – in other words, a 'science of science'. The point of the critique of psychologism is to demonstrate once and for all the inadmissibility of that line of thinking which seeks to show that all concepts, logical or otherwise, have their provenance in, and thereby can only be explained by reference to, those 'inner mental operations' which are 'supposedly involved in attaining them'. What the critique confirms is that, while psychology is undoubtedly useful in revealing something of the mental processes which may occur during the initial phases in which concepts have their origin, it is quite unable to account for that quality of *ideality* which marks the independence of concepts from the particularity of any actual mental event. Pythagoras' theorem both possesses the same meaning, and is true and valid, for anyone who thinks it, at any time and in any place.

Thus, Husserl argues at the outset of Chapter 11 that 'what makes science science ... is certainly not its psychology, nor any real context into which acts of thought are fitted, but rather a certain objective or ideal interconnection which gives these acts a unitary objective relevance, and, in such unitary relevance, an ideal validity.' *Logical Investigations* as a whole therefore seeks to effect a passage from 'the psychological

connections of thinking, to the logical unity of the thought-content (the unity of theory)' ('Foreword' to 1st edn, p. 2). However, as Husserl proceeds to point out, this logical unity or objective interconnection can function both as an interconnection of things (that is, the unity of a science could derive from the interconnection between the field of objects that it studies – typical of 'concrete' sciences such as natural history) and an interconnection of truths (whereby the unity of the particular fundamental lawfulness explored by the science would derive from the interconnection between the principles of explanation exploited by that science – typical of 'abstract' sciences, such as mathematics). The goal of the *Logical Investigations* would thus be the achievement of a pure logic understood as pure a priori science (a pure theory of any judgement – or signification formation – whatsoever), balanced by an equivalent pure a priori science of objects (a pure theory of any object whatsoever), which is worked out in the formal ontology of the Third *Investigation*. But already, as Husserl subsequently reflected, Chapter 11 of the Prolegomena had revealed the 'inseparable connection' between the '*Apriori of formal ontology*' and the '*apophantic Apriori*', and so, as a consequence, had brought out an awareness of 'the problem of how this inseparability should be understood.'¹⁰

This inseparability is evident from the fact that the sense of any judgement whatsoever is dependent upon its having some bearing upon some possible objectivity – a judgement, however well formed, which is literally about nothing is, in the final analysis, senseless. Thus, on a level higher than that of the pure a priori theories of any-judgements-whatsoever, on the one hand, and of any-objects-whatsoever, on the other, what is required is a unitary theory of '*judgement-systems in their entirety*', a pure theory of the unity of any 'possible deductive theory'¹¹ – that is, a pure theory of the possible form of any-theory-whatsoever. Husserl responds to this need by turning to the Riemannian *theory of multiplicities* (*Mannigfaltigkeitslehre*).

Multiplicities

What is remarkable about multiplicities, as Riemann described them, is that, on the one hand, they are distinct from mere aggregates, to the extent that they are determined by a certain specific 'lawfulness' – that is, a series of 'operations' to which the elements of the multiplicity are subject. On the other hand, however, the multiplicity is distinct from 'sets' properly so-called, to the extent that the elements of the multiplicity *are not* determined in advance in their concrete mathematical nature. The apophantic apriori and the

apriori of formal ontology thus converge within the theory of multiplicities:

The *objective correlate* of the concept of a possible theory, determined only in its form, is the concept of any possible field of cognition [*Erkenntnisgebiets*] that would be governed by a theory having such a form. Such a field, however, the mathematician (in their sphere) calls a *multiplicity* [*Mannigfaltigkeit*].

Husserl proceeds to specify the nature of the 'form' that determines the possible theory, and thereby, at the same time, 'governs' the field of cognition or objective correlate of the theory:

among the objects belonging to the field, *certain* relations [*Verknüpfungen*] are possible, which come under *certain* fundamental laws having such and such a *determinate form* (here, the only determining condition). In respect of their matter the objects remain completely indeterminate ... Thus, they are determined, neither directly as individual or specific singularities, nor indirectly by their intrinsic species or genera, but exclusively by the *form* of the relations ascribed to them. These relations themselves are accordingly as little determined in respect of content as the objects connected; only their form is determined, namely by the form of the elementary laws assumed to hold good for them. These laws, then, determine both the *field* and its *form*, and the theory that can be built, or, more correctly, the *theory-form*.... The multiplicity is determined by the circumstance that the thought-objects belonging to it make possible [*ermöglichen*] these 'operations'. (Prolegomena, §70)

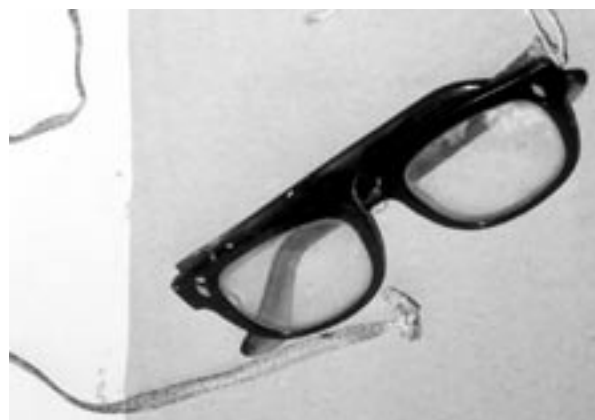
I have quoted this passage at length because, I believe, it discloses the operative principles of Husserl's phenomenology. Let us underscore the salient features: First, the only determining condition of the multiplicity is the determinate form of those laws which govern (both the form and the field of) the multiplicity. Second, the matter of the objects of the multiplicity remains undetermined. It is determined solely by 'the form of the relations ascribed to them'. Third, the content of these relations themselves is equally undetermined. Finally, it is the objects of the multiplicity that actualize, or make possible, these very relations.

It is noteworthy that both Husserl and Bergson, in seeking to develop a response to what Deleuze styled the 'impossible position' of contemporary psychology, should have recourse to the theory of multiplicities. In the characterization of Husserl I am developing here, I am consciously allowing certain elements of Deleuze's explication of Bergson's use of multiplicities to exercise a determining function. Bearing this in mind, what I believe to be most significant in this account

for philosophy today is, on the one hand, the specific nature of the a priori determinate relations governing the multiplicity's 'field and its form'.¹² This provides us with the clue as to how we must undertake our phenomenological investigations if we are to respect the radical impetus of phenomenology. On the other hand, there is an important ontological hint contained within this account: while the determinate forms of the relations are a priori with respect to the matter of the objects determined by these relations, nevertheless the objects themselves are not simply secondary to these relations, for they precisely *make possible* the relations. This 'non-indifference' of the relations to those objects which they determine accords, very closely, to one specific aspect of the ontology of immanence which Deleuze begins to delineate in *Difference and Repetition*.

We can use the apriority of relations derived from the theory of multiplicities to chart a course through the *Investigations*. We recall that the Prolegomena established that there is an 'ideality' of sense, whose status entails the 'repeatability as the same' of that sense in any particular empirical situation. The First Investigation extends the analysis of ideal sense into the specific realm of language and signification. The Second Investigation critically assesses traditional theories of abstract ideas, showing by implication that, to the extent that they inevitably hypostatize universals, they are inadequate for theorizing ideality. In the Third Investigation, Husserl advances his formal ontology, developed in terms of a 'Theory of Parts and Wholes'. This is something of a misnomer – it is, in fact, a theory of relations. Recalling the theory of multiplicities, we can see that it is an ontology founded on the a priori determinate relations of *dependence* and *independence*. Any object whatsoever will be analysed according to its determination either by the relation of dependence (thus, in the analysis of our consciousness of inner-time, for example, Husserl shows that the present cannot exist independently of its 'comet's tail' of retentions and protentions) or of independence (a table leg, for instance, can exist independently of a table). As recent work on this Investigation has begun to make clear, these analyses are crucial for the rest of the book; indeed, it has been plausibly argued that all of the subsequent inquiries are worked out within the horizon opened up by these initial analyses of dependent and independent relations. Initially, the Fourth Investigation repeats the same formal analyses, but focusing on the grammatical relations in any possible language, rather than on the ontological relations in a field of any possible objects.

In the Fifth Investigation, we come at last upon the theory of intentionality. Now, it is clear that we can recast this theory as revealing the dependent relations that subsist between consciousness and its objects. As a consequence, of course, we could go on to demonstrate, on this basis, the precise nature of the mistakes that give rise to epistemological dualism. And it is just this line of reasoning which can sustain much of phenomenology's liberating quality for philosophers today. However, I think we can push the significance of the apriority of relations much further. It seems to me that the key to carrying out intentional analyses is always to begin with the relation, rather than seeking to construct a relation between already extant objects. We must not begin with the notion of a transcendental subject, for example, and then seek to explain its various properties and ways of interacting with the flow of consciousness. Rather, we should seek to show how subject and object emerge as such through



being so determined by relations which govern the flow as field. We must, that is, begin with the flow as field, and seek to explicate those determinate relations which govern the field. In this way, we can then investigate *how* the relata emerge as a determination of the relation. The key in all of this is not to begin with preconceptions derived from, for instance, the history of philosophy. Thus, we might analyse the relation of perception, finding how the perceiving and the perceived emerge as such from the prior relation. As before, we would thereby be able to show the way in which the assumption that we perceive representations inevitably undermines traditional theories of perception. And this Husserl indeed does in §14 of the Sixth Investigation, where he demonstrates that the relation between perceiver and perceived is quite distinct from that between representer and represented, with the consequence that the relata themselves are determined in distinct ways.

However, the most significant of the analyses conducted in the *Investigations* is to be found in the

second section of the Sixth Investigation, which deals with ‘categorical intuitions’. This analysis represents the highest goal of the *Investigations*. In the adequate unity of categorial and sensuous intuition, we attain the dignity of true knowledge, or evidence. Equally, the phenomenological demonstration of the possibility of intuiting categories represents Husserl’s response to the failure of traditional theories of abstract ideas, and hence his demonstration of how we can have actual, concrete and productive experiences of the idealities first uncovered in the Prolegomena, and which are, of course, a necessary condition of any scientific work in the broadest sense.

These analyses were subjected to a remarkable reading by Heidegger in his 1925 lecture course.¹³ Husserl had shown that categorial intuitions are *founded upon* sensuous intuitions, and that, as a consequence, we, so to speak, see through the sensuously intuited object to the category which is founded upon it. This is, as Heidegger argues so forcibly, a notable departure in the history of philosophy. However, he also goes on to show that sensuous intuitions are themselves founded upon categorial intuitions, to the extent that it is the category which enables us to intuit the sensible object as such. Thus, while I can intuit the categorial relation of ‘being above’ by intuiting the computer on top of my desk, it is only through being founded in this categorial relation that I am able to see the computer as being, precisely, ‘on top of’ the desk. There is, therefore, a *co-founding* relation between sensuous and categorial intuitions, and we now know that for Heidegger this co-founding relation contained an anticipation of his own articulation of the ontological difference.

But if we review Husserl’s analysis of the relation between sensuous and categorial intuitions from the perspective of the theory of multiplicities, we can see that Heidegger’s reading had, in a sense, been anticipated. For, as we have suggested, one of the key aspects of Husserl’s account of the theory of multiplicities is his claim that while it is the relations which determine the objects, it is these objects which ‘make possible’ the relations. This formulation clearly anticipates Heidegger’s articulation of the co-founding relation between sensuous and categorial intuitions.

It is at the level of this profoundly ontological interpretation of the significance of Husserl’s theory of multiplicities that we once again encounter the claim of that which is to be thought. The phenomenologist offers a richly productive way of responding to this claim through the aprioricity of relations

which emerges from Husserl’s account of the theory of multiplicities. It is within this context – unfortunately omitted from the ‘shorter’ edition – that we can, I believe, offer a confidently affirmative response to the question of phenomenology’s future today.

Notes

1. E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. D. Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 1970, p. 389. This remark dates from ‘Summer 1935’.
2. M. Heidegger, ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, in *On Time and Being*, trans. J. Stambaugh, Harper & Row, New York, 1972, p. 82.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
4. J. Petitot, F.J. Varela, B. Pachoud and J.-M. Roy, eds, *Naturalizing Phenomenology*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1999.
5. I demonstrate one element of this affinity in ‘Speaking of Time ... Husserl and Levinas on the Saying of Time’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1999, pp. 35–58.
6. Heidegger, ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, p. 82.
7. These latter shortcomings have, unfortunately, tended to be exacerbated by Husserl’s English translators – Dermot Moran’s observation that ‘Findlay has produced a powerful translation’, one in which the ‘prose [is] smooth, clear, even elegant’, provoked much rueful perplexity amongst participants in concurrent seminars devoted to the *Investigations* at Staffordshire and Manchester Metropolitan universities last year. His earlier admission, that most commentators agree as to the ‘uneven, fragmentary and sprawling character’ of the *Investigations*, is surely more appropriate.
8. G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, Athlone, London, 1986, p. 56.
9. It is one of the frustrating, though inevitable, consequences of abridging the *Investigations* to a single, manageable, volume that certain key sections are omitted – in this case, the crucially important §70 of Chapter 11, ‘Elucidation of the Idea of a pure theory of multiplicities [*Mannigfaltigkeitslehre*]’.
10. E. Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. D. Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1978, p. 86. Husserl notes that the problem of this relationship was not expressed explicitly in the *Investigations*, although it can nevertheless be discerned therein from the perspective of the *Logic*. The difference in perspectives between these two works consists essentially in the supplementation of the ‘objectivist’ orientation of the Prolegomena with the turn to subjective problems of constitution in the *Logic*.
11. Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, p. 90.
12. In a recent essay (‘Immanence and Difference: Towards a Relation Ontology’, forthcoming in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*) I have sought to show why these relations must, first and foremost, be differential. One way or another, it is notable that a certain prioritization of relations is a defining characteristic of some of the most remarkable work being done in contemporary theoretical physics. I have in mind, in particular, the work of Lee Smolin and Stuart Kauffman, among others.
13. M. Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. T. Kisiel, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985.