



## EDITH STEIN AS A MIDDLE WAY BETWEEN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF HUSSERL'S *IDEEN* AND THE CRITICS OF GÖTTINGEN CIRCLE

Edith Stein como via intermediaria entre a fenomenologia das *ideias* de Husserl e as  
críticas do círculo de Göttingen

Edith Stein como vía intermedia entre la fenomenología de las Ideas de Husserl y las  
críticas del círculo de Gotinga

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### SUMMARY

The present article aims at defining Edith Stein's place in the phenomenological movement and the reasons for her distancing from Husserl because of the modulation of the concept of transcendental constitution exposed by her *Ideas about a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. We have divided our work into three sections. The first one has the purpose of situating us in the context of the break between Husserl and the Göttingen Circle as a consequence of the transcendental turn of phenomenology. The second one, about Stein's position in the phenomenological movement, contains an analysis of Husserl's vision in early phenomenology. Finally, we present a description of Stein's constitutive problem and the differences and agreements she maintains with her Master. The objective is to show that Edith Stein's phenomenology is faithful to Husserl's original approach in the *Logical Investigations* and continues being so in the transcendental phenomenology exposed in *Ideas*.

**Keywords:** *Ideas I, constitution, Husserl, Stein, Transcendental Idealism.*

### RESUMO

O presente artigo visa definir o lugar de Edith Stein no movimento fenomenológico e as razões do seu distanciamento de Husserl devido à modulação do conceito de constituição transcendental exposto em *Ideias para uma Fenomenologia Pura e para uma Filosofia Fenomenológica*. Dividimos nosso texto em três seções. A primeira tem o propósito de nos colocar no contexto da ruptura entre Husserl e o Círculo de Göttingen como consequência da virada transcendental da

fenomenologia. A segunda, que abrange a posição de Stein no movimento fenomenológico, contém uma análise da visão da autora sobre Husserl no contexto da fenomenologia inicial. Finalmente, apresentamos uma descrição do problema da constituição de Stein e as diferenças e acordos que ela mantém com seu Mestre. O objetivo é mostrar que a fenomenologia de Edith Stein é fiel à abordagem original de Husserl nas *Investigações Lógicas* e continua sendo assim na fenomenologia transcendental exposta nas *Ideias*.

**Palavras-chave:** *Ideias I, constituição, Husserl, Stein, idealismo transcendental.*

## RESUMEN

El presente artículo tiene por objetivo definir el lugar de Edith Stein en el movimiento fenomenológico y las razones de su distanciamiento de Husserl por la modulación del concepto de constitución transcendental expuesto por sus *Ideas relativas a una Fenomenología pura y a una Filosofía fenomenológica*. Hemos dividido nuestro texto en tres secciones. La primera tiene por propósito situarnos en el contexto de la ruptura entre Husserl y el Círculo de Göttingen como consecuencia del giro transcendental de la fenomenología. La segunda, sobre la posición de Stein en el movimiento fenomenológico, contiene un análisis de su visión sobre Husserl en el contexto de la fenomenología temprana. Finalmente, presentamos una descripción del problema constitutivo de Stein y las diferencias y acuerdos que mantiene con su Maestro. El objetivo es mostrar que la fenomenología de Edith Stein es fiel al enfoque original de Husserl en las *Investigaciones Lógicas* y sigue siéndolo en la fenomenología transcendental expuesta en las *Ideas*.

**Palabras clave:** *Ideas I, constitución, Husserl, Stein, idealismo transcendental.*

## THE DISSOLUTION OF THE GÖTTINGEN CIRCLE

After the publication of the *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901), an active group of disciples gathered around Husserl, including Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Adolf Reinach, Roman Ingarden, and Edith Stein. The formation of the phenomenological school was the consequence of the intense teaching activity that Husserl carried out in Göttingen, which, supported by the foundational slogan “back to the ‘things themselves’” (Husserl, 2001, p. 168) exposed in the *Logical Investigations*, restored a wide field of action that introduced one of the most significant transformations that German philosophy suffered since the end of idealism<sup>1</sup>. One of the characteristics of Husserl's work is the disparity of criteria it has received over time. Because,

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<sup>1</sup> We turn to Spiegelberg to obtain a precise data about the reason that defined the *ethos* of the phenomenological movement, inspired fundamentally by the tireless academic work that Husserl carried out during his stay in Göttingen between 1901 and 1916, seen with perfect eyes by those who were disappointed by the superfluous subject matter of the philosophy and the European sciences of the end of the 19th century. For them, the *Logical Investigations* must have meant a genuine possibility of resuming philosophy based on the objectivity of “the things themselves” that it promised in its inaugural approach: “Most of these students had been prepared by reading the *Logische Untersuchungen*. What fascinated them about Husserl was encountering in a climate of relative academic sterility, an original thinker practicing in his teaching the original seeing of the ‘essences’ in the ‘things,’ as he had described it in his writings” (Spiegelberg, 1994, pp. 167-168).

despite the initial acceptance of his philosophy, in 1913, many of his disciples agreed to reject the Master's new publication: *Ideas that is pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy*, for apparently contravening the "realistic" character of the descriptive phenomenology of the *Logical Investigations* –even though *Ideas* “only represented the consequent elaboration of those initial approaches and developed for the first time within a wide problematic the guiding principles of phenomenological methodology” (Landgrebe, 1968, pp. 13-14).

The phenomenology program exposed in the *Logical Investigations* said little about the renewed concept of conscience that Husserl would place years later as the transcendental phenomenology's central axis. In this work, the philosopher tried to achieve the foundation of formal logic; intentional structures were only considered as long as they served as support to this end. Nevertheless, from the *Logical Investigations*, we can find the reasons that served to give a more significant extension to the problematic of the essence of intentionality, for which mathematical objects are only the scope of logical objectivities that, in their fullest sense, belong to phenomenology.

During his first years in Göttingen, Husserl dedicated himself to investigating sensitive intuition in its mode of external perception, accompanied by a series of variations such as memory and the representation of fantasy. Together with the tenacity with which Husserl approached them during his lessons, these themes were the ones that decisively influenced the configuration of the *ethos* of the phenomenological school.

The intentionality taken as a synthetic performance made it possible for questions concerning the essence of objects to be treated in correlation strictly linked to the structures of consciousness. Husserl adopted the term “ontology” to deal with this correlation, which ended up transforming its meaning into an ontology of the thing in correlation with the effects of the consciousness in which it occurs:

To each one of these objective structures correspond psychic performances in which the object comes to give itself an entity of that structure or, as Husserl expresses later, it is constituted. Thus, in the fundamental conception of intentionality understood as a performance, the correlation between the essential structures of intentional objectivities and the essential structures of the experiences in which those objectivities occur is based from the outset, and gradually develops on that basis (Landgrebe, 1968, p. 31).

Husserl elaborated the universal meaning of this correlative period that separates the *Logical Investigations* from the publication of the first volume of his *Ideas* in 1913. It is

because the constitution problem was not directly explained in the initial program of phenomenology, that it is understandable that the disciples of Göttingen could not appreciate the true scope of the concept<sup>2</sup>. For those disciples, the intuition of essences was the nucleus of phenomenology and the most significant conquest of Husserl to speak rigorously of the entity and its regions, as much as of the psychological-descriptive analyses. The “vision of essences” came to be alluded to in a measure that exceeded the use that Husserl made of it without looking for a complete understanding of its methodical character producing, until today, the negative image of phenomenology as an intuitionism lacking method. What is striking is that the Göttingen Circle members did recognize the fundamental *Principle of All Principles*:

*that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak, in its ‘personal’ actuality) offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there”* (Husserl, 1982, p. 44).

Despite this, they did not consider the connection between the self-giving intuition and the character of being of the objectivities<sup>3</sup>.

For this reason, they did not come to understand self-donation as an intentional act, so this principle seems to have been interpreted as a “return to the object” in the sense of an atheoretical intuition of reality in all its spheres. Such an interpretation leaves the essence of the new sense of ontology proposed by Husserl, whose aim was to combat naive realism.

The first phenomenological school, therefore, together with its irradiations, was characterized by the discrepancy consisting of not taking in its indissoluble correspondence the two capital motives of Husserl's phenomenology –the psychological-eidetic and the ontological–, but in following them more or less separately. In saying this, we do not intend to criticize that school in which a joint work of unusual intensity and fecundity was carried out, directed by the highest ethos; it is only a matter of making understandable, from a historical point of view and the peculiarity of the development of Husserl's work, the singular way in which

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<sup>2</sup> According to Mariano Crespo, "some authors with realistic roots have considered that the discovery of the problematic of the constitution put Husserl irremediably on the way of transcendental idealism. To speak about the 'constitution' of the objects by the conscience would include certain 'creative' nuances, which would conflict with the objectivism of the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*. However, nothing seems to be further from the intentions of the founder of the phenomenological method" (2009, p. 106).

<sup>3</sup> Erazim Koáhk's explanation is beneficial when he says: "What Husserl really proposes is an experientialism so radical that it does not pretend to bestow patterns of meaning upon a meaningless universe by a miracle of induction but discovers –literally, sees– them in experience and applies them to understanding particular instances" (Kohák, 1978, p. 166). With these words, the author underlines the central role of experience in Husserl's phenomenological thought, phenomenology understands itself as a transcendental critique of experience.

it was received and executed its influence (Landgrebe, 1968, pp. 33-34).

This discrepancy was the result of a lack of understanding of the true meaning of intentionality, which caused, among other things, that the analysis of the *Consciousness of Internal Time* was not taken into account during the period immediately following the appearance of the *Logical Investigations*, in which Husserl deepened the concept of intentionality as a synthetic performance that would allow the leap to reduction to be understood. Intentionality only reveals its real significance in advance of phenomenological research, this notion that guided Husserl from the beginning of his philosophical life also clarifies, in that same advance, the question of how the evolution of phenomenology and the pretension of the universality of the phenomenological method are consequences of this original approach.

The phenomenological reduction, first presented in his 1907 lessons, was for Husserl, a central issue that accompanied him until the end of his days. This thought did not mean that phenomenology lost the north of the investigation, that until then, it was oriented to objectivity, nor was it replaced by mere methodological considerations. The reduction was, for Husserl, the way to access the fundamental questions of first philosophy.

The importance of the reduction exposed in *Ideas* was conceived as a renunciation of the convictions with which Husserl had founded phenomenology in the *Logical Investigations*, for what he was accused, from then on, of having embraced an idealism of neokantian stamp<sup>4</sup>. The publication of *Ideas* meant the end of the phenomenological school of Göttingen. Paradoxically, Husserl's intention when writing this work was to put at his disciples' disposal a detailed exposition of phenomenology's fundamental principles and the necessity of its evolution to the transcendental phase<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Edith Stein gives us a testimony about the disappointment caused by this supposed return to idealism by Husserl in *Ideas*: "The *Logische Untersuchungen* had caused a sensation primarily because it appeared to be a radical departure from critical idealism which had a Kantian and neo-Kantian stamp. It was considered 'new scholasticism' because it turned attention away from the 'subject' and toward 'things' themselves. Perception again appeared as reception, deriving its laws from objects not, as criticism has it, from determination, which imposes its laws on the objects. All the young phenomenologists were confirmed realists. However, the *Ideas* included some expressions which sounded very much as though their Master wished to return to idealism. Nor could his oral interpretation dispel our misgivings. It was the beginning of that development which led Husserl to see, more and more, in what he called 'transcendental Idealism' (which is not to be confused with the transcendental idealism of the Kantian schools) the actual nucleus of his philosophy and to devote all his energies to its establishment. This was a path on which, to his sorrow as well as their own, his earlier Göttingen students could not follow him" (Stein, 1986, p. 250).

<sup>5</sup> At this point we are guided by Javier San Martín's opinion about the original character with which Husserl wrote the *Ideas*, this work was conceived from the beginning as a systematic presentation of phenomenology: "However, this work, written with illusion and in full maturity, was misunderstood and worse accepted by his disciples from Göttingen, because they did not find adequate the explicit confession of idealism that Husserl makes in it, thinking that with the adscription to idealism a backward movement was consummated, forgetting something fundamental of phenomenology, which above all is the acceptance of the value of intuition and the objects. What was scandalous about this work was precisely the presentation that is made of the reduction, a presentation that does not seem to take into account the achievements of the text of the classes of 1910-1911, since it rather repeats the scheme of 1907, that of *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Husserl expected to solve these problems in volumes II and III. However,

The understanding of itself as transcendental idealism is one of the themes that has caused the most damage to Husserl's phenomenology. By the reduction, we learn that every being is a sense of being, that every being is the result of the subject's constitutive activity, but about a world that is a *factum*. We do not create the world; we constitute it from experience. The transcendental subject is the condition of the possibility of the experience but on a pre-existing material base. The phenomenological reduction leads us to the transcendental idealism: the thesis that shows that every being is primarily related to the *Ego*, that there is nothing that remains out of the conscience. The task of phenomenology is to describe everything as a sense that is formed in and by the action of the transcendental subject<sup>6</sup>. The following question arises: Why did idealism awaken the mistrust and rejection of the most enthusiastic disciples of the Göttingen Circle? To answer the question, we will briefly discuss the difference between ontological idealism and gnoseological idealism to contextualize our definition of transcendental idealism.

For ontological idealism, the reality is determined by ideas. According to this position, from which the most usual sense of the word idealism comes, the ideal counts more than the real in the definition of the way of life of everyone who "moves, or pretends to move, in order to realize some ideas, which in this way become determinants of the reality" (San Martín, 1986, p. 262). For gnoseological idealism, it is the subject who determines the knowledge we have of reality.

there is an "active side" of the subject that mediatizes knowledge, which thus ceases to be the result of an action of the reality on the subject, and becomes the result of the activity and spontaneity of the self-same subject that leaves its mark on the knowledge (San Martín, 1986, p. 262).

To think that realism is a total antithesis of gnoseological realism, which postulates that both the existence of the world and that of the subject are before both entering into a cognitive relationship, would be too naive. An idealism in absolute opposition to realism would suppose the denial of reality and would make any human attempt to acquire knowledge counterproductively. Gnoseological idealism is sceptical only about the pretension of getting to know reality itself. Although this has nothing to do with denying that reality itself exists, it

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he must not have been delighted with all this because he did not want to publish the continuation of the *Ideas*" (San Martín, 1987, p. 25).

<sup>6</sup> With these words, Miguel García-Baró clarifies the Nature of transcendental subjectivity as a constituent of sense: "It is about the evidence that any problem, any answer or thesis, any question or doubt, any experience of any kind, whether it refers to the poetic, practical or theoretical field; in short, all things or entities, all values, all purposes, there are only as many figures and combinations of senses. Everything, everything at all, begins with a sense. And by this expression, I mean everything that is in some relationship with life, with my life, or, more precisely, with our life" (García-Baró, 1999, pp. 91-92).

was undoubtedly why, until today, a prudent distance from the ontological meaning of the term had not been marked. In the particular case of Stein and Husserl,

the defense she makes of her Master Husserl, distancing him from supposed idealistic ascriptions in the classical, mainly Kantian, sense, does not mean that Stein affirms that Husserl is a realist in the sense above; it would rather be a realism that is in no way incompatible with the 'transcendental idealism' that Husserl had conceived and that Stein had already understood at a certain point (González Di Pierro, 2016, p. 34, n. 6).

The phenomenological idealism refers to the sense of the existence of the world when accepting, without any fear, the fact of the constitution, that is to say, that we only know within a structural frame, within a "style of being", a "sense of being" that is characterized by being constituted. The analysis of the origin of this sense is the goal of the phenomenological transcendental idealism,

transcendental phenomenology, as a concrete science, is in itself universal idealism carried out as science, even if in it not one word is spoken about idealism. It demonstrates this idealism by means of its own sense as transcendental science in each of its separate constitutive domains (Husserl, 1989, pp. 419-420).

For Husserl, a transcendental subject reduced to the complex of aprioristic elements present in knowledge would be contradictory, since, on the one hand, the individual would be the support of the pure subjectivity. On the other hand, the individual is only objectively justified from the transcendental subject. Whether this transcendental subject is understood as general consciousness or as a supra-empirical subject, it is impossible to find it in the individual or to explain it from the individual. Husserl's insistence on the character of absolute of the transcendental subject goes beyond a purely logical structure or a complex of structures.

We can raise the problem in the following way: from the simplest of ontologies, we must discard any supra-empirical absolute reality, unless we appeal to God to characterize such reality, then, or justify the knowledge from the transcendental subject or God. However, if we renounce making theological extrapolations, it will have to be in the subject where we find the laws that scientifically legalize universal knowledge. At this point, we return to the aprioristic laws that made it so difficult for us to clarify the true meaning of transcendental subjectivity: the laws that are fulfilled in the subject, go beyond it. Ontologically, we will have to go beyond

pure individuality and open ourselves to a metaphysics of categorical and specific levels of being. Thus we will be able to justify these laws that, operating in the empirical subject, go beyond pure empiricism. These laws should not only be sought in the subject who knows, but also in the ambit that corresponds to the object that is to be known.

## **EDITH STEIN: HER PLACE IN THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL MOVEMENT**

The phenomenological movement organized around Husserl was made up of a variety of young philosophy students who came from all over Europe to listen to the lessons of the man who, by that time, had become one of the most famous professors in Germany, due to his novel anti-psychological proposal that he summarized in the inaugural slogan of his philosophy: “back to the ‘things themselves’” The importance of this circle was cut short by the outbreak of World War I and by Husserl's move to Freiburg in 1916. The rise to power of the national socialist regime meant a severe blow for the expansion of phenomenology and truncated, in a short time, the cultivation of phenomenological research.

Establishing Stein's place in the phenomenological movement requires that we place ourselves in the context of her contact with Husserl and his influence in the phenomenological circles of München and Göttingen's first two years of his move to Freiburg when she was Husserl's assistant.

In Husserl, the phenomenological method is oriented to things, not to the methods of particular sciences. The phenomenology is a science of essences, which implies the resumption of the central objective of the classic and scholastic philosophy, due to the approach that considers that the purpose of the phenomenological method is to allow the intuition of essences and, therefore, the so longed-for return to the object that Husserl had been promising since the *Logical Investigations*. Here is where the highest common point between Husserl's proposal and the convictions with which the phenomenologists of München and Göttingen had approached him can be noticed,

Phenomenology differed from the various directions of *Neo-Kantianism or criticism* in that it was not oriented to the methods of the particular sciences, but to things themselves (to measure the methods on them): that is why the change it produced was called the *turn to the object*. In contrast to empiricism, which seeks to base itself on mere sensual experience, it was distinguished as a science of essence, and through both it appeared as a return to the oldest traditions (...) What is decisively new about Husserl is that he does not stop at the fact of a single cogito, but reveals the *whole domain of consciousness* as a field of unquestionable



certainty and assigns phenomenology as its field of research (Stein, 2014a, pp. 150-151).

For Stein, it was clear that the objective of the transcendental argument was to demonstrate the dominance of the consciousness as a field of unequivocal certainty whose structure corresponds to the field of study of transcendental phenomenology, to which not only the acts of consciousness but also their objective correlates belong. However, she does not hesitate to add a comment that can be interpreted as a complaint due to ambiguity in the way that Husserl exposes what he considers to be the meaning of the constitution.

What offended his circle of friends and students was a conclusion –not necessary in our opinion– which he drew from the fact of the constitution: If specific regulated processes of consciousness necessarily lead to the fact that a concrete world is given to the subject, then the *concrete being*, e.g., the existence of the sensually perceptible outside world, means nothing other than being given for a consciousness of this or that kind, more closely: for a majority of subjects who are in mutual understanding and exchange experience with each other (Stein, 2014a, p. 152)

This interpretation of the constitution is what Stein calls transcendental idealism and justifies, in the words of the author, the estrangement of Husserl's disciples, and the dissolution of the Göttingen Circle.

To show which were the deviations that separated Stein from the common denominator of München and Göttingen's phenomenology, we will concentrate, briefly, in clarifying the position of Hedwig Conrad-Martius, with whose thought and person Stein felt closely linked, in front of Husserl's transcendental approach.

In his text entitled *Die transzendente und die ontologische Phänomenologie* of 1959, Conrad-Martius points out that Husserl has not dealt with the being or non-being of reality that transcends consciousness since such a problem would be overcome after the application of ἐποχή. The problem was that the transcendental methodology included among those affected by ἐποχή and the reduction to the same being of the world. Husserl characterizes the result of the exclusion of any position of being from the world by stating that "world" and "reality" are concepts that have to be represented in the framework of real consciousness through meanings that are full of actual content, in this way he affirms:

everything which we call *object*, of which we speak, which we confront as actuality

which we hold as possible or probable, no matter how indeterminately we think it, is precisely therefore already an object of consciousness; and that signifies that whatever world and actuality took universally may be called, they must be represented in the framework of actual and possible consciousness by corresponding senses or posita filled with more or less intuitive contents (Husserl, 1982, p. 322).

Everything, to be a phenomenological subject, must be questioned about its meaning, it must be asked about the way in which this meaning is shown in the acts of consciousness that originally constitute it, which does not imply that the meaning cannot have components that refer to something different from what the consciousness is, “something determinate and determinable, given thus and so, which is something over against consciousness itself, something fundamentally other, non-really inherent [*Irreelles*], transcendent” (Husserl, 1982, p. 239).

However, in the phenomenological explanation of meaning, Husserl relates reality and consciousness in a way that can be exaggerated in the opinion of the realists of München and Göttingen; for him, what exists always occurs exclusively concerning a consciousness or, to be more precise, within the framework of a perspective of being that instantly assumes consciousness. What we have seen, insofar as we only cover a specific side of it in experience, can never be given in an absolute way. This relational determination of reality, in which the being is defined as a correlate of the being of consciousness, is the cause of the sense of reality that Husserl uses being interpreted by his detractors as reduced to a mere annexe of consciousness,

the whole *spatiotemporal world*, which includes human beings and the human Ego as single subordinate realities, is, *according to its sense, a merely intentional being*, thus one has the merely secondary sense of a being *for* a consciousness. It is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences which, of essential necessity, can be determined and intuited only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: *beyond that* it is nothing (Husserl, 1982, p. 112).

The affirmation that reality is found concerning a consciousness can mean both that its sense must be ascertained according to the consciousness and that its sense is exhausted in being relative to the consciousness.

The reproach that Conrad-Martius makes to Husserl for having reduced the world

to the reduced yield of subjectivity did not aim at making the world the theme of phenomenology, but at denouncing that Husserl intended to characterize the world in its sense and its sense of being, exclusively, as a correlate of the immanence of consciousness. If we were to equate reality with the sense that is immanent to the consciousness, we would make it irretrievable, the real being of the world as a position in itself would cease to be a phenomenological theme, “Conrad Martius, on the other hand, proposes another way, starting from an *epoché* that dispenses with all questions of being or not being. In this way, she puts the world with everything that integrates it as *being hypothetically*” (Sepp, 2008, 719- 720).

Despite her critic against the transcendental turn of phenomenology, Conrad-Martius attributes Husserl a partial success, since she considers that only the phenomenological method is capable of discovering the presence of the operating subjectivity in the world. From this recognition, we can verify the need for parallelism in the phenomenological investigation that reveals a mutual relation and without contradictions between the demand of transcendental investigation of sense-producing subjectivity, on the one hand, and the ontological investigation of reality, on the other. In this way, the metaphysical-transcendental objectification of the world and its metaphysical- transcendental objectification (actualization) are not contradicted but “corresponded” to each other.

In Stein's opinion, based on Conrad-Martius' statements, we can conclude that nothing forces us to reject the relationship with consciousness in favour of the direct conception of being. On the contrary, it can be concluded that consciousness, as long as it is taken as a constituent of sense, requires the right to be the object and partial basis of the phenomenological investigation. The basis of this assertion is the genuinely phenomenological notion that certain features of reality are presented only in particular relations or approaches; therefore, any affirmation about the reality must be weighed with the type of consideration that corresponds to its particular character. Is already the opinion of Husserl when he formulates *the Principle of All Principles*.

Stein did not criticize Husserl's questioning of the structure of sense of the world based on the achievements of the constitution, her critic is directed at the radicalness with which, on the argumentative level, transcendental idealism interpreted the constitution in such a way that the object being was reduced to a mere being given for consciousness. He even formulates a question about the possibility of appropriating the idea of the phenomenological constitution without adopting, in its totality, the position of the transcendental idealism<sup>7</sup>.

Stein tried to comply with the research agenda, and the phenomenological approach suggested in that question. Her proposal's main objective was to research the

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<sup>7</sup> “Is there a possibility to adopt from the *philosophia perennis* the problem of the phenomenological constitution without at the same time adopting what is called the transcendental idealism of phenomenology?” (Stein, 2014a, p. 161).

constitution that did not rely on the metaphysical approach of the idealism of conscience. However, she recognized in Husserl, the pioneer of this possibility:

Husserl calls this construction of the world for the Ego, which lives in its acts and can explore them reflectively, *Konstitution*. In the investigation of what he calls the *transcendental consciousness*, i.e., that sphere of unquestionable being that has been uncovered by radical doubt, he sees the task of transcendental phenomenology, in itself the basic philosophical science. Since for the "pure I" [*reine Ich*] the entire objective world is built up in his acts, only the analysis of these constituent acts can ultimately clarify the structure of the objective world, only it can reveal the actual meaning of knowledge, experience, reason,

The uncovering of the sphere of consciousness and the problematic of constitution is certainly one of Husserl's great merits, which is still not appreciated enough today (Stein, 2014a, pp. 151-152).

For Stein, the great merit of her Master was to have unveiled the sphere of consciousness and posed, under this perspective, the problem of the constitution of reality. While Conrad-Martius, together with the other members of the phenomenological circles of München and Göttingen, defended the possibility of a transcendental and ontological investigation that would complement each other, without realizing his fall in the dualism with which Husserl had settled accounts years before in his critics to Descartes<sup>8</sup>, Stein's phenomenological position can be understood as independent; nevertheless, it will be necessary to recognize the fundamental similarities that she maintains with the phenomenologists of München and Göttingen, even about the realistic conception of phenomenology that had been gestated in this first school.

The ontological background of Stein's philosophy is a feature of her time in Göttingen, but she insists that only by appealing to the phenomenological *ethos* formulated and practised by Husserl can reliable philosophical results be achieved. Hence, to discover the person's essential structure, the influence of his Master is so evident, on which she builds a modified concept of the constitution with which she unifies the transcendental and ontological points of view in her philosophy.

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<sup>8</sup> As Mariano Crespo says: "Husserl's novelty with respect to Descartes is not to have remained in the fact of an individual 'cogito', but to have discovered the domain of consciousness as a 'region' of undoubted certainty that constitutes the fundamental field of phenomenological research. In this domain of consciousness there exists a whole series of necessary laws that govern the relationships between the acts of consciousness. In such relationships an objective world is 'constructed' or 'formed' for the consciousness. This 'construction' or 'formation' of the world for the consciousness, for the 'I', is what Husserl calls constitution" (1999, p. 42).

## EDITH STEIN AND THE PROBLEM OF THE CONSTITUTION

In this section, we will base a double thesis: Firstly, the core of the divergences between Stein and Husserl lies in modulating the concept of transcendental constitution of reality. Secondly, Stein develops his theory on the constitution from 1917 and outlines it parallel to her taking of knowledge and deepening in the gnoseological thought of Thomas Aquinas. To achieve our goal, we will trace in Stein's work the indications of his position on the constitution.

During the first years she spent as Husserl's student in Göttingen, Stein perceived the seriousness of the change of direction his Master's research was taking. Despite the objections she had about this transcendental turn, Stein was far from pronouncing herself on how the constitution of reality is carried out since the appearance of *Ideas*, a concept that she preserved and modulated in a specific way when criticizing the status of the absolute constituent of sense in which Husserl situates the transcendental subject.

For Husserl, being constituted means that immanent data are *exposed* in phenomena that, in a certain way, *create* objects for the consciousness. The transcendental idealism of phenomenology does not leave any noumenic residue; besides, the constitution does not only affect objectivity in the diversity of its modes of giving but takes charge of the configuration of these modes, that is: “the *styles of being* corresponding to each ontological region and the sense in which its habitual *praxis* is oriented” (Teruel, 2002, p. 82) depend entirely on the constitutive action of the subject. In summary, the constitution proposed by Husserl fulfils the role of “originary foundation” of the sense of the world.

Let us remember that transcendental phenomenology has its object the study of transcendental life and its constitutive activity. According to this definition, the reference to objectivity as the supreme instance of knowledge can only be assumed as a prejudice. The slogan “back to the ‘things themselves’”, which configures the itinerary of the *Logical Investigations*, must be understood in the sense of applying the phenomenological transcendental method until arriving at the radical and original evidence of each object, as it is observed in the approach exposed by the phenomenology of constitution. This process requires a rigorous work of investigation of the layers of the phenomenon's surface constructed by reason –such as science, philosophy, or culture–, to reach the most fundamental level of the pre-categorical experience. The placing in parentheses has its purpose. The decoding leads to the pre-categorical dimension of the experiences, which correspond to the last moment of the process itself; nevertheless, the doxic explanation of the experience has to be carried out on a categorical level. What Husserl proposes is that the formal evidence of logic or mathematics is not the paradigm of radical science, but that the evidence that corresponds to it is constituted by and in the transcendental subjectivity. In this way,

the phenomenological description and method, according to the thinker, cannot be directed only to objectivity and remain in it, as somehow the first disciples of Göttingen wanted, especially Hedwig Conrad-Martius, but, as for Husserl, for Stein, the investigation of the objective phenomenon (...) has to be directed to the subjective activity, to the subjects and their cognitive operations. It means that it must ultimately be directed not so much at subjectivity alone, in a Cartesian-idealist retreat, but at different objectivity that is derived precisely from the epistemic activity of the subject, that is, the very genesis of so-called scientific phenomena and their specific weight in the entire universe of culture (González Di Pierro, 2016, pp. 36-37).

Now, the constitution can be understood from various points of view. As long as it remains clear that the constitutive function of the transcendental subject is framed in the field of gnoseology, we can lean towards a realistic interpretation, that is to say, to recognize in the basis of that the previous existence of the matter (a point which is not necessarily equivalent to postulate the existence of a “thing in itself”), which is analogous to the present hyletic moment both in Stein and in Husserl<sup>9</sup>. In the same way, we can opt for an interpretation of idealistic bias, if it is understood, as the members of the Göttingen Circle did in their partial analysis of *Ideas*, that, for Husserl, there does not exist a possible world independent of the act constituted by the transcendental subject, what would completely annul any ontological commitment in favour of uncritical solipsism opposite to the original purpose of phenomenology. In this line, there are Conrad-Martius' critics whose rationality is based on specific fragments of *Ideas* in which Husserl does not do justice to that fundamentally other one that he presents as conscience correlates in the phenomenological explanation of the sense. For Conrad-Martius, this exaggerated way in which Husserl relates reality and consciousness subordinates tacitly to everything outside the transcendental subject's sphere to be understood as a mere effect of the subject's constitutive action and, therefore, not to possess necessary existence outside the

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<sup>9</sup> The most precise reference to the hyletic moment (*hyletisches moment*) in Husserl appears in the following fragment of *Ideas*: "The color of the tree trunk, pure as the color of which we are perceptually conscious, is precisely the 'same' as the one which, before the phenomenological reduction, we took to be the color of the actual tree (at least as 'natural' human beings and prior to the intervention of information provided by physics). Now, *this color*, put into parenthesis, belongs to the noema. But it does not belong to the mental process of perception as a really inherent component piece, although we can also find in it 'something like color:' namely, the 'sensed color,' that hyletic moment of the concrete mental process by which the noematic, or 'objective,' color is 'adumbrated.' (...) Effecting the phenomenological reduction, we even acquire the generical eidetic insight that the object, tree, *can only appear at all* in a perception as *Objectively* determined in the mode in which it does appear in the perception if the hyletic moments (or, in the case of a continuous series of perceptions, if the continuous hyletic changes) are just those and no others. This therefore implies that any changes of the hyletic content of the perception, if it does not quite do away with perceptual consciousness, must at least result in what appears becoming objectively 'other,' whether in itself or in the orientation in which it is appearing, or the like" (Husserl, 1982, pp. 237-238).

perimeter of subjectivity.

Stein's first reference to the constitution is found in a letter addressed to Roman Ingarden on January 5, 1917, while she was working as Husserl's assistant reviewing the manuscript of the second volume of the *Ideas*, in which we find the following testimony: "Then, when I explained specific difficulties I had encountered, he decided (with justification) that the entire doctrine of constitution needed to be rethought and, to that end, part 1 of *Ideen* reexamined" (Stein, 2014b, p. 27). Shortly afterwards, in another communication with Ingarden, she writes

I think I now have a reasonably clear understanding of "constitution" –but outside the context of idealism. Prerequisites for an intuitive nature to constitute itself are: an absolutely existing physical nature and a subjectivity of a precise structure. So far, I have not gotten around to confessing this heresy to the Master (Stein, 2014b, pp. 39-40).

A year later, however, she writes, accepting Husserl's opinion that the subject has a decisive role in the constitution of objectivity, but without abandoning his conviction about that what just belongs to the object alone and which is the material basis of the constitutive act.

I have turned over a new leaf when it comes to idealism and believe it can be understood in a way that is metaphysically satisfying. It appears to me, however, that much of what is presently in *Ideen* has to be composed differently, though in Husserl's sense, if only he brings together what he has, and in a critical moment does not leave out of consideration something that necessarily belongs to the subject [*was notwendig zur Sache gehört*] (Stein, 2014b, p. 110).

Her discovery of scholastic defines Stein's position on the constitution. From then on, the study of Thomistic philosophy would occupy more and more of her time until it became the main component of his philosophical system. In 1925, she began to read the *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*. Thanks to this effort, Stein will perform a translation of the Latin text into German and, later, in the elaboration of a study in which she confronted the relationship of the Thomistic procedure with the phenomenological method.

In this first essay, Stein mentions idealism using the phenomenological terminology "change in sign, " which Husserl used to refer to the transcendental reduction: the recovery of reality under a different perspective. In the text, the philosopher assumes that realities do not

arise by the action of the transcendental subject nor do they disappear from the scene of the phenomenological investigation due to the interest with which philosophy approaches the study of conscience, but, after the suspension of the judgment that inaugurates the phenomenological attitude, *things are* re-semantized, that is to say, they acquire for conscience, their real significance<sup>10</sup>.

For Stein, the global result of the transcendental idealism is equivalent to a realistic ontology modified under the perspective that Husserl promotes by granting an extra-ordinary protagonism to the transcendental subject.

You have been tireless in your efforts to perfect a method that would allow you to pursue these “constitutive” issues and show how the intellectual activity of the subject, working on the pure material of sensation, constructs his “world” through various acts and assemblages of acts.

My general ontology, which assigns a specific activity to every being possessed of mind, surely accommodates these constitutive investigations. However, it cannot concede a “fundamental” significance to them.

The course that you followed has led you to posit the subject as the start and center of philosophical inquiry; all else is subject-related. A world constructed by the acts of the subject remains forever a world for the subject. You could not succeed –and this was the constant objection that your own students raised against you– in winning back from the realm of immanence that objectivity from which you had after all set out and insuring which was the point. Once existence is redefined as self-identifying for a consciousness –such was the outcome of the transcendental investigation– the intellect will never be set at ease in its search for truth (Stein, 2000, p. 31-32).

In other words, gnoseological idealism cannot but affect the way we conceive the ontology of reality. Despite everything, Stein remains firm in her opinion that there is a possibility of reconciling Husserl's position with the opinion that affirms the ontological primacy

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<sup>10</sup> With these words Husserl explains the meaning of the expression “change in sign” (*Vorzeichenänderung*): “It is clear that all these descriptive statements, even though they may sound like statements about actuality, have undergone a *radical* modification of sense; similarly, the described itself, even though it is given as ‘precisely the same,’ is yet something radically different by virtue of, so to speak, an inverse change of signs. ‘In’ the reduced perception (in the phenomenologically pure mental process), we find, as indefeasibly belonging to its essence, the perceived as perceived, to be expressed as ‘material thing,’ ‘plant,’ ‘tree,’ ‘blossoming,’ and so forth. Obviously, the *inverted commas* are significant in that they express that change in sign, the correspondingly radical significational modification of the words. The *tree simpliciter*, the physical thing belonging to Nature, is nothing less than this *perceived tree as perceived* which, as perceptual sense, inseparably belongs to the perception. The tree simpliciter can burn up, be resolved into its chemical elements, etc. But the sense –the sense of *this* perception, something belonging necessarily to its essence– cannot burn up; it has no chemical elements, no forces, no real properties” (Husserl, 1982, p. 216).



of reality over the cognitive subject's constitutive activity.

The phenomenological legitimacy of Stein's position, always faithful to Husserl's phenomenological project, becomes evident during the development of the Thomist Society's Conference in Juvisty in 1932, a meeting to which she was invited to present her opinion about the common themes between contemporary German phenomenology and Thomism. There are two points from which we can appreciate the loyalty with which Stein defends the status of phenomenology as a field of *Philosophia Perennis*. Firstly, Stein underlines the importance of the spinning material of sensitive data in the course of perception and in determining the intention that governs it,

The intentions directed towards the thing are based on a changing "hyletic material", sensation data, that are predetermined for perception [*Empfindungsdaten, die für die Wahrnehmung vorgegeben sind*], motivating its course and the intention that dominates it. The assessment of this hyletic material to me to be of great importance for the question of idealism (Stein, 2014a, p. 166).

Secondly, she emphasizes that the dedication with which Husserl dealt with the problem of transcendental idealism was due to the constant requests for clarification with which his detractors approached him, which ended up distancing him from his initial objective of back to the 'things themselves', in favour of a phenomenology converted into a philosophy of consciousness. According to Stein, his disciples' resistance led Husserl to focus on achieving the definitive foundation of transcendental idealism, which made it the center of his philosophy and moved away from his initial objective.

In the *Ideas*, the idealistic turn is only noticeable in some places. It came as a complete surprise to Husserl's students and immediately became the topic of discussion, which continues to this day. Perhaps it was precisely the resistance from his circle of students that urged Husserl to concentrate his efforts more and more on a compelling foundation of idealism and to regard this question as to the center of his philosophy, which had not been so initially (Stein, 2014a, p. 163).

By emphasizing the contemplation of essences, regardless of the position in which the experience should be placed during the cognitive process analysis, Husserl highlights only one aspect of objectivity, leaving aside the link with the reality that is inherent in the essence of the thing. Because of this separation between fact and essence, it is understandable that at an argumentative level, Husserl reached an idealistic interpretation of reality. However, we

must not forget that, for him, “it is still consciousness, the noetic (objectifying) acts and their underlying hyletic moments, that constitutes functionally the unity in manifold of experience” (De Warren, 2015, p. 243).

On her side, Stein oscillates between the comprehension of the Husserlian approach as gnoseological idealism, a position she shares within limits previously exposed, and her comprehension as ontological idealism, in which the subject develops as an unconditioned absolute, definitely responsible for the sense of the world, thesis with which he is ultimately in disagreement. To the extent that it is consolidating its position, at times, it seems to be approaching Conrad-Martius' approach, for whom phenomenological idealism dissolves objectivity in pure noematic consciousness. Although indeed, she always recognized the importance of the hyletic moment in the Husserlian idea of constitution, it is possible to affirm that the steinian interpretation of the constitutive problem is an intermediate way between Husserl and Conrad-Martius (and the rest of the disciples of Göttingen). Despite Husserl's neglect of the reflection on the ontological autonomy of the world, Stein considers his position as phenomenological as that of his Master: “It is possible to pursue phenomenology according to the one method of philosophy as rigorous science and in metaphysics has an opposed standpoint. That is indeed obviously the case with Husserl and with us” (Stein, 2014b, p. 197)<sup>11</sup>. Or, in other words,

for Stein, the conditions of knowledge must attend to both aspects: on the subjective side, it is directed towards logical forms and formal judiciary correction; on the objective side, towards the structure that possesses the consistency of the state of affairs, the same that will be captured precisely by the predicative judgment. Edith Stein carries out a precise and detailed exegesis of the meaning of the famous Husserlian affirmation by which there is no world if there is no conscience. We must not lose sight of this interpretation because it constitutes the backbone of Steinian phenomenology. (...) The argument is that every “external” or, better, “objective” being must be susceptible to being captured; otherwise, it would not make sense; it can exist, of course, independently of any conscience,

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<sup>11</sup> Considering this possibility, San Martín says: “Insofar as this constitution of sense, style or type is the fundamental, the originary, the *urstittendes*, and insofar as the access to reality is precisely the *constitution of that sense*, phenomenology can be conceived as idealism, but perhaps at this particular point, Husserl has made a decision not postulated by his method. In effect, idealism can mean that the constitution of sense is something purely factual and irrational, but that it comes from the activity of the consciousness; or it can simply mean that there is no access to reality if it is not “learning to access” it, that is to say, constituting interpretative schemes of reality, which in some aspects will have a praxico-vital foundation, of an adaptive biological type, and in others will be given to us by a social praxis. In this second case, the phenomenological idealism is very peculiar and has little to do with the idealisms of traditional type; the phenomenological praxis of Husserl seems evident that goes in this direction, because the learning to see, that we were in the previous number, or to constitute a sense, is not another thing that to integrate a behavioural interaction between the body and reality” (San Martín, 1986, pp. 266-267).

but its sense would be questioned, which arises from a subjectivity that captures it, since “what distinguishes ‘reality’ from any simulated world is its character of experience” (González Di Pierro, 2016, p. 39).

This is perfectly compatible with Husserl's following statement: “Unities of sense presuppose (as I again emphasize: not because we can deduce it from some metaphysical postulates or other, but because we can show it by an intuitive, completely indubitable procedure) a *sense-bestowing* consciousness” (Husserl, 1982, pp. 128-129), or, in other words: “The components of our experienced world do not in any sense have a meaning ‘in themselves,’ but only in experience” (Kohák, 1978, p. 102).

If the objective is to achieve a global vision of the world, metaphysics must be supported by sources of theoretical and practical knowledge that, in many cases, exceed the scope of scientific rationality. For Stein, what underpins her defense of realism is the *pre-philosophical* attitude with which the researcher approaches the world's problem and its relationship with consciousness. The vision of the world that Husserl's phenomenology provides, valued according to Stein's perspective, results in a man understood as a monad that constitutes his world and that, in the broader sense, is part of an intermonadic community in which everything that is found beyond the monads would have been constituted by their acts and would be inevitably related to them, which fits perfectly with Husserlian's proposal.

The disadvantage Stein warns about the transcendental argumentation goes beyond the formulation of the transcendental subject's absolute character and the intersubjectivity produced by the monads in the exchange of their experiences. What is a problem is that such a character of absolute left the transcendental argumentation without a point of reference to explain where these “rules” that define the structure of subjectivity come from and that, at the same time, allow the naturalness of the intersubjective contact. According to Husserl, the “from where the rules come” is something that transcendental phenomenology as “first philosophy” cannot answer. That is an object of a “second philosophy” that deals with the factuality of intersubjectivity, history, destiny, death, and birth, why the *Ego* constitutes and constitutes in such a way.

After exposing his objections regarding the transcendental idealism, Stein rehearses a possible solution to the gnoseological-ontological problem that points to the search of a foundation of being previous to the monads that also serves to explain the how of the actualization of the laws that regulate its activity, principle in which the relation between subject and object is based, and the transcendental constitution of reality in which it becomes evident. Stein speaks of a foundation in which being and essence coincide: subject at the same time of contemplation of objectivity in its integrity, in the totality of its modes of giving, which

have their origin in him. If we are not forbidden to admit the existence of everything that falls within the senses, the possibility of knowing the world in another way is opened up to us, thought out in a realistic approach to the epistemological questions raised in Catholic scholasticism, which took it as its last and definitive dwelling place.

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