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## **HUSSERL’S IDEALISM**

### **Abstract**

The following paper is dedicated to a perennial theme pertaining to Husserl’s phenomenology, namely its ontological orientation. The main objective in this connection is to throw a shadow of doubt on an interpretation that over the years had its adherents: the understanding of phenomenology as just a special brand of material idealism. In order to accomplish this aim, one will employ a strategy that has as its main point of attack the correlation between Husserl’s phenomenology and the Cartesian project. Thus, it will be exhibited firstly those key aspects that sustain this correlation. Secondly, we will show how Descartes’ philosophy can be linked with idealism, reaching as a result a preliminary conclusion: phenomenology is tantamount to idealism insofar as it is Cartesian in nature. In the end we will contest this conception by alluding to Husserl’s critique of Descartes, one that has as its forefront the notion of transcendental idealism.

**Key words:** phenomenology, material idealism, theory of perception, the riddle of knowledge, transcendental realism.

As it is well known, one of the most problematic aspects pertaining to Husserl’s philosophy is its ontological orientation. A brief look at the relevant exegesis could lead an unwarned reader to a state of amazement, for this topic has been the subject of very disparate treatments. Thus it could be said that phenomenology in its Husserlian variant covers virtually the entire range of the ontological spectrum. There are, for example, interpretations that identifies it with an ontological idealism (Philipse, Ingarden), one that could be traced back to the philosophy of the infamous Bishop Berkeley, and there are others which depict it as not involving any ontological commitment whatsoever (Carr, Ricoeur). These two authors endorse a view which was labeled “methodological idealism”, one that has as its centre the meaning of the reduction: “phenomenology simply *refuses* to consider the world as in itself; it simply places the whole question in

brackets”<sup>1</sup>. The interpretation in question points to the fact that as long as the reduction involves neither a negation nor an affirmation of the *in itself* of the world, phenomenology is ontologically neutral.

My aim in this paper is to show, first of all, that a certain reading of some of Husserl’s texts does in fact yield to an idealism which is akin to that pertaining to Berkeley’s philosophy. The source of this interpretation is the viewing of those texts which establish the reduction in a Cartesian way. Secondly, I will try to show that an alternative picture can be assembled, one that has in the forefront a Kantian motive. This reading will show itself to be more compelling, providing that: a) will do justice to Husserl’s own views on this matter; b) will corroborate the critique of Descartes from the tenth paragraph of the *Cartesianische Meditationen*.

### I. A Cartesian Account of the Reduction

In paragraph 55 from *Ideas I* Husserl dissociates firmly his position from that belonging to Berkeley’s philosophy, saying that “Wer angesichts unserer Erörterungen einwendet, das hieße alle Welt in subjektiven Schein verwandeln und sich einem 'Berkeley’schen Idealismus' in die Arme werfen, dem können wir nur erwidern, dass er den Sinn dieser Erörterungen nicht erfaßt hat”<sup>2</sup>. Now even though the sense of this sentence is unequivocal, it is nonetheless a remark which Husserl probably felt forced to introduce after saying that: “Eine absolute Realität gilt genau so viel wie ein rundes Viereck. Realität und Welt sind hier eben Titel für gewisse gültige Sinneseinheiten, nämlich Einheiten des 'Sinnes', bezogen auf gewisse ihrem Wesen nach gerade so und nicht anders sinngebende und Sinneseinheitlichkeit ausweisende Zusammenhängendes absoluten, reinen Bewußtseins”<sup>3</sup>. In this sentence we apparently have a pronouncement on the ontological status of world and consciousness: it is being stated that the designation of the former by the predicate “absolute” is nonsensical, while the latter is precisely absolute. The fact that the world is not absolute goes certainly hand in hand with the fact that it is in some way related to that which “*nulla 're' indiget*

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<sup>1</sup> David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologische Philosophie*, Erstes Buch, Hua III/1, Edited by Karl Schumann, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

*ad existendum*”, a relation which doesn’t take place between “coordinate kinds of being”, as long as “ist die ganze räumlich-zeitliche Welt [...] ihrem Sinne nach bloßes intentionales Sein, also ein solches, das den bloßen sekundären, relativen Sinn eines Seins für ein Bewußtsein hat”<sup>4</sup>.

Even though Husserl repudiates this kind of understanding, as indicated above, it is not very difficult to interpret the statements just presented in a strong idealistic vein, an interpretation which will appear to be a lot more convincing after the presentation of what could be called their motivation and proof, one that will strike as bearing a Berkeleyan overtone. In order to accomplish this, I will first present in a brief manner Berkeley’s argument for idealism and in the remaining part of this section I will illustrate the alleged bond between it and the Cartesian account of the reduction.

### I.1. Berkeley’s Idealism

Given the fact that the story of Berkeley’s idealism is widely known, at least in its official version, I will not have to insist very much on it. The position in attention is the outcome of a critique of what now is known as Locke’s representationalist theory of perception. The aspect which is of interest for us here is the fact that Locke considered ideas to be the direct objects of perception. Thus, “whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call *idea* [...] Thus a snow-ball having the power to produce in us the *ideas* of *white*, *cold*, and *round*, the powers to produce those *ideas* in us. As they are in the snow-ball, I call *qualities*; and as they are sensations, or perceptions, in our understandings, I call them *ideas*”<sup>5</sup>. As noticed, the ideas are those mental entities which represent an external object. Therefore, we have a distinction between the qualities of the snowball on one side and, on the other, their mental correspondents.

The theory in question gave rise to the following critique: if we don’t have any immediate perceptual contact with the spatiotemporal entity or, otherwise put, if the external object is not the object of our perception, then how are we to be sure that the correspondent idea is really about its object? Let’s suppose that the perceptual idea of red is given: what

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 134.

guarantees in this case that the object itself is really red or, worse yet, is there even any way to certify the fact that there is a red object out there?

Berkeley was well aware of the fact that Locke's theory gives birth to skepticism: "Colour, figure, motion, extension and the like, considered only as so many *sensations* in the mind, ar perfectly known, there being nothing in them which is not perceived. But if they are looked on as notes or images, referred to *things* or *archetypes* existing without the mind, there we are involved all in skepticism"<sup>6</sup> (Berkeley 1998, p 134). In order to secure the knowledge claims, Berkeley modifies the theory in question. Thus, if all our knowledge of external objects has the character of presumptiveness because they are considered to be independent from the perceptual act, then the presumptiveness in question should vanish if the condition of objects as mind independent entities is negated. The legitimacy of any knowledge claim pertaining to whatever external object should no longer be a point of discussion, given the fact it, the object, has been degraded to a mere mental entity and that the perception of an idea cannot be otherwise but adequate: "all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any substance without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known"<sup>7</sup> (Berkeley, p 105). This is the outline of Berkeley's idealism.

## I.2. The Cartesian Scenario

The connection between Husserlian phenomenology and Cartesianism is famous and in no need of any demonstration. Problematic here is the evaluation of this connection or, otherwise put, the estimation of Husserl's real indebtedness to Descartes. Some points though seem not to be within the reach of any doubt, among which the methodological doubt occupies a chief place, which is to say that it shapes the entire scenery related to the phenomenological reduction.

For the purpose of this article we need to investigate in greater detail the Cartesian setting of Husserl's philosophy. Thus, the first aspect worth mentioning in this connection is the idea of philosophy as "eine

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<sup>6</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding*, edited by Jonathan Dancy, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Wissenschaft aus absoluter Begründung”<sup>8</sup>, one that together with its correlates constitutes that part of the Cartesian project which Husserl considers to have an “eternal significance”. Therefore, transcendental phenomenology must be guided by: a) the imperative of a radical beginning which is equivalent to epistemological poverty, an imperative that entails the overthrowing of any type of knowledge, even that which is scientific in nature; b) given the epistemological poverty which the researcher should embrace methodologically, then all the advancement on the terrain of knowledge must be realized in conformity with absolute evidence. In the lecture *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, the idea of philosophy as a science with an absolute ground is embedded in what Husserl calls “the critique of knowledge”, one that has the task of determining the essence of knowledge. The naturalistic reflection succumbs to skepticism, as long as to question the essence of knowledge from its standpoint has the disadvantage of altering knowledge into a riddle or a mystery (this point will be clarified below). In order to avoid the misconceptions specific to any naturalistic reflection on this topic, it becomes clear that an absolute beginning is needed, one that: “nichts als *vorgegeben* voraussetzen, so muss sie mit irgendeiner Erkenntnis anheben, die sie nicht anderwärts unbesehen hernimmt, die sie sich selbst vielmehr gibt, die sie selbst als erste setzt”<sup>9</sup>.

As Iso Kern rightly observes<sup>10</sup>, the section entitled *Die Phänomenologische Fundamentalbetrachtung* from *Ideen I*, even though it makes no mention of the radical beginning theme, incorporates some thesis which are Cartesian in nature, they being nonetheless strongly connected with the mentioned theme. Thus we reach the second aspect belonging to the Cartesian scenario: the critique of transcendent knowledge. The critique in question is developed within the horizon of the epistemological poverty. In this text the step towards it is accomplished by distinguishing between perception of something immanent and something transcendent (paragraph 38). The first kind is directed towards those objects that are part of the same stream of mental processes as the perceptual act itself. All acts of reflection,

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, Hua I, Edited by S. Strasser, The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie. Fünf Vorlesungen*, Hua II, Edited by Walter Biemel, The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Iso Kern, “Three Ways to the Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl”, in Rudolf Bernet, Donn Welton and Gina Zavota (ed), *Edmund Husserl. Critical Assessments of leading philosophers*, Volume II, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 59.

for example, belong to this type of perception. The important feature of this type of perceptions is the inclusion of the object in the intentional act. Now the second type consists of precisely those objects that cannot be a real part of the intentional act, namely all spatial objects. By an examination of the manner in which this two types of objectivities are given to the perceptual act, Husserl concludes that the former has an absolute being, while the latter only phenomenal (pars. 42, 44). Thus a transcendent object, due to the fact that it is spatial, can be given only “one-sidedly”, a characteristic which amounts to its essential inadequacy in connection with the perception. The conclusion to be acknowledged in this connection is that the perception cannot guarantee the existence of its object: it can prove itself to be something else or even to lack existence. On the other side, an immanent object, given its inclusion in the stream of consciousness, will always be given adequately, which is to say that to this type of objectivity belongs an apodictic evidence.

In *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* the critique of transcendent knowledge is focused on the epistemological mystery which arises when transcendent objects are *vorgegeben vorausgesetzt*. Thus, in the second lecture of this text, Husserl points to the fact that the mystery in question is connected with the two senses which belong to everything transcendent: a) to be transcendent is equivalent to not being really (reell) contained in the intentional act. Therefore, “wie kann das Erlebnis sozusagen über sich hinaus?”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, to be immanent in this case means to be really contained in the act; b) the second sense that can be attached to everything transcendent has to do with the correspondence between the intentional act and that which is intended. The correspondence between the two has de index of evidence. The transcendent object cannot be given with evidence, because, as we already saw, it is always adumbrated by some of its parts. In wahrhaft gegeben ist?”<sup>12</sup>

The critique of transcendent objects from the *Cartesianische Meditationen*, paragraph 7, has the same outline as in the other two texts: perception of something transcendent is doubtful because it cannot be given with apodictic evidence (the latter concept is presented in paragraph 6).

Given the fact that knowledge pertaining to transcendent objects proves to be doubtful, then, if the idea of philosophy as a science with an absolute ground is to be realized, it must be rejected. To refuse to take part

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<sup>11</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

in any acceptance of transcendent objects is certainly the most Cartesian feature of Husserl's phenomenology. Nevertheless, we are not dealing here with a simple assimilation of a Cartesian method, as long as Husserl's claim is that he doesn't follow it verbatim, rather he is trying to extract a moment which is inherent in it.

In order to clarify this topic, we have to point out a few aspects (for the sake of brevity, I will take into account only *Ideen I*). First of all, it must be stated that knowledge can become a riddle only as long as it is embedded in the natural attitude. Simply put, the latter is that which shapes our quotidian relations with the world (paragraphs 27-28). To be more precise, the world which we encounter in the natural attitude is one that has the character of availability, it is "on hand" (*vorhanden*). To be encountered in this manner is possible only if the being of the world is straightforwardly accepted. This is what Husserl calls "der Generalthesis der natürlichen Einstellung".<sup>13</sup> Now the mystery of knowledge appears whenever a critical reflection rooted in the natural attitude takes place, because the two senses of transcendence mentioned above are precisely based on the thesis of existence<sup>14</sup>. To be a spatiotemporal object in the natural attitude means to be considered as simply existent, which is to say that its existence and the manner in which it exists have nothing to do with any mental acts whatsoever. But as long as this is the case, we are not in the position of explaining how knowledge takes place: how is it possible for two entities which have nothing to do with one another, a perceptual act and an outer object for example, to coincide?

Therefore, if we are to circumscribe the essence of knowledge, we must put out of action the general thesis of existence. But what precisely means this putting out of action? If the thesis amounts to the acceptance of outer objects as simply existing, then its reduction shouldn't be equivalent to the denial of the existence of its correlates? In paragraphs 31-32 Husserl stresses the fact that the reductive step is not equivalent with the negation of the existence of transcendent objects. What is of interest for phenomenology in Descartes' method is the fact that when attempting to doubt, a certain annulment of the thesis occurs. As noted, the annulment in question doesn't transform the positing into a counter positing, but rather renders it powerless. This must happen because one cannot attempt to doubt a being

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<sup>13</sup> *Idem, Ideen zu einer Phänomenologie und Phänomenologische Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Idem, Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, pp. 16-17.

which at the same time is considered to be *on hand*, that is certainly existent. Therefore, in order to doubt something you must, first of all, neutralize the general thesis: “Und doch erfährt sie eine Modifikation – während sie in sich verbleibt, was sie ist, setzen wir sie gleichsam ‘außer Aktion’, wir ‘schalten sie aus’, wir ‘klammern sie ein’“.<sup>15</sup>

### I.3. The Connection between the Cartesian Scenario and Husserl’s Idealism

In the preceding pages I presented the Cartesian thrust behind Husserl’s phenomenology. To summarize, it consisted out of three different moments: a) the epistemological imperative of a science with absolute ground; b) the critique of transcendent knowledge and the assessment of the immanent as absolutely certain; c) the rejection of that which the critique showed to be doubtful, namely transcendent objects or, better yet, things in themselves. Now the alleged connection between Cartesianism and phenomenological idealism is maybe not that evident. In order to expose it, I will use Herman Philipse’s article *Transcendental Idealism*, from *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl* as a guideline.

In this article Philipse tries to show that the ontological commitment of Husserl’s phenomenology is akin to that of Berkeley. The corner stone of his arguments is an identification of Husserl’s theory of perception with *the projective theory of perception*. The commentator deploys his hermeneutical virtuosity on that theory of perception which was presented by Husserl in the *Fifth Investigation* from *Logische Untersuchungen*. As it is known, Husserl defends in this text a schematic view of perception.<sup>16</sup> Thus the perceptual scheme, which is said to be responsible for the constitution of an object, is a compound of two distinct moments: the sensory content and the *noesis*. The former makes its appearance in consciousness whenever we experience an outer object. The important fact here is that the sensations, in contradistinction to the object itself, are real constituents of the act or, differently expressed, they are immanent to the perception, whereas the object is transcendent. The second moment pertaining to the constitutional scheme is that which exercises an interpretative function on the sensory content. In order to clarify briefly what this function is supposed to do, I

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<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl’s Concept of Constitution*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970, pp. 54-57.



will use Sokolowski's example<sup>17</sup>: a man who is standing under some high tension wires grasps that what he considered thus far to be a buzzing sensation in his ears is just the hum of the wires. It is evident that in each case the sensory content is identical, their distinction residing in the interpretative function.

As long as Philipse is trying to interpret phenomenology in an idealistic vein, that is as "a doctrine saying that the object as we perceive it ontologically depends on the perceiving mind"<sup>18</sup>, he has to "solve" the apparent incongruity between the theory of perception just presented and his very interpretation, for, as noted, Husserl stresses that even though the sensory content is a real part inherent in consciousness, the object itself is not. So, his interpretation will prove itself to be successful, if, firstly, he will show that the constitutional scheme is just a variant of the traditional representative theory of perception. Secondly, he has to show that the transcendent object is in some way or another dependent ontologically on the mind. If this is the case, then Husserl's transcendental idealism should appear to be just a solution to the common skeptical problems raised by this type of theories, "a solution similar to Berkeley's or Kant's".<sup>19</sup>

Philipse considers that all this is achieved when he identifies Husserl's theory with one which was common in the nineteenth century, namely the *projective theory of perception*. Briefly put, the latter acknowledges, first of all, the existence of really contained within consciousness sensations. Then it goes on by saying that the outer object is thought to be precisely outside, rather than a mental modification akin to the sensory content, just because we are the victims of an illusion. This is done by the "perceptual apperception" or, in Husserl's words, the interpretative function (*noesis*), which simply *projects* the sensations outside, thus endowing them "with the illusory appearance of independent existence".<sup>20</sup>

Now, if Philipse is right, we only succeeded to show thus far that Husserl's idealism is similar to that of Berkeley. The Cartesian scenario presented above seems to be futile at this point. But this is not the case, because Philipse's argument doesn't stop here: he contends that the Cartesian doubt is a justifiable scenario only within the context of a theory

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Herman Philipse, „Transcendental Idealism“, in Barry Smith and D. W. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 266.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

of perception like that which Husserl supposedly endorsed. The main significance of this theory in our circumstance is the fact that it makes use of what the exegete calls “the principle of immanence”, which states “that the primary data of perception are really immanent in consciousness”.<sup>21</sup> The principle in question, Philipse argues, is nothing but the outcome of the corpuscular revolution in ontology. The latter states that nature is reducible to small particles, *corpuscula*, which obey the laws of mechanics. This modern manner of explanation had important consequences on the theory of perception, because it was contended that the particles do not possess secondary qualities, namely color, smell etc, a premise which prompted the conclusion that, likewise, the microscopic objects do not have secondary qualities. But if these are not really colored, for example, then the place which the perceived color occupies is the mind, this being precisely the principle of immanence. From here to the Cartesian setting is just a small step: “The real origin of this possibility of doubting the existence of the external world lies in the corpuscular ontology. This ontology implies the subjectivity of the immediate data of perception (the principle of immanence), which implies the projective theory of perception, which, in its turn, implies skepticism concerning the material world”.<sup>22</sup>

## II. Transcendental Realism and its Critique

The first section of this paper showed, firstly, that Husserl’s idealism is supposedly akin to that of Berkeley, because Husserl embraced some thesis like the non-absoluteness of the world and, consequently, its dependence on consciousness, precisely for the same reasons as Berkeley: the need to overcome skepticism, which was the outcome of a variant of the representationalist theory of perception. Moreover, the connection between Husserl’s idealism and the Cartesian scenario is likewise reasonable, because “the possibility or even the necessity of doubting the existence of the external world”<sup>23</sup> is the consequence of the same type of perceptual theory.

In this section I will try to cast a shadow of doubt on this interpretation, by showing, firstly, that Husserl’s critique of Descartes reveals that the former was well aware of the connection between the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Cartesian scenario and subjective idealism and, secondly, that the critique of this very connection should help us in viewing phenomenology in a different light.

### II.1. The Critique of Descartes

As we have seen above (pp 5-6), knowledge becomes a mystery, which is to say that its possibility cannot be accounted for, because there is no way of explaining how the act reaches the transcendent object. Given the manner in which phenomenology was seen thus far, it would be a reasonable thing to say that the reduction is designed to eliminate transcendent objects. This would be within its reach, because by elimination it is concomitantly brought to the fore the constitutional function of the consciousness, one that would amount to nothing less than a creation of that which is constituted. Thus, if there are no longer transcendent objects, the mystery of knowledge is cracked.

The problem with this interpretation is that the Cartesian feature of the reduction is too strong. I have pointed above (p. 6) that Husserl doesn't simply assimilate the Cartesian doubt: his intent in this connection was to extract that moment inherent in the doubt which puts out of action the general thesis. This certainly doesn't amount to a negation of the existence of outer objects no more than the acceptance which is said to occur in the natural attitude.

This succinct remark gives us the opportunity to question the soundness of Philipse's argument, for if the reduction doesn't amount to the plain rejection of transcendent objects, then maybe Husserl's idealism was not designed to populate with mental entities the space which remained empty after their supposed elimination, thus putting into action a different type of solution to the problem of knowledge. This hint is in fact corroborated by Husserl's critique of Descartes, one that accuses the latter of not taking the transcendental turn. This is the case because it is stated that all that the Cartesian doubt succeeded in doing was to secure some first evidence, the ego, which now it is being used as the ground for a chain of deductions, "durch recht geleitete Schlußfolgerungen nach den dem Ego eingeborenen Prinzipien die übrige Welt hinzuzuschließen".<sup>24</sup> The fact that the world needs to be deduced is certainly the outcome of its loss in the methodic doubt, a loss which is in some respects necessary if Descartes

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<sup>24</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, p. 63.

endorsed a corpuscular ontology related type of perception. Moreover, Husserl points that Descartes, being engaged in this kind of project, “zum Vater des widersinnigen transzendentalen Realismus geworden ist”.<sup>25</sup>

To sum up, Husserl considers that the problem of the Cartesian project is reducible to the kind of solution that it gave to the problem of knowledge – the deductive model. In the next section I will show that transcendental realism is in fact the source of this problem and that, within its bounds, there are only two solutions available: the Cartesian model and material idealism.

## II.2. Transcendental Realism

As it is well known, the term “transcendental realism” was first used by Kant in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. The main intent behind the usage of this term was critical, because Kant considered all the philosophies that were not akin to his transcendental project to be “guilty” precisely of a transcendental realist view of the world. The main feature of this view is that it identifies the objects of knowledge with things in themselves, these being the transcendent objects which Husserl considers to be the cause of the riddle of knowledge. To consider that the objects of knowledge are things in themselves means that they are in no respect connected with the mind/consciousness. Thus, Kant states that: “Ich verstehe aber unter dem *transzendental Idealism* aller Erscheinungen den Lehrbegriff, nach welchem wir sie insgesamt als bloße Vorstellungen, und nicht als Dinge an sich selbst [...]. Diesem Idealism ist ein transzendentaler Realism entgegengesetzt, der Zeit und Raum als etws an sich (unabhängig von unserer Sinnlichkeit) Gegebenes ansieht. Der transzendente Realist stellt sich also äußere Erscheinungen als Dinge an sich selbst vor, die unabhängig von uns und unserer Sinnlichkeit existieren, also auch nach reinen Verstandesbegriffen außer uns wären. Dieser transzendente Realist ist es eigentlich, welcher nachher des empirischen Idealisten spielt, und nachdem er fälschlich von Gegenständen der Sinne vorausgesetzt hat, dass, wenn sie äußere sein sollen, sie an sich selbst auch ohne Sinne ihre existenz haben müssten, in diesem Gesichtspunkte alle unsere Vorstellungen der Sinne unzureichend findet, die Wirklichkeit derselben gewiss zu machen”<sup>26</sup> (A369).

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A369, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1971, pp. 397-398.

The main points that need to be highlighted here are: a) transcendental idealism is the doctrine which considers objects of knowledge to be *mere* appearances; b) transcendental realism misinterprets this situation by appointing the objects of experience with an existence that exceeds the boundaries of our experience; c) the transcendental realist ends up by tackling the problem of knowledge, the one which he himself gave rise to, because he realizes that after assigning appearances with a existence of their own he can no longer explain the connection between his representations and that which is “out there”; d) empirical idealism is the logical outcome of this problem, because the objectivity of knowledge can be saved only by considering things in themselves to be objects in the mind.

In the *Refutation of Idealism*, Kant points that Berkeley endorsed a “dogmatic idealism”, while Descartes a “problematic” one. Descartes’ form of idealism has to do with the fact that he was committed to transcendental realism, which is to say that he considered objects to be outside the scope of mind, a premise that leads him to the recognition of the fact that we are aware only of ideas in the mind. Berkeley’s idealism is, as noted, the result of this acknowledgement.

From the quotation just given, it should be plain that Kant dissociates himself from any form of material idealism. But as any student of his philosophy knows, this topic is as controversial as the corresponding theme from Husserl’s phenomenology. This is no surprise, providing that Kant does in fact state “dass alles, was im Raume oder der Zeit angeschaut wird, mithin alle Gegenstände einer uns möglichen Erfahrung, nichts als Erscheinungen, d. i. bloße Vorstellungen sind”.<sup>27</sup> Even though this is an important theme for our present discussion, we are not nevertheless in the position of dealing with it here. For the sake of the argument relevant for this paper, I will just allude to Allison’s interpretation of this problem. The exegete contends that an identification of Kant’s philosophy with Berkeley’s is nothing but “a gross distortion of Kant’s position, since it ignores its explicitly transcendental thrust”.<sup>28</sup> Thus, according to Allison’s interpretation, there is a difference between an empirical treatment of the objects of experience and a transcendental one. The exegete reveals this by taking into account the distinction which Kant makes at A373/A378, namely that which involves the couple *in uns/ausser uns*. Thus, the fact that an

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, A490/B518, p. 491.

<sup>28</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 24.

object is *in uns* from an empirical point of view means that it is a temporal determination of our inner sense, while to be *ausser uns* means to be an extended object that pertains to the outer senses. Viewed like this, the passage in question does amount to material idealism. Now, the *in uns/ausser uns* pair is ontologically neutral if we view it from a transcendental stance, because in this respect it only specifies the ways in which objects are related with the conditions of human sensibility. Thus “things may be viewed as *in uns* (or even as “mere representations”) insofar as they are regarded as subject to the sensible conditions of cognition or, equivalently, as phenomena or objects of these conditions <as they are in themselves>”.<sup>29</sup>

### II.3. Conclusions

Even though the connection between the projects of Husserl and Kant is certainly in need of a much more elaborate discussion, I believe that for the scope of this article that which was said thus far is sufficient. For the aim of my paper is a humble one, as long as it doesn't contend to give definitive answers to the problems regarding the ontological orientation pertaining to Husserl's phenomenology. Indeed, the task that I set before me is tantamount to a mere correlation between the often defended strong idealistic interpretation of phenomenology and its more or less widely acknowledged Cartesian motives. The bridge between these two is provided by transcendental realism. The main problem in this connection has to do with the possibility of knowledge, for how are we to explain it if that which is to be known is in no way linked to that which intends to know it? The core of Descartes' epoch making method of doubting lies precisely here or, better said, its reason is embedded in this doctrine. It should be said that the screening of phenomenology as material idealistic is in this context far from arousing wonder. To see it as overrun with Cartesian motives is the same with its interpretation from the transcendental realistic standpoint, one that, in order to avoid the skeptical dead-end, gives rise to usually low-rated views as those defended by Berkeley. The avoidance of this (mis)understanding is in a certain way simple. Its possibility is firstly opened up by Husserl's own critique of the Cartesian project from the

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

*Cartesianische Meditationen* and its accomplishment requires a careful assessment of the *epoché*.

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