

Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence

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Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence

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*Phenomenology and the Metaphysics
of Presence*

AN ESSAY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF
EDMUND HUSSERL



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE BEGINNING

Phenomenology begins in the work of Edmund Husserl; the first of his phenomenological publications was the *Logische Untersuchungen* of 1901. It is rare that the beginning point of a philosophical movement can be identified with such precision. We must take advantage of this fortunate circumstance in order to better understand the phenomenological movement, for the notions of "origin" and "beginning" themselves play a key part in the development of the phenomenological teaching.

Being able to pinpoint the beginning of phenomenology is not to deny that Husserl had philosophical predecessors or that he had been influenced by other thinkers. To the contrary, Husserl acknowledges his debt to people like Franz Brentano and Paul Natrop. Also, from the perspective of history he sees what he calls the incipient phenomenology of Descartes, Hume, Kant, and others, who *do* phenomenology to some extent without realizing the consequences, thereby losing the thread and falling away from their "phenomenology."

To read the history of philosophy and be able to recognize similarity in the direction of certain philosophical thinking is not, however, the same thing as tracing back to the origins of one's own thought; Husserl begins phenomenology in its self-consciousness, and phenomenology depends upon this abrupt or radical sort of beginning. According to Husserl the idea of a radical beginning is necessarily tied to the philosophical enterprise:

Must not the demand for a philosophy aiming at the ultimate conceivable freedom from prejudice, shaping itself with actual autonomy according to ultimate evidences it has itself produced, and therefore abso-

lutely self-responsible – must not this demand, instead of being excessive, be part of the fundamental sense of genuine philosophy?¹

Phenomenology then depends upon the return to the beginning in the sense that philosophers must rid themselves of their prejudices and must overthrow the dependence on previous philosophies as sources of knowledge. But there is also another sense in which phenomenology is associated in a special way with the notion of beginning. Every systematically developed complex of thought or knowledge moves through mediation from its foundations to greater and more intricate levels of knowledge. It is important therefore that the foundation of the system of knowledge be secured and be understood, since the entire edifice is threatened if the foundation is weak or unintelligible. Much of the work of Husserl is the effort at the grounding of the sciences and of knowledge in general, in order that the systematic development of *Wissenschaft* be on firm foundations, foundations which have themselves been examined and comprehended. In this way too phenomenology is concerned with the notion of origin.

Finally, there is yet another way in which the return to beginnings plays a role in phenomenology. Husserl himself consistently returned to the beginning moments of his own philosophic work, constantly reexamining *his* beginnings. What is perhaps most admirable about Husserl as a philosopher is that he is perpetually the “beginning philosopher.” In his own intellectual work Husserl follows many times the suggestion he makes to philosophers in the *Cartesian Meditations*:

First, anyone who seriously intends to become a philosopher must “once in his life” withdraw into himself and attempt, within himself, to overthrow and build anew all the sciences that, up to then, he has been accepting. Philosophy – wisdom – is the philosopher’s quite personal affair.²

In spite of all this scrutiny however we find in our return to the beginning of phenomenology that there was not achieved the radical break with the history of philosophy that Husserl thought he had accomplished. In fact, we find that the “beginning” made by Husserl is very much in keeping with what might be the oldest and most dominant trend in the history of western philosophical

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

thinking, a trend which we elaborate as the “metaphysics of presence.”

It is always possible in retrospect to see prejudices that could not have been seen at the initiation of a “new” beginning of philosophy. Perhaps this indicates that the notions of “origin” and “beginning” themselves must be subject to criticism. From the perspective of history Husserl found it possible to reflect on the meaning of Descartes’ attempt at a radical beginning, and found unstated presuppositions that needed to be unearthed. Of course we too speak from the perspective of history, and in part our effort too is that of attempting to reclaim the beginning of phenomenology in order to rid it of *its* inarticulated and thoroughly diffused presuppositions. And we shall do so by returning to the origin of phenomenology, the work of Edmund Husserl.

Taking *Ideas* as the central (but not definitive) work in the Husserlean development of phenomenology we find that Husserl elaborates an epistemology that incorporates that traditional orientation of western philosophy which we call the metaphysics of presence.

This is a problematic already located and identified by Jacques Derrida in his interesting and important work *Speech and Phenomena*, where he discovers this orientation at work within Husserl’s theory of signs:

The historic destiny of phenomenology seems in any case to be contained in these two motifs: on the one hand, phenomenology is the reduction of naive ontology, the return to an active constitution of sense and value, to the activity of a *life* which produces truth and value in general through its signs. But at the same time, without being simply juxtaposed to this move, another factor will necessarily confirm the classical metaphysics of presence and indicate the adherence of phenomenology to classical ontology. It is with this adherence that we have chosen to interest ourselves.³

Husserl does not anywhere justify this orientation; it just never occurs to him to question it. Throughout his teaching in *Ideas* we see that being in the mode of presence is given a privileged place; it constitutes the epistemological and metaphysical moment, the high-point of philosophical activity. It is in terms of this that the radical intuitionist thesis of Husserl must be understood in order

³ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 25-6.

to be appreciated in its fullest sense. Furthermore, all of the major themes of Husserl's thinking: the *Wesesschau*, the phenomenological epoché, *Sinngebung*, evidence, all function within this classical notion, the metaphysical and epistemological priority of presence. In the second chapter we show how this concept is operative in *Ideas* by giving an interpretation in terms of it, thereby articulating the most fundamental epistemological teachings of Husserl in that work.

This notion of the metaphysical priority of presence, however, comes into conflict with some of the most famous phenomenological descriptions and analyses worked out by Husserl himself. We shall examine three of these descriptions that are at the very heart of Husserl's phenomenological teaching: language, time, and intersubjectivity. And we find that in all of these cases, the work of Husserl himself shows the illegitimacy of the doctrine that contends the primacy of presence.

We examine the doctrine of language as presented in the *Logische Untersuchungen* and we see that nowhere does Husserl acknowledge the *density* of language, that aspect of the being of language whereby concepts and words operate in terms of each other, and not simply independently or clearly. For Husserl, however, consciousness becomes aware of self-constituted meanings. But to maintain this is to neglect the reality of language as a system which resists being reduced to a series of meanings constituted by consciousness.

Husserl's desire is to understand language within the realm of the metaphysics of presence, and it is this desire that makes him overlook the complexity of the phenomenon of language. In the end, it is Husserl himself who reveals this to us when we see how language is tied up with the phenomenological concept of evidence. It is here that Husserl shows that his concept of language is inadequate since in order to account for the relation of language and evidence Husserl has to lapse into ambiguity concerning the nature of language. That ambiguity revolves around the relationship of the presence of meaning as dependent upon the absent system of meanings and words.

Of all of the specific doctrines of Husserl the teaching on time is probably the most influential. Husserl has an explication of time that is unique in the history of philosophy, and this is taken up

and “exploded” by the existentialists who come after him. But what is seized upon by those who followed him is not exactly what Husserl intended. Contrary to his own desires, Husserl shows that in ordinary temporality *de*-presentation is as original as presentation. The past and the future are not present, and yet they, no less than the present itself, function originally in the constitution of time. That means that absence is co-primordial with presence, a thesis that is in direct contradiction to the teaching of the primacy of being in the mode of presence.

This same theme is followed out in our examination of Husserl’s doctrine of intersubjectivity. There have been many critics who have claimed that Husserl fails to resolve the problematic of the meaning of the existence of the Other, and we are in agreement with those critics. What is of interest, however, is to think through the source of that failure and to find that it centers around the attempt to reduce the alien to presence. Husserl finds himself in the dilemma that he must either abandon his transcendental idealism (which we see as a manifestation of the metaphysics of presence) or he is condemned to a type of solipsism, a position which he himself declared to be absurd. We find that either there must be granted the co-primordially of absence and presence, or there is lost the otherness of the Other. And this, the otherness of the Other, is precisely the phenomenon we are trying to explicate. In the teaching of Husserl this remains unresolved in the end since he does not abandon the metaphysics of presence.

In retrospect we see that Husserl has not been freed of all presuppositions and prejudices. To the contrary, it is to one of the very oldest that he is subject, the metaphysics of presence; the teaching that the presence to being *is* the metaphysical moment. But we realize this inarticulated dependency because in his descriptions of the phenomena of time, language, and the Other, Husserl himself reveals the necessity of understanding presence and absence as co-primordial if an account is to be given of the “things themselves.” Ultimately therefore it is in the work of Husserl himself that we ground our phenomenological research.

CHAPTER II

EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE METAPHYSICS OF PRESENCE

A. THE METAPHYSICS OF PRESENCE

Western philosophy follows out a line of what Jacques Derrida has named the metaphysics of presence. The movement of that great thought which began with the Greeks and culminated in Hegel was the idea of metaphysics, the science of Being *qua* Being. What is of interest here is that this great thought moved in a certain direction, along a certain theme – that the metaphysical moment is the moment of presence; that the metaphysical notion of Being as it is in itself is the notion of absolute presence. The general doctrine of the metaphysics of presence can be summed up in the following way:

1. Being, as the most universal concept, defies definition in terms of lower concepts. But this is also true of the concept of presence. The metaphysics of presence maintains that entities participate in Being, that they do not exhaust Being and that they do not delimit Being. Exactly the same thought is carried through about presence in regard to entities. Entities are present in Being, their presence is the manifestation of Being, but their absence is not a delimitation of Being, since there is always the presence of other entities to manifest Being, to bring Being to presence. This means that Being is absolute; it is not relative to entities or to conceptual determinations. Precisely here we can see that presence is a mode of Being, and in the metaphysics of presence, the supreme metaphysical moment is when Being reveals itself, presents itself as Being-in-the-mode-of-presence.

2. The real nexus of the concepts of Being and presence is to be found in temporality in the concept of “the present.” Being is given in the absolute present moment because Being is eternal,

trans-temporal, and therefore primarily present. That which is not in the present is not given as being in a primary mode of Being. That which was, for example, is given in the mode of having-been. That which is in the present is what is, that is, manifests Being through its presence in the present.

3. Being is absolute. Being is that other than which nothing is. The limit of Being is nonbeing; it is the ground of all mediation. Nonbeing and absence are derivative, mediated categories. Being-in-the-mode-of-presence is absolute presence.

4. The notion of Being as absolute presence means that Being in itself, the eternal, immutable idea of Being, is the notion of absolute presence, and therefore the exclusion of the notions of the temporal, the incomplete, and the negative. The notion of Being, in its primordial manifestation is the exclusion of absence. These are the thoughts that are at the heart of that line of thinking in Western philosophy which is the metaphysics of presence.

Already in Plato's analogy of the cave this metaphysical notion of Being is delimited and defined by contrast with the notion of absence. All persons, save only the philosopher, are doomed to be dealing only with shadows, the phantom, and to think that it is the real. But even those who see outside of the cave, through the exercise of reason, see only shadows at first. Of course they are the shadows of the real world, not of the cave, but they are shadows nonetheless. They are mere profiles; they have no depth, no substantial being.

After some time, Plato tells us, it would be possible to look directly at the things of the world themselves, no longer being restricted to mere reflections. But even to see these beings as they are is not yet the exercise of the philosophical act, not yet the metaphysical moment. For what is not given in the vision of these things of the world is their source, the ground of their being. That is to say, Being *qua* Being has not yet been given – Being in the mode of absolute presence. The entities of the world are temporal, unstable, constantly changing, that is, not in absolute presence. The last thing to be perceived is the good itself, in the analogy of the cave, the sun. And this vision is given all at once; it is unchanging, unadumbrated, the eternal source and ground of all being and all change. For it to be grasped all at once, to be grasped in a single vision means that it is given as *presence*, absolute,

total, and complete. It is this moment of presence which is for Plato the metaphysical moment. Plato tells us that it is only after having this vision that one has become a philosopher, has comprehended Being *qua* Being.

We see also in Hegel this theme of the metaphysics of presence. The moment of Being *qua* Being is the presence of Spirit to itself, all at once, no longer history, no longer becoming, no longer mediated. As in the thought of Plato, so too in the thought of Hegel, Being is presence, and the metaphysical moment that creates philosophy is the direct presence of Being, enduring, timeless, and absolute.

As a final example of a philosophy which is grounded in the metaphysics of presence let us consider the aim of the work of Kant – the destruction of metaphysics. How is it possible to consider him within this tradition? Paradoxically, it is perhaps most clear with Kant, who limits reason and declares classical metaphysics to be impossible, just what is at the heart of this type of thought which we call the metaphysics of presence. The most fundamental epistemological and metaphysical reason why metaphysics is impossible, says Kant, is because there is no way to know the things-in-themselves; there is no way that the human reason can come into the presence of the things themselves. Metaphysics is impossible *because* Being cannot come into presence; all that is possible is Appearance, which is precisely *other than* the presence of Being itself.

It is only on the ground of this understanding of metaphysics that it makes sense for Kant to claim that metaphysics is indeed impossible, that it goes beyond the limit of human knowledge in its claims. But this means that Kant has exactly the same notion of the metaphysical moment as do Plato and Hegel – that Being is presence. Kant, in denying metaphysics, affirms completely the highest aspirations of metaphysics.

Following Kant, Husserl too aimed at a philosophy free of presuppositions by means of pursuing a radical positivism in an epistemological investigation. But, in fact, his radical positivism presupposes a certain metaphysics – precisely that classical one which we have called the metaphysics of presence. With this conclusion as the guiding thought we shall give an interpretation of Husserl's central work, *Ideen I*, showing how this metaphysical

notion reveals itself through three major themes in Husserl's work.

1. That intuition is the epistemological foundation of true positivism.
2. That the transcendental sphere is the sphere of Being.
3. That Being giving itself in intuition is the epistemological moment for Husserl. This means Being is absolute presence – that is, the metaphysical moment.

In this way we shall see that Husserl does indeed have a presupposition, the metaphysics of presence.

B. POSITIVISM

Paul Ricoeur has called Kant our “oldest contemporary.” The resolute intention to avoid “mere metaphysical speculation,” in favor of a type of positivism, contemporary philosophy owes to Kant. Taking the research and principles of British Empiricism seriously, Kant is determined to elaborate an epistemology which grounds itself in the principle that all knowledge begins in experience. Kantian empiricism maintains that the source of all possible experience lies in sensible intuition.

Objects are *given* to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arises concepts.¹

This passage expresses the very foundation of Kant's epistemology, since it is here that he acknowledges that objects are given to intuition. But we can also see here an ontological corollary. The sensibility, through which we are part of Nature for Kant, is the ontological ground of the epistemological operations because it is the locus of the givenness of being. Epistemologically and ontologically, the presence of being is accomplished through the sensibility. It is on this foundation, however, that for Kant the metaphysical moment is impossible, as we have noted above.

Husserl has taken up the spirit of the epistemological teaching of Kant and the ontological doctrine which is its necessary correlate. But in taking up this spirit, Husserl has, as we shall see,

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith (New York: St. Martins, 1965), p. 33.

radicalized this teaching to bring about a new epistemological and ontological understanding of intuition, And in this radicalization Husserl in fact moves to rejoin the dominating thrust of Western metaphysics: the metaphysics of presence. The major preoccupation of Husserl, and the result of his work, is the development of an epistemology which reveals that cognition is cognition of Being in the mode of presence. In Husserl, the end result of his radical epistemology is nothing less than a rejuvenation of the Western philosophical tradition which teaches that Being, in its most fundamental mode, is Presence.

In seeking a truly positivist epistemology Husserl establishes a rigorous criterion of knowledge; we shall see that for him the *only* ultimately validating criterion of knowledge is that evidence which is self-evidence, that which is obtained through direct intuition, that is, an intuition of the object in its "bodily presence." This notion of self-evidence is one which Husserl worked on very diligently and which we shall discuss further in the chapter on language. What is important here is the realization that Husserl carries through this notion of self-evidence as *the* criterion which validates knowledge. Of course not all cognition is immediately given in this way, nor even immediately evidenced as such; there is also "founded knowledge," knowledge that is not achieved by a direct intuition and even that which is not intuitive at all. But, it is the task of what Husserl calls intentional analysis to trace the founded back to the original founding intuition, since all knowledge is ultimately derived from, and is of, objects given through intuition. This means that in principle such analysis must always be possible, and that "returning" to such intuition provides immediate evidence for knowledge. It is nothing less radical than this that he means when he says in *The Idea of Phenomenology*:

It will not do to draw conclusions from existences of which one knows but which one cannot "see." "Seeing" does not lend itself to demonstration or deduction. It is patently absurd to try to explain possibilities (and unmediated possibilities at that) by drawing logical conclusions from non-intuitive knowledge.²

In carrying through the positivist standpoint Husserl demands that knowledge on all levels be grounded in epistemological pre-

² Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Alston and Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 2.

sence. It is through intentional analysis that Husserl shows how *all* knowledge is founded on direct intuition. It is the aim of this chapter to give an expository account of the direction of Husserl's thought as it moves within this guiding principle, and to show that he has a teaching in which all phenomena of this type are brought to epistemological presence, as well as the corollary ontological doctrine that what is given in intuition is true Being. That is, what is brought into epistemological presence is ontologically fundamental.

That the founding intuitions are the absolute criteria for the knowledge of what is, is what lies at the heart of what Husserl calls (and uses as) the principle of all principles:

No theory we can conceive can mislead us in regard to the principle of all principles: that every primordial dator intuition is a source of authority for knowledge, that whatever presents itself in "intuition" in primordial form (as it were in its bodily reality), is simply to be accepted as it gives itself out to be, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself.³

Already implied here are two ways in which Husserl carries through a more radical positivism than Kant. (1) It is true that Kant maintains that all knowledge begins with experience, but he also maintains that it does not follow that it all arises out of experience, and therefore certainly not out of intuition. Husserl, however, maintains that all knowledge does in fact arise out of intuition, that intuition *is* the source of all knowledge. (2) For Kant, all intuitions are sensible intuitions. They are the intuitions of the faculty of the sensibility which have as their objects sensible data. This is for Kant the only type of intuition possible. Husserl claims not only sensible intuitions which have as their objects sensible data, but also eidetic intuitions, intuitions of essences. This is the famous "*Wesensschau*." Let us take up first the possible types of intuitions and their possible objects.

C. INTUITION

It is a fundamental axiom of phenomenology that every act of consciousness is an intentional act; that all consciousness is con-

³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1933), p. 32.

sciousness of . . . This means that every act of consciousness has an *object*. An object need not be a spatio-temporal thing since Husserl explicitly uses the term in the sense of formal logic where an object is "every subject of possibly true predications."⁴ There are, says Husserl, different types of objects just as there are different types of acts of consciousness. Imagining has as its object the imagined object, remembering the object remembered, wishing the object wished, etc.

One of the acts of consciousness is intuition. As we have already seen, it is the teaching of Kant, in keeping with the spirit of positivism, that knowledge is obtained first of all by means of sensible intuitions. For Husserl too the fact of sensible intuitions plays a fundamental role. Sensible intuition for Husserl is perception, and perception, as an act of consciousness, must have an object. In smelling, *something* is smelled; in hearing, something is heard, and in seeing, something is seen. Staying within the philosophical tradition in considering perception, Husserl gives vision, seeing, a certain priority by having it serve as the epitome of perception in general. Let us consider an example of visual perception from the phenomenological standpoint.

I see a tree. In what way, in what sense is this object given in the perceptual act of consciousness? It is not given as a representation; it is given as an *embodied presence*. Husserl embraces this notion of embodied presence in order to distinguish his from other theories of perception in which the object of perception is given as present in the status of a sign or symbol. Also, the object of perception is immediately given as present "bodily" in contrast to the modifications of "hovering before the mind" or being presented in memory or free fancy.⁵ The tree, as the object of this perception, also falls under the category of "thing," as does every object of a perceptual act of consciousness.

The way in which the thing is given is also important; the thing, the object of sensory perception is given in a series of profiles, it is adumbrated. And this series of profiles is in principle infinite. That is, it is the very nature of the thing that it be given non-exhaustively. I cannot see both the back and the front of the tree at one and the same time, but the presence of

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

the front implicates the back; from the front which I see, the whole series of possible appearances is announced, implicated.

It is the very nature of any spatio-temporal object in reality to be given, to be perceived in this adumbrative manner.⁶ This does not mean, however, that it is a mere sign or index which is perceived and that somehow the true imperceptible thing is merely indicated or signified by the series of appearances. The thing is not represented through its appearances; these appearances are aspects of the thing itself. We can see that here Husserl, in keeping with positivism, departs from Kant. For Kant the appearances were mere signs for the thing itself which could not be perceived, something which is other than, of a different level of being than, the sign which indicates it. For Husserl the appearance is not a *sign* for the thing; it is an aspect of it. It does not *indicate* the thing; it implicates the thing because it itself is a profile of the thing.

A sign and copy does not "announce" in itself the self that is signified (or copied). But the physical thing is nothing foreign to that which appears in a sensory body, but something that manifests itself in it and in it *alone*. Indeed in a primordial way, a way that is also *a priori* in that it rests on essential grounds something which cannot be annulled.⁷

In sensory perception what is perceived is the thing as present, manifested in bodily presence, not as a sign or symbol, but as itself, a concrete individual.⁸ The thing is given to sensory perception through, or across, its profiles, given as a possible infinite series to a consciousness which perceives it. The mode in which the thing presents itself is in its bodily self-presence (*leibhaftigen Gegenwart*). Sensory perception is therefore an original mode of experience upon which other experiencing acts build as upon a ground. Perception has been established as a mode of experience, specifically a type of intuition in which the object is given in its bodily self-presence to a consciousness which intuits it as it is, directly given in sensory perception. It is in this sense that phenomenology can be considered as the doctrine that holds that seeing is believing.

It is on this point that phenomenology finds itself in opposition

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

to scepticism and that empiricism which has its roots in scepticism. Scepticism in general is the position that all knowledge is uncertain, and its roots lie in the existence of perceptual illusion as a phenomenon. That is, scepticism holds that it is naive to "believe what is seen," since it is often self-evidently the case from experience that what one thought one saw was not in fact what one saw. The attack of scepticism then is that phenomenology claims a "bodily self-presence" for an object which is possibly only an illusory object, the object of sensory perception. Scepticism thereby maintains that there is an incompatibility in the notion that one and the same object can be claimed as both being present "bodily" and being only an illusory presence.

In order to justify his claim that the object of sensory perception has "bodily presence" it is incumbent upon Husserl to undermine the sceptic's position. Husserl ignores most of the classical arguments against scepticism and presents rather the argument that the sceptic sets up a false dilemma. He accomplishes this by showing that there is nothing incongruent in the notions of bodily presence and the possibility of illusion, as is claimed by the sceptic.

Husserl does not take up the position of Descartes who resolves, or rather dissolves, the problem of illusion by making it into a problem of judgemental activity. According to Descartes, it is not our senses which deceive us since in fact our perceptions are accurate enough; it is just that sometimes we "judge" too quickly about our perceptions. This means that the error involved in illusion lies on the level of judgement rather than on the level of perception. Illusion is here reduced to improper synthetic activity carried out by the faculty of judgement. Husserl cannot and does not use this method of escaping the dilemma; perception is indeed a synthetic act, but it is an act on the pre-judicative level. The synthesis involved in perception is not a matter of judging, but one of perceiving.

Resorting to the faculty of judgment as the source of error in the perceptual process, as did Descartes, is ultimately unintelligible. On what grounds can one judge that the previous judgment had been incorrect? Certainly not on the grounds of the object as perceived, since the original error was not perceptual. Where then does the second judgment derive its authority to

correct the first? It is unsatisfactory to rely upon a concordance theory of truth, since that criterion would be purely on the level of judgments, whereas the perceptual activity is concerned with the immediate givenness of the object. By using previous judgments as the criteria of the real and the true the object itself is neglected and the original claim that the error is in judgment and not in perception is meaningless since the object plays no role in this criteria. It is only in an appeal to the object of perception that such a corrective judgment would be feasible. But for Descartes such a perception is impossible since it would necessarily have the same *perceptual* status as the first, which was also correct.

Husserl challenges the sceptics on their most primary assumption: that the source of illusion is the fallibility of the perceiving act alone which fails to perceive properly the object which is simply there, complete, just waiting to be properly perceived. It is this notion of the object as simply *there* which Husserl attacks. It is indeed there, in its bodily presence, but for a perceptual object to be there means, as Husserl has shown, to be there *as a series of appearances which are perceived in a series*. The object is not given all at once, but through or across this series of appearances. And this object of consciousness is not synthesized by either the object or by judgmental activity, but by the perceiving consciousness.⁹ It is precisely because of the nature of the object, the thing, that illusion is possible. Since the thing is in principle never adequately perceived, not because of faulty perception but because of the nature of the thing, there is revealed a presupposition made by scepticism. Scepticism has always first taken for granted what it then makes dubious – the thing as necessarily existing as an absolute and therefore as knowable in itself. With the insight that it is the very nature of the thing to be given to consciousness perspectively (non-absolutely) the onus of being the only possible source of illusion is lifted from the perceiving consciousness.

One can now answer the question of how an illusion can be known to be an illusion, a knowledge which was inexplicable under scepticism. The object, itself being always in principle an infinite series of possible appearances to a perceiving consciousness, is now

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 334.