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Report on **Viktor Zavřel**, *Pojem objektu v Husserlově fenomenologii a jeho předobraz v klasické antické metafyzice*

1. Descriptive Summary

The work sets out to achieve a quite ambitious goal, that of providing a sort of comparative examination (to say the least) between the notion of “object” in Husserl’s phenomenology and in ancient Greek metaphysics. However, the dissertation is composed of two parts of strongly unequal length: whereas in fact the first part on Husserl covers a total of 62 pages (I am not including the two-and-a-half-page general introduction), the part on ancient metaphysics is 30 page long (despite the numerous, and difficult philosophers mentioned and discussed).

The first part’s general goal is to elucidate the many different functions and meanings that the notion of “*objekt*” has in Husserl’s philosophy and according to the different phases of its development (I am leaving intentionally the term in Czech as it appears on the dissertation’s title so that later on I can highlight the very ambiguous way in which the candidate uses it). In this respect, the Husserl-part is in turn divided up into 4 sub-sections: the first sub-section is on the *objekt* in Husserl’s early works, with an exclusive focus on the *Logical Investigations*; the second sub-section, on the contrary, address the new conception Husserl proposes in *Ideas I* within the static framework and in connection with the noetic-noematic relation. The third sub-section moves on a late work, the *Cartesian Meditations* in order to tackle what the candidate the “ideal conception” of the *objekt* or the *objekt* itself as something ideal. Finally, the fourth and last sub-section of the Husserl-part is quickly dedicated to the genetic approach as it can be found in *Experience and Judgment* (where particular attention is given to the pre-predicative dimension of our experience). The main results of this first part of the dissertation

are listed as a series of three theses by the candidate himself at the beginning of the second part (p. 71) (I will come back later on to the content of such first part): the candidate speaks of a “metaphysical thesis” (absolute reality is a *contradictio in adiecto*); of an “epistemological thesis” (there is no substantial or essential difference between the things as we perceive them and the things in themselves); finally, he speaks of a “psychological thesis” (it is not possible to establish a univocal distinction between thinking and perceiving).

Given such three theses, the candidate presents as following the main goal of the second part:

“Vyjadřuji tuto tezi prostřednictvím těchto jejích tří atributů, protože se domnívám, že jsou natolik obecné, že jejich prostřednictvím je možné nahlížet i na antické filosofické teorie a podle toho, jak se staví k obsahu těchto tezí, je považovat buď za příbuzné fenomenologickému způsobu pojmání skutečnosti, nebo za tomuto způsobu protikladné” (p. 70).

Note a strong ambiguity: the candidate does not justify *why we should do what we are doing, namely, why there should be any interest on our part and on the part of the candidate himself in verifying whether ancient metaphysics agrees or not with the three Husserlian theses above*. In fact, the same statement (*jak se staví k obsahu těchto tezí, je považovat buď za příbuzné fenomenologickému způsobu pojmání skutečnosti, nebo za tomuto způsobu protikladné*) could be made about any other moment or period of the history of philosophy: one could verify whether Hellenic philosophy, early Christian philosophy, 13th century and 14th century metaphysics, early modern philosophy from the 16th century Jesuits to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Lotze all agree or not with the three theses emphasized by the candidate. I could not find in the work any *de jure* argument able to justify the transition from the first to the

second part of the work. The explanation proposed at the outset of the dissertation is in my humble opinion quite lacking:

“Tématem mojí disertační práce je problematika objektu. Jelikož je toto epistemologické téma velmi rozsáhlé, autor práce si předně klade za cíl stanovit rámec, v němž se bude celé zkoumání pohybovat. Tento text bude zaměřen především na to, aby podal zevrubnou analýzu pojetí objektu, které je obsaženo ve fenomenologii Edmunda Husserla, a následně představil jeho vztah k antickému pojetí předmětu. Obsahem této práce bude analýza počátků formování pojmu objektu, které jsou obsaženy v klasické antické filosofii, a představení jejich souvislosti s pojetím objektu, které se nachází takřka na druhém konci dějin evropské metafyziky, tj. s jedním z posledních komplexních filosofických systémů, jímž je Husserlova fenomenologie” (p. 5)

The argument that the concept of *objekt* was first “formed” in classical antique philosophy is, at best, a *factual argument* – yet, it does not suffice to establish a *de jure* connection. Because even if one were to accept the thesis that the concept of *objekt* was first formed in classical Greek metaphysics, it is unclear why *one would have to approach it on the basis of Husserl’s phenomenology*. The statement to the effect that one could read the ancient concept of *objekt* through Husserl’s lenses (*Z historického hlediska bude začínat od konce, neboť její první část bude obsahovat Husserlovo pojetí objektu, teprve prostřednictvím tohoto prismatu lze totiž nahlížet na koncepty antické filosofie a klást je do souvislostí s pojmy moderní epistemologie*) is completely unjustified. Why not Heidegger? Why not Whitehead for example, or Brentano?

This is why the reader that goes from the first to the second part is left with two opposite, yet both unsatisfying feelings. On the one hand, the two parts look like two independent and just

juxtaposed works: a first, short work on Husserl, and a second – extremely – short work on ancient Greek philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Aristotle. Entire pages are included in the second part, whose reading leave the strong impression that we have simply entered a new and different dissertation with no connection with the Husserl-part. On the other hand, here comes the opposite feeling, by reading Aristotle through Husserlian senses the candidate gives us the impression that he can find what he is looking for *only because he has already imposed on Aristotle terms and concepts which come from outside his work*. We can find “Husserl” in Aristotle only because we have already imposed “Husserl” on Aristotle himself (see later on my remarks concerning the candidate’s alleged translation of the Aristotelian *tode ti*).

2. Merits of the Candidate’s Approach and Methodology

The main merit of the candidate in the present work is the ambition to link together Husserl and ancient Greek philosophy: it is a great merit because Husserl’s phenomenology is usually regarded as having nothing or little to do with Greek philosophy. Heidegger’s statement is quite known to the effect that while his own conception of phenomenology stemmed out of Brentano’s dissertation on Aristotle and the problem of being, Husserl took as a point of departure a modern Brentano, the one of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.

On the contrary, the candidate’s methodology is lacking in many respects. In the first place, there is quoted – it seems – no secondary literature on Husserl and Greek philosophy. Which is a field of study that has made incredible progresses over the last decade. Even the choice of Husserl’s own texts is not easy to understand: with the exception of a quick passage on Plato from the *Crisis* quoted on page 80, it is not clear why a dissertation on such topic does not even mention Husserl’s many texts and lectures on the history of Greek philosophy: I am for example referring not only to the *Crisis* itself and the texts in appendix; but also, for example, to *First Philosophy I*, the *Einleitung in die Philosophie* of 1922 (see Hua XXXV) and, most

importantly, to Hua-Mat IX (*Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 1916-1920) in which Husserl does provide his most systematic account of the history of Ancient Greek philosophy from Thales to Aristotle (via the fundamental role of the Sophists). It is quite surprising that the candidate does not even address the question of Husserl's own relationship to Greek philosophy. Had he so done, the candidate would have had the chance to actually justify the transition from the first to the second part of the dissertation in a more serious and robust way.

It is not even easy to understand why the candidate quotes the Husserlian texts that he actually quotes and discusses: I am referring, for example, to *Experience and Judgment*. Why, during the discussion of the “genetic” dimension of the determination of the object (see §1.4.1), there is no mention of the lectures on passive syntheses (to which many of the ideas of *EJ* actually refer back)? Why does the candidate quote sometimes from the A-edition of the *LU* and sometimes from the B-edition without explaining why this is so (see for example page 12)?

With the exception of *EU*, the candidate does not quote from any of the Husserliana volumes – is there any reason for that? Volumes such as *Ding und Raum*, Hua XXXVIII (on attention and perception), and Hua XXXVI (on Husserl's transcendental idealism) might have been of great help to the candidate. Why none of these volumes is ever mentioned?

3. Formal Problems

In addition to the methodological problems above, I would make the following quite critical remarks. One, when it comes to works such as PhD dissertations, I would personally regard the tendency to self-quotation as an expression of bad taste, and the candidate even decides to close the second part of the dissertation with a long citation from his own MA thesis! This suggests – but I hope I am wrong – that the arguments proposed during the second part of the work are a sort of repetition of what the candidate had already written in the MA thesis. If this

is the case, it follows that the only new part is the one on Husserl. I hope this is really not the case, because what we would have is a Ph.D. dissertation long less than 70 pages! Moreover, if we consider that in the second part all the (long) quotations are accompanied by an equally long translation (I am wondering why this does not happen in the Husserl part), the actual arguments proposed by the candidate amount to more or less 20 pages... 20 pages to cover the history of philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Aristotle! Quite ambitious, to say the least.

4. Content-oriented Objections

I will not get into any systematic discussion of the candidate's interpretation of Husserl (or Greek philosophy); rather, I would confine myself to the following bullet-points.

- Please, it is just a mistake to use the adjective “human” in relation to Husserl's phenomenology. Here are some examples: “Nástroji, které Husserl v pozdější fázi svého myšlení při popisu vztahu mezi lidským vědomím a předmětem zavádí, jsou především termíny noésis a noéma” (p. 30); “V principiálně odlišném ohledu (tj. že existují nezávisle na vědomí) předměty chápat nelze, neboť to jsou eo ipso předměty lidského vědomí” (p. 31); “Je třeba pamatovat na to, že všechny koncepty, jimiž se charakterizuje lidské myšlení jsou intencionálně provázané” (p. 35); “K následující části této práce lze proto přistupovat jako k objasnění a rozvedení úlohy předmětu jako regulativní ideje v lidském poznávání” (p. 37); „Nutnou součástí smyslového vnímání je však také lidské tělo“ (p. 41). *Husserl's phenomenology wants to be an “eidetic” science of the structures of consciousness*; the talk of “human” (body, knowledge, or consciousness) turns it into something else: into a form of a priori psychology or a priori anthropology. Which is precisely what it is not and does not want to be.
- The main problem is the way in which the candidate speaks of *objekt*. He claims to be interested in the concept of object in Husserl's phenomenology, but in the end what

we have is always the analysis of the thing (*Ding*)-constitution. Without ever referring to Husserl's own German distinctions, I must confess that quite often I had a hard time understanding what the candidate was actually referring to. In Husserl's philosophy, a clear-cut distinction can be found between: (1) *Gegenstand* – “object” in the sense of formal logic and ontology: “the subject of a possible true predication” (with its own ontological correlate in a state of affairs); (2) *Objekt* – “object” as a psychological and descriptive term: the correlate of an objectifying act in the sense of the *LU*; (3) *Sache* – “thing” in the sense of the regional materialization of *I*; (4) *Ding* – “thing” in the sense of the material determination of the region “nature.” Then, more generally, (5) Husserl speaks also of *Gegenstand* in the “transcendental” sense to mean whatever is the correlate of the constitution-process (no matter whether “static” or “genetic”), and which could include any of the object-concepts above. Now, although the title of the dissertation promises a discussion of the concept of object in Husserl's philosophy, the candidate does not even seem to be interested in the many meanings that such concept has or could display in the thought of Husserl.

- One more thing... Were I the candidate, I would be very careful in translating *tode ti* with *daná věc*, especially if this happens in a work on Husserl. For, the adjective *daná* could really suggest a *givenness*-determination of the object. But that of *givenness* is a *relational*-determination: $R(x)$ or, even worse: $(x)R(y)$ – to be read as “*x* is given to *y*”; or as “*x* is as *given* to *y*.” But relations fall under the category of the *pros ti*: we would be really running the risk of reducing the *tode ti* to the *pros ti*.

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Despite all my criticisms, I have decided to allow the candidate to **be accepted for defense, but I really hope he can explain and address all the problems mentioned here.**

I must confess that I was thinking of rejecting the dissertation completely; but this would require of the candidate of re-thinking his dissertation project from top to toe – which is not something that can be done at this stage.

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