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Epoché and Teleology: The Idea of Philosophy as ‘infinite task’ in Husserl

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Introduction**

In Husserl’s phenomenology, there are two essential moments; one is the Epoché which makes the phenomenology possible, the other is the teleology of science which directs it to its own goal (telos). The former, later appeared in Husserl’s text, does not seem quite consistent with the latter — on the contrary, these seem so exclusive that a question arises as to whether Husserl could reconcile Epoché with teleology consistently claimed from the beginning of his career.

My aim in this paper is to reveal their conflict in Husserl’s phenomenology, confining my argument to the science as teleological activity which had been claimed from *Logical Investigations* (1900) to his last work *Crisis* (1936). The plan is as follows; firstly we will confirm that Husserl defined the idea of the science as an activity which tends to one universal science and that when he innovated the Epoché as the phenomenological method (*Ideas I*, 1913), he confined the range of Epoché in such a science; secondly we will

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** The reference to *Husserliana* (Martinus Nijhoff / Kluwer / Springer, 1950-) is in the form: volume + page.

prove that in his last work, this idea of the science remained in the form of “teleology of history” claimed by Husserl to be possible only by the Epoché; thirdly we will examine the inconsistency between the Epoché and the teleology, making reference to the critique of Jan Patočka. Finally we should deliberate whether, after such a kind of critique, there is place for the teleology in phenomenology, thorough the consideration to a difference of Crisis between in the Vienna lecture (1935) and in the *Crisis*.

1. Teleology and the science as activity; *Logical Investigations* and the *Logos* article

From the beginning of *Logical Investigations* (Prolegomena to pure logic), Husserl claimed the necessity for theory of science (Wissenschaftslehre). In an incomplete state of all sciences which had no “inner clarity and rationality” (XVIII, 26) required independently of the expansion of their domains, Husserl demanded what makes sciences into sciences, that is, the “idea” of science. Insofar as an activity of science aims at knowledge (Wissen) as an objective truth, it is based on an evidence of truth (Wahrheit) or probability (Wahrscheinlichkeit). However, while a science as objectivity should not be a miscellany of individual knowledge, every knowledge needs *systematic connection* in which each knowledge is founded and the foundations are connected with each other. The science therefore consists in unity of foundational connections (Einheit des Begründungszusammenhanges, XVIII, 30). It is important for us to indicate that such a unity of objective science induces a teleological movement in the activity of science. Since, according to Husserl, the foundational connections are ruled by regulative laws and this systematic structure is not our own invention but is present in things, the activity toward such a unified structure aims “not merely to arrive at knowledge, but knowledge in such degree and form as would correspond to our highest theoretical aims as perfectly as possible” (XVIII, 30). In this way, Husserl arrived at a conclusion that activity of science should have a “teleological meaning in the attainment of the highest goal of knowledge for which all science strives” (XVIII, 39-40).

In the *Logos* article “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (1911, XXV, 3-62), after the argument that the phenomenology also aims to a science (theory), Husserl separated from the philosophy of world view (Weltanschauungs-

philosophie) the rigorous scientific (wissenschaftlich) philosophy which has the above-mentioned teleological structure, according to their goals. It is certain that the philosophy of world view also has a teleological function which tends to cultivate some world view providing a framework for theoretical, practical, aesthetic, religious etc. experiences in a certain age, and aims to elevate it to an ideal of the perfect humanity. In this sense, the world view, too, is an “idea”, but an idea relative to age, “of a goal lying in the finite, in principle to be realized in an individual life by way of constant approach” (XXV, 52). On the contrary, the idea of science as objective is independent of age, so to speak, supratemporal (überzeitlich), and is meant *not to be realized* in our age. Therefore if we ask for science the objective validity which the philosophy of world view or historicism amount to denying, we must constantly strive for the idea of science based on only *one* evidence, though we admit the impossibility of this accomplishment (XXV, 52). Husserl, already but somewhat inconsistently, attempts to characterize the motive for this impossible pursuit as the *urgency of life* (Lebensnot) which means that if we prefer world views to rigorous science and forget the idea of science, we fall into the skepticism as ‘invincible vice’ (unausrottbares Übel, XXV, 57). In the *Logos* article too, in this way, Husserl argued that the activity of science has a teleological structure, and here, we can extract three essences from it.

- 1) Against the philosophy of world view and historicism, the activity of rigorous science aims to the science as objective unity of foundational connections and thereby should *be founded on only one and absolute* evidence (XXV, 61).
- 2) It must aim to attain to the science that will *never be accomplished* in certain age. Whereas the philosophy of world view is for certain age (für Zeit), the philosophy as rigorous science is for the eternal (für Ewigkeit).
- 3) The teleological activity of science contains not only some causal necessities but also a sort of obligation which is required from a matter of *urgency* derived from the incompleteness of sciences.

By the way, does the epoché, the essential method of phenomenology, explicitly suggested in the *Ideas I* (1913), derive from such a teleological activity of science? Let us see the relation between epoché and the teleology of science in the *Ideas I*.

2. Epoché and the science; Ideas I

In the *Ideas I* too, Husserl maintained the idea of philosophy as rigorous science against the skepticism (§ 26). Then it is remarkable that although the rigorous science could be entirely reformed by the epoché, but Husserl did limit the epoché by the idea of science.

In it, after characterizing our normal lives as the ‘natural attitude’ which is destined to accept every actuality or ‘the’ world as factually existing (§27-30), Husserl started to examine the possibility to change totally such an attitude (§31). Against the general positing concerning *everything* which is explicitly or implicitly object of consciousness, he got a clue from the Decartes’ attempt to doubt *universally*. We can’t doubt anything without some motive, but we can *attempt* to doubt anything whatever with ‘perfect freedom’ (III/1, 65). Here is, with regard to *any* positing we effected, the possibility to put it out of action, to parenthesize it without affirming or denying it, so to say, to exercise the epoché. Through this purely parenthesizing of every positing, we can put out of action the world which is posed in natural attitude, and bring it to question.

However as soon as Husserl showed the possibility of universal epoché in this way, he limited (begrenzen) this universality (Universität) of epoché for the sake of science (§32).

But with good reason we *limit* the universality of that [epoché]. Since we are completely free to modify every positing and every judging [Urteil] and to parenthesize every objectivity which can be judged about if it were as comprehensive [umfassend] as possible, then no province would be left for unmodified judgments, to say nothing of a province for science. (III/1, 65)

Concretely, Husserl restricted the object of epoché to the general positing in the natural attitude, the *whole natural world* which is continually “there for us”, that is “the transcendency” as a correlate of consciousness. The reason Husserl limited the epoché was that he considered pure consciousness the Residuum by the epoché in order to define it as ‘a new scientific domain’ (III/1, 65). As far as pure consciousness is residuum by the epoché (III/1, 107), phenomenology has to be one science whose object is some existent thing

(residuum) and to be subject to the idea of rigorous science (cf. to be founded on only one and absolute evidence). These results of limit of the epoché is inconsistent with science not in the *Idea I* whose purpose is bringing the natural attitude to question, but in Husserl's later works which insist that phenomenology is started only by the epoché. Before pointing out this inconsistency, we must find out that the teleological activity of science is maintained in the form of 'teleology of history' in Husserl's later works.

3. Epoché and the teleology of history; *Cartesian meditations and Crisis*

In the *Cartesian meditations* (1931), considering the idea of 'authentic science,' Husserl recurred the teleological aspect of science again. The idea of science here is formulated not as a complete system of deductive theory, but as universal self-reflection (Selbstbessinnung) by the pure consciousness, by the hand of phenomenology which 'changed radically the fundamental and essential meaning of science' (I, 182). It is important for us that this self-reflection, repeating its attempt that would always be incomplete, aims a 'necessary final form' in the 'history'. "Shouldn't this tendency to get forward bear an eternal meaning, and for us a big task imposed by the history, in which all we are called to be engaged?" (I, 46) Husserl reintroduced here the idea of philosophy as teleological activity of science given in the *Logos* article, in the relation with 'history' from which Husserl had clearly separated the scientific philosophy. This idea would be developed in the *Crisis* (1936) in the form of 'teleology of history'.

At his later years, Husserl turned his attention to the history in order not to prove from historical standpoint an authenticity of his philosophy, but, it seems to me, to stress the 'activity' of philosophy, not only theoretical activity, but also 'rational activity', in a broad sense, which include theoretical, practical, and aesthetic activities (I, 111; VI, 269-276). And in this point, the rational activity has the teleological structure striving for the 'true and full rationality.' "In all its forms it [philosophy, science] is on its way to a higher rationality; it is rationality which, discovering again and again its unsatisfying relativity, is driven on in its toils, in its will to attain the true and full rationality" (VI, 274).

In the *Crisis*, this teleology of reason was illustrated as necessary

development of the idea of philosophy since its birth of Greek philosophy, for example the struggle between objectivism and transcendentalism and the conquest of the former by the latter (§14). In brief, Husserl interpreted the teleology of reason as the teleology which subsists in the history, that is 'teleology of history.' This is why the history was considered as the *unity* running through all the projects of history and as a personal unity (§15). In the particular situation, history is imposed on the individual as a 'task' (Aufgabe). 'Task' means what each activity of philosophy has to have as its starting point when it starts in the individual. Such a task has great significance in the philosophy on the condition that it is connected with the idea of rigorous science, that is the unified idea which has the universal validity. So the philosophy developed in the history becomes the 'infinite task' (unendliche Aufgabe, VI, 73), which orientates the history toward an unity, makes it a teleology, and thereby requires constant critique and renewal of philosophy.

Then the epoché is also placed on the teleology of history. And the remarkableness is that it is positioned as the start of the science itself. In the *Crisis* too, the epoché is derived from Descartes' attempt to doubt. But since Husserl argued that the establishment (Urstiftung) of the spirit of Europe, that is, of philosophy is in ancient Greece and Descartes could not develop sufficiently this spirit or the 'philosophic surprising' (philosophisches thaumazein, VI, 80), we should think that the pure epoché itself is positioned as the start of philosophy in ancient Greece. This inference could be confirmed in the Vienna lecture titled " (1935, VI, 314-348)¹, in which Husserl considered the start of philosophy in ancient Greece as the Aristotelian surprising and equated it with the epoché of all practical interests (VI, 331-332). In this way he showed that the philosophy as the infinite task is started only by pure epoché, and the epoché is in this sense the starting point (Anfang) of the activity of philosophy.

4. Epoché and teleology

How does the idea of philosophy as infinite task, revealed in the teleology

¹ The Vienna lecture was one of the important sources of the *Crisis*, but it, I would argue, is not only the draft.

of history, then, relate to the epoché? The idea of universal science, declared in the *Crisis*, accords with the idea as systematic unity of foundational connections from the *Logical Investigations*, which is what limits the epoché. So then if in the *Crisis* too, the teleological activity of science derives from such an idea of science as system which supposes the limit of the epoché, it must contradict the above thesis that phenomenology as science has to start only by the pure epoché. The epoché is, in essence, more than any means for some aims or prospects, because it can and must parenthesize *every* positing. Therefore cannot it belong to the movement toward unified systematic science founded on only one absolute base?

In this point, a thesis on the relation between epoché and science, given by Patočka who criticize Husserl for making phenomenology into subjectivism by considering the phenomenological action as ‘reflection’ or ‘experience’ by the pure consciousness, is on the mark.

Husserl would have to exercise the epoché completely, but this means at the same time that he would give up his intuitionism (because the intuition is always that of some existent things), ‘the principle of principles’, in the end, (as far as science is that of some existent things) the ideal of philosophy as rigorous science, or at least he could no longer claim this ideal with his pathos of confidence proper for him.²

For Patočka, Husserl *drew away* in front of the universality of the epoché and subordinated the phenomenology to the ideal of rigorous science which has supratemporal validity.³

The result of our examination can make clear this thesis whose arguments appear somehow obscure. As far as the pure consciousness is found as residuum, phenomenology has to aim at one science whose object is some existent thing and thereby to be rigorous science as activity toward an objective science. Here is the reason to limit the universality of the epoché. Then if the phenomenology can start only by the epoché *unlimited*, the phenomenology

² Jan Patočka, *Die Gefahren der Technisierung in der Wissenschaft bei Edmund Husserl und das Wesen der Technik als Gefahr bei Martin Heidegger*, *op. cit.*, S. 347.

³ *Ibid.*, S. 353.

could never be subject to one science above mentioned, namely teleological activity striving for one unified system.

Thus by the essential method for the phenomenology, it becomes difficult to maintain the conception of science as teleological activity. Then is this conception of teleology a mere world view in one era of ‘the crisis of European science’? Isn’t the idea of science as infinite task, itself, essential for the phenomenology?

To avoid a simplistic conclusion, we have to be careful of structure of the argument we made. We confirm: the Patoëka’s thesis that the universality of the epoché is inconsistent with the rigorous science is correct on the condition that Husserl’s thesis, claimed at the latest by 1911, that phenomenology is one objective science, becomes the *only* basis of the teleological activity of science in his later years. Conversely speaking, if the universality of the epoché could be consistent with the rigorous science, we have to seek the basis of that from other reason than it. Therefore besides alternative between the idea of rigorous science and the universality of the epoché, we would have another choice, namely an hypothesis that the teleological activity of science in his later year is required not from an ideal of objective science to which this activity might aim, but from the essence of the ‘activity’ of philosophy.

5. Two crises; the Vienna lecture and *Crisis*

Reviving the teleological activity of philosophy which is naturally to be put out of action in the epoché, what did Husserl try to do? Besides the unified objective science, what impose the ‘teleological activity’ of philosophy on him? We try to expose one possibility, paying attention to a difference of ‘crisis’ between in the Vienna lecture and in the *Crisis*.

On the one hand in the *Crisis*, Husserl considered the crisis as the objectivism of science which is the ‘crisis proper to psychology’ (§2). This crisis was found in the corruption of the science to the technology since Galileo Galilei who, according to Husserl, idealized the nature as unity of causality, based on the world as natural givenness. Such a view of the crisis is, in advance, determined by the teleology of history as the struggle between objectivism and transcendentalism (VI, 71), which is dominating in the *Crisis*. On the other hand in the Vienna lecture, Husserl argued that the crisis is not an obscure

fate or an impenetrable destiny, but ‘the *apparent failure of rationalism*’ and this requires the necessity of the teleology. “In order to be able to comprehend the disarray of the present “crisis,” we had to work out the *concept of Europe as the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason*” (VI, 347). This comparison shows that, placed in advance on the route of conquest of the objectivism, the ‘crisis’ in the *Crisis* lost the urgency vividly described in the Vienna lecture. As a corruption of the transcendentalism to the objectivism, it is diagnosed objectively in the teleology of history and no more and no less. On the contrary, the ‘crisis’ in the Vienna lecture is what *requires* such a teleology as a one of the choices. It is connected with the ‘will’ or ‘courage’ (Tapferkeit) that is, as Husserl said, ‘heroism of reason which’ (Heroismus der Vernunft) which intends to struggle against ‘weariness’ (Müdigkeit) falling into the skepticism. This will striving for the philosophy is nothing less than the requirement of the activity of philosophy as infinite task imposed on the individual. In just here, we could start to work on the problem about the relation between the reason and the will in the phenomenology.

6. Conclusion

Thus in the limited range of science as activity, we could present a certain understanding and some problems concerning the relationship between the epoché and the teleology in Husserl’s phenomenology. The pure epoché is, in my view, inconsistent with the teleology of science aiming at the unified objectivity, but it could be consistent with the teleological activity of science through the other route, which Husserl had described as the ‘crisis’ undetermined in the framework of the *Crisis*. We found that the relation between the pure epoché and the teleology becomes more significant in this view, and only in this point, the activity of phenomenology could be argued newly in the relation to the will or task imposed on the individual. This somehow rough routes traced in this paper should be retraced carefully in multiple stages of phenomenology.⁴ Only such a retracing will be able to prove

⁴ Cf. Yoshihiro Nitta, The Husserl’s Teleology, in: *Husserl’s Phenomenology*, Tokyo: Keiso, 1986; Rudolf Bernet, Finitude et téléologie de la perception, in: *La Vie du sujet: recherches sur l’interprétation de Husserl dans la phénoménologie*, Paris: PUF, 1994, pp. 121-138.

the validity of this route. But we should not think little of importance and transition of the idea of science itself, for this idea leads every particular analysis of phenomenology. Through some result of this paper, there would be different and new questions like a relation between the reason and the will, that is, the problem about the 'error' in the phenomenology, which Husserl might have to think otherwise than Descartes or Kant.