

# ON CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE VIRTUALIST PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS

*Ivaylo Lazarov, PhD*

**Philosopher, Head Assistant Professor of Psychology Department,  
the Chernorizets Hrabar Free University of Varna**

Six years ago, in an article on the philosophical problems of psychological knowledge<sup>1</sup>, presenting an analysis of the paradigmatic consequences of Kant's regulative idea of psychological reason, I reached the conclusion: when a psychology is to happen as pure phenomenology, it will always be obliged to 'bracket away'<sup>2</sup> (which, in a popular language, means: 'to point out the conditionality and non-self-sufficiency of') the ontological premise of its importance. What will be left of 'subjectivity' is its pure form alone – the horizon of principal intuition of anything whatever. Then, total psychology would be possible as a total phenomenology: its 'matter' would be the pure intuition, and its 'form' – the pure subject. Paradoxically, this is how the metaphysical claim of the supposedly particular science of 'psychology' comes true nevertheless.

On this basis, I begin today my paper with the following thesis: *Phenomenology<sup>3</sup>, in my view, is a claim and a successful attempt at turning a particular science – the one of psychology – into critical knowledge of the most general – that is, into philosophy.* In this regard, let us remember that especially Husserl's phenomenology has its source in the radical psychological conclusions of a typical psychologist, Franz Brentano<sup>4</sup>, the teacher of Husserl.

But what does phenomenology mean in a context so defined? *Phenomenology* (also as a possible variety of psychology) is a 'pure science' of the worldly effects of the deployment of the perceptive acts of consciousness. It is a 'pure science' precisely because it is a *par excellence* critique of possible experience. Under 'pure science' one should mean a science that does not permit itself to dogmatically multiply entities and the correspondences of its conceptual apparatus at the cost of abstraction from, or ignoring of, the apperceived visibility and wholeness of the given, in the concreteness of apperception of the given precisely as valid (as that of which one is conscious). Such a weakness and similar concessions to dogmatic prejudiciality are allowed by empirical sciences that are based on the conditions of nature 'in itself' (*Kant*)<sup>5</sup>. It is thus allowed by every variety of empirical psychology. Because of that, the cognitive achievements of the said sciences are fully entitled to a critical 'apriorist' (again

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<sup>1</sup> See **Lazarov** 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In the German original, *Einklamerrung* ('putting between brackets') was introduced by Edmund Husserl (see **Husserl** 1959: 311) and it connotes the non-acceptance of the unconditional being status of any object or meaning of the world.

<sup>3</sup> Compare e.g. to **Thevenaz** 1962; **Sokolowski** 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. **Brentano** 1981, 1995. Brentano believes that it is on the basis of free observation of the *mental* phenomenal order that the structure is built of the whole of the rest of our mediated knowledge not only of the mental but also of everything else.

<sup>5</sup> *Immanuel Kant* was the first to provide a clear differentiation of methodological principles as a choice of research strategy. Kant formulates clearly the difference between *transcendentalism* and *metaphysics*, especially as regards the problem field of the research and the predetermination of its results by the (philosophically *precise* or not) general theoretical position (see e.g. for more detail **Kant** 1980: Introduction, V). 'A transcendental principle is one by means of which *is represented*, a priori, *the universal condition under which alone things can be in general* Objects of our cognition. On the other hand, a principle is called metaphysical if it *represents the a priori condition under which alone Objects, whose concept must be empirically* [i.e. by presumption as possibly present also beyond the synthesis of intuition – this remark and all emphases mine – I. L.] *given*, can be further determined a priori.' (*ibid.*: 52).

in following Kant) or ‘phenomenological’ processing and de-struction on the part of speculative reason. Recently, in the philosophical literature in Bulgaria<sup>6</sup>, the conception and method dealing with such a de-struction have been given the name of *virtualism*.

The approach to the incommensurabilities between being and cognition in virtualism, as a cognitive paradigm possessed by consciousness, is **simultaneously transcendental and reflective**. It is *transcendental* because it concerns horizons rather than empirical separations, the constitution rather the description of the known. Its connotations, as I pointed out, are rooted in the literally *critically* taken measure of what is being as from ‘transcendental apperception’ (*Kant*), in its givenness as a world horizon. Thus e.g. an infallible evidence is that, in experience, we interact not with separate, particular aspects of the world-whole but with the world-whole itself – i.e. precisely in the horizon of our experiential immanentizations, which, in a psychological language, would mean also – ‘in the synthesis of apperception’, we respond to all of its possibly revealable aspects at once.

Virtualism is also *reflection*. Reflection is what establishes the description as a fact that is always already actually, respectively also formally, preceding the description. This is how precisely the describer, the one who reflects, sneaks in. By virtue of that, phenomenology (as a critique of transcendental empirics) is, tentatively speaking, ‘something in excess’ over objective science – it accounts for the worldliness as **the work of the subject**, as a project of constituting consciousness – that is, as a light-bringing rather than self-lightening. What matters (for reflection) is, first of all, **who** observes and describes, of course, and this is how the critical-phenomenological account comes about with regard to the differences in observations and descriptions as a type of constitutive, rather than merely descriptive, comportment towards the world (these differences are what concerns hermeneutics<sup>7</sup>). Virtualism is a constructivist critique of any possible descriptivity that supposedly comes from the self-sufficient objectivities of the world, be they objects of psychology of any empirical science. Therefore, the virtualist paradigm is the work of a *pure consciousness* which, from now on and always anew, is in the process of studying the formal, which also means transcendental, conditions of the possible visibility of the category of ‘essence beyond consciousness’ with all its consequent dogmatizations of content and ties to the schemes and dependencies of the empirical cognition.

A pure consciousness in the flow of the reflective process of a pure psychology is, before all, pure self-affection, an apodictic ascertaining of oneself as the first and only goal in the acts of any possible cognitive ordering and making-whole. It is in this sense that for J.-P. Sartre ‘*consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself*’<sup>8</sup>. Or in other words, consciousness implies in its being an unconscious and trans-phenomenal being that is *before (en face de)* it, in the immediate intuition that unveils it. This frontal gaze of consciousness is intentionality (directedness-toward) and it leads directly and necessarily to the fundament of the ontology of intentionality – the being-in-itself, but in the same time it points at the incorrectness (due to the sheer impossibility) of the experiment to surpass cognitively any possible project of worldliness that would uncritically ignore consciousness as a factor of world ordering and making-whole. Actually, it is in accordance to what specific theoretical solutions this question has received

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<sup>6</sup> See more especially **Kanavrov** 2003: 215-93; **Kanavrov** 2006: 11-78; also **Donev** 2004: 51-60 and **Tsatsov** 1999, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> According to the phenomenologist Dimitar Vatsov (see **Vatsov** 2003: 128) hermeneutics is basically a *relativization procedure* with regard to transcendentalism. As far as transcendentalism is a type of logocentrism (i.e. a gaze from the uniqueness of the immanentizing subject), hermeneutics transforms this methodical strategy, multiplying the subjects to a multiplicity by analogy and in the hidden premise of their discretely diverse identity. Thus hermeneutics essentially remains a variety of the transcendental method.

<sup>8</sup> **Sartre** 1969: 29.

that we subdivide the historically occurring conceptions themselves of consciousness as a factor of virtualization<sup>9</sup>.

Setting thus the starting parameters of a critical-theoretical instituting of a virtualist psychology, **we see that consciousness can never be a means (respectively, an empirical mediator in the game) of knowing oneself but, instead, always a goal (*telos*) that immanently takes up through itself the horizon of apperception, and this is also to say, the contents of any possible worldliness.** The unity of the world as apperception can in no way be retained by a means and through a means – such a ‘mediocre’ (as an explanation of its genesis) retaining is, in fact, no retaining at all; an apperceptive unity of the world is brought together virtually, it is, figuratively speaking, ‘self-igniting nothing’, which would mean *at once as a pure chance*, through a limit of the possible (a subject) and with no dogmatic clarity as to its origin – not ‘in the space and time’ of the natural or possibly social predestination but before any ‘space’, ‘time’, measurability... and as the first found fortuity of goal-setting. Space, time, dimensions, biographies are, in their turn, only post-factum marks of recognizing description of what has already being made whole of meaning by the consciousness in the projectory of its meaning-giving light-bringing.

Let us take space as an example (our reasoning on time would be analogous). Space is, for phenomenology, a constituent of intuition, but this does not predetermine ontologically its exteriority nor hyperbolizes in an absolute sense the discrete correlation of things with their places. The thing is precisely intuitively, virtually accessible – being at it (*ad rerum*) is an ordinary prejudice of articulating (nonphilosophical) procedure. All spatiality is revealed only in the virtual form of pure intuition – in other words, for virtualists spatiality is not an all-pervasive, metaphysical criterion or narrative but always a conditional and circumstantial one. And this is how we find ourselves in the paradox that the exterior order of empirics has no way to precede the interval of intuitive immanentization as from the subject (or, more concretely thematically speaking”): as from someone’s constitutive consciousness). There is nothing at all that would be really inherited as a genetic mediator, nor identified as a place and separatedness ‘for eternity’ but only virtually encountered and immanently accepted/made sense of/defined as from me in the delaying interval of counterposition. Such is the genesis of every picture of the world. Thus also the science of experience turns into phenomenology, i.e. philosophy or also pure psychology of transcendental empirics. And it is only in this radical case that the transcendental appearance becomes unmasked of any claim of eternity and all-pervasiveness of space with regard to a metaphysically un-spatial observer (point) that extends it up in intuition.

My *telos* is light-bringing because it assembles the world. It must be remembered that the world is assembled ideally, virtually, in the unity of meaning. The *virtual* loses its characteristics of an object-centered world in which I scatter among the infinite multiplicity of hard things. The virtual ‘brackets away’ (*Husserl*) the real, turning into its ideal ‘other’. The virtual sublates the objectivity of the objective, in Husserl’s phrase – ‘puts it between brackets’. It is only the virtual assembly of the world as *pure intuition* that makes visible the possibility of analytically establish any empirical dependences whatever. To repeat: the failure to see or sheer neglect of this primordial fact is not able to provide us with an adequate, unburdened by dogmatism, genealogy of the cognitive picture in general.

I already hinted that reflection of this type is the work of a pure science that does not invest trust into reality before critically tracing the virtuality of the emergence of a form of meaning or symbolic form in general. This comprises the essence of the critical procedure of virtualism – a pure science, e.g. a phenomenological psychology, insists on its own self-destruction by its method, refusing to accept dogmatically any reality without taking into

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<sup>9</sup> For more specifying details as to the historical steps of phenomenological radicalization regarding the notion of the virtual, see my article ‘The virtual – idea and apperception’ (**Lazarov** 2010: I).

account the constituting conditionalities of one interpretive conscious choice or another. In the ‘science in the classical sense’ (which includes every possible empirical psychology – a psychology that, due to its reductive impurity, remains not entirely a science of the subject as such, i.e. not entirely at itself), there is no such radicality of claims, since the experience of science is not self-reflective, i.e. is not properly the experience of consciousness<sup>10</sup>. Empirical science<sup>11</sup> pretends not to see or outright ignores e.g. the fact that it is consciousness that selects the theme, orders and makes whole the intuitive. Phenomenology, at the outset and by virtue of its self-imposed rules, does not do it, it is not ignorant regarding the sterility of *intuitivity* (as the very experiential substratum of virtualization), it is sharply critical to the maintenance of any dogmatisms and metaphysics concerning causality, origins, and all such superfluous content-hypostasizing procedures and conventions in cognition and practice!

But what would ‘pure intuition’ more especially mean as the already mentioned substratum of virtualization? Seen precisely purely (transcendentally), rather than empirically (respectively, pan-optically), a certain aspect of the world is in fact the world as a virtual intuitive uniqueness. In the world there is simply **no place** for anything other than conscious intuition. It is in an intuitive proposition that the world appears ordered and whole; the world is able to projectively appear as a possibility of making intuitively visible. There is nothing in the world than this pure possibility of making intuitively visible! Looking phenomenologically and borrowing Aristotle’s popular formula, we already said – in the synthetic intuitive apperception, the form of expression primordially covers the expressed matter. ‘Everything existing’ is nothing more than the being-grasped of the being through a form of subject. I don’t think that we see anything more than what we see. Or, in other worlds, the seeing itself constitutes a sensory aspect of our perception that we have no way of knowing beforehand. It is true, in the same time, that any technique of the sensory must be guided by generalized rules in order to possess also generalized properties. **These, however, are the base rules of pure cognition rather than any obligations of it towards the ‘empirically present’. The purely cognitive, as far as conceived constitutively and in a virtualist mode, has only rights but no obligations.** In the self-imposing, obviously finite, horizon of apperception, outlined contingently and as the circle of the possessions of a finite being, the primordial command to think and perceive obliges us to do it **but it may in no case predetermine us how to do it.** As was said, all places are localized secondarily in intuition and only intuition is whole, i.e. is an expression of the *goal* itself. The goal, in so far as it is a making-whole of the landscape with regard to its principal illusionality (non-self-sufficiency), does not follow from anything. In ‘nothinging’, you are not in the positive – this is the unique in aiming at the goal/whole as from the non-lagging-behind, and this is what makes the

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<sup>10</sup> Consciousness, in the sense of phenomenology, is not something *separate from* and because of that *mutually linked with* the world – purely and simply in the ideal (reductive) case of apperception, **the world is lighted consciously** and in no other way. Consciousness is not a ‘human phenomenon’, at least for the philosophy of the phenomenological type. On the contrary, the phenomenon of ‘man’ is lighted in consciousness, it has no way of appearing worldly-wise, other than through consciousness. Consciousness is not just one of the worldly realities, it is precisely *virtual* because it is the constitutive of the experiment of being-worldly, of being present as **some kind of, self-identical**, being behind oneself. **Consciousness is a concept that receives privilege for the needs of philosophy in order to clarify the general case in which virtual intuitive uniqueness happens at all.**

<sup>11</sup> Being scientific is only a possible tendency of discourse but not a privileged discourse before any other discourse (see more especially **Heidegger** 2005: 17, §3). Depth is precisely the philosophical establishing of the actuality of enterprise. The enterprise of discourse encounters in actuality science as a recognition of its own sign of expression/formalization but the interpretation of this sign must not necessarily be of scientific form. The becoming of science is eventful rather than by archetypal command. Science expressed nothing before being expressed eventfully and by pure chance. This eventfulness is established by philosophy. Science never realizes anything in itself, since it itself is the object of immanentization as from its limit and it suffers the consequences of an active enterprise not from without but precisely within the experience of its being expressed *ex post facto*.

intuition pure, sterile of dogmaticity of hypostases as to origin and being. It is on such a presumptionless fundament that the essential advantages are based of a ‘pure science’ including the virtualist psychology, in contrast to any empirical one they are based on the void disciplinarity of the approach expressed in the illusion of inevitability and pregiveness of the meanings of the beings as well as of the approaches to their study. Heidegger himself notes that expressly in *Being and Time*: in phenomenology, he contends, ‘one does not have to measure up to the tasks of some discipline that has been presented beforehand; on the contrary, only in terms of the objective necessities of definite questions and the kind of treatment [‘pure intuition’ – I. L.] which the ‘things themselves’ require, can one develop such a discipline’<sup>12</sup>. This is why ‘ontology [of anything whatever – I. L.] is only possible as phenomenology’<sup>13</sup>, the ‘real’ as a basically-empirical possible experience is possible as being only in the actuality of the event of virtualization.

On such a radically set plane, the *thing*, the *world* in general, exists only in someone’s experience, in someone’s representation, and in no other way. There is no primordial objectness (since its guarantors have no way of surpassing the imaginativity of the representation), the objects are not bodies in themselves but only ready-to-hand<sup>14</sup> in someone’s experience. The *phenomenon* in phenomenology is precisely the virtual form of the ready-to-hand acted out as from the present-at-hand – being a transcendental configurative of apperception, the phenomenon is not a self-identical object/idea in itself – it is not an eternal retaining of the being in meaning but merely a risky attempt at such retaining. It is not a part of any permanent and essentially consistent empirical experience, it is not an object of scientific interest in the trivial meaning of the word. The phenomenon has neither an objective (correlative) measure in space and time, nor a primordial ‘rest mass’. The phenomenological moment is announced to remind the rules specifically of *this game*. And this game is critique and self-de-struction, an incessant contending and simultaneously contesting the metaphysical inclination to posit a pre-established identity of the beings and to multiply entities beyond the control of the existence (the so-called *Occam’s razor* with the nominalists). ‘The things themselves’ (that is, the ideal of knowledge for the empirical-objectivist attitude) in a phenomenological psychology are marked by the term ‘life-world’ (specifically in Husserl). This (for him) is the sphere of pre-predicative experience, a ‘world’ of an obviously eidetic nature, which is a condition of knowledge in general but not a cognitive result<sup>15</sup>. The real in Husserl is, rather, a kind of ‘pure ideal’ which is more at the beginning than at the end of the cognitive cycle. This is why, for phenomenology, the *real* is after all the ideal – a kind of pure eidos that is the basis of knowledge in general, with no regard of the latter’s contents, a guarantor of intentionality, and has nothing to do with the changing flow of consciousness into which we are harnessed, encountering the phenomena, co-existing in the process of perception...

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger 2005: 29-30, §7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 36.

<sup>14</sup> Especially in the popular contexts of Heidegger, the *present-at-hand* is what gives a principal openness to the horizon of visibility to the ontos, whereas the *ready-to-hand* is the existing that hides from the question of its essence, constituted in accordance to the secondary instrumental interests, modulations and relations of *Dasein*. Here is what D. Vatsov, in his turn, says on this: ‘Before the thing, secondarily or ontically, could be grasped as presence (in judgment, ἀποφανσις), it is primordially or ontologically *ready-to-hand*. **Readiness-to-hand is to say: the thing does not exist in itself but is always ‘for something’, it provides or indicates possibilities for something** else [emphasis mine – I. L.]. The ready-to-hand as a phenomenon is the showing-itself-at-itself – with the difference that it does not merely unveil but projects its ‘own’ possibilities: this is why it is the “existing with distinction” because it is interested in the meaning of “its” being’ (Vatsov 2003: 121-2).

<sup>15</sup> See for details Husserl 1999: §§27-30.

It is not a goal in itself of the virtualist paradigm to deny the reality derived from empirical pure cognition and its functional truth corresponding to our habits and our habitual everyday perceptions... The problem, rather, has to do with the primordial hypostaticity and imperative non-obligatoriness of the choice of this or that, including a psychological, explanation of the world, and it therefore has to do with the open possibility of free social and existential testing of other types of auto-reflective schemes and explanations. In this sense also comes the playful opposition between real and virtual to the favour of the virtual in the so proposed model of a 'pure (unempirical) psychology'. The virtualist critique radically recognizes the world as the fruit of a contingently and circumstantially held constitutive experiment as from the monad of consciousness. In other words, **the virtuality of the world is merely the world's being-nowhere, its primordial interpretive void**. The so-called 'real' world' including the world of science, is a fiction to the virtualists – a contingency and circumstantiality of thematizations + belief in the objectivity of the situation, which presumably 'enlightens you' on something 'objectively true' beyond you, instead of taking into account that it is you who 'enlighten' yourself on the situation, or your agreement with some authority that exists imaginatively beyond you but still through you... The so-called 'objective state of affairs' is, in its turn, just one of the possibilities that takes the upper hand in the thematizations of the world, and nothing more... No 'objective state' of things in general and above everything else exists, since it does not surpass precisely the worldly, i.e. the virtually-intuitive, horizon of interpretation as from someone's world-bent consciousness. The thematizations of someone, even if generally accepted, perfectly can be invalid or uninteresting for someone else... There is no primordial equation sign, in such a case, between generally accepted and true, this must be clear to us... The so-called 'objective necessities' are always imperative requirements in someone's interested discourse, they are the fruit of someone's utterance that does not present the world but just someone's *representation-of-the-world*... (The fact e.g. that an ant crawls on my desk does not yet mean that, for the ant, the crawling is on my desk...) These 'necessities' are 'the truth itself' solely by deliberate or unconscious agreement/convention, and this, by the way, comprises the whole reconciliation of dialectics, so that there be dialog and, therefore, a cultural space with its corresponding habituses and functionalisms... Ignorance, from such a perspective, is not simply and purely not knowing, but is a reliance on paradigms and formulas that are inappropriate with respect to an epoch or paradigm. You cannot know e.g. how the mediaeval man authentically perceived the world, you can only make approximative hermeneutic attempts to penetrate into his worldview and world-feeling... (The same critical model should be methodologically related also to the solution of some more intricate 'clinical cases' in the psychotherapy and psychiatry of our times.) An object only has a socio-cultural, conventional, currently-epochal meaning, and none else. This is valid indeed for every particular modification of being – be it a thing, an idea, a concept or an artifact...

And here I conclude... Fictitiousness, which is one of names of virtuality, comes from the non-obligatoriness of the structure that is talked about, confessed, used – the sustainability of the latter is the work of the perceiving subject, it is constituted playfully, simulatively, by choice, by contingent circumstances, this is why it is not something independent from a given socio-cultural convention and its conscious – that is, responsible – choice of the subject. The world of the savage or barbarian is quite different from the world of civilized man. The world of the happy one cannot be the world of the miserable one, nor can the world of the healthy be the world of the sick. But the criterion of reality is never entirely in favour of the civilized, happy, healthy one. Everything in explanation is a matter of choice or convenience... and there are no explanations that would be predetermined, precisely because no predetermination is possible beyond someone's conscious and responsibly achieved explanation.

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## Резюме

Статията прави опит да докаже една по-нетрадиционна теза относно феноменологията: че *феноменологията е претенция и успешен опит за превръщане на частната наука – психология, – в критическо познание за най-общото – а им. философия*. Съзнанието е не просто една от световните реалности, то е именно *виртуално*, понеже е конститутивността на експеримента да бъдеш световен, да присъстваш като някакъв, самоидентичен, изоставайки от себе си. Съзнанието е концепт, който се привилегирова за нуждите на философията, за да се изясни общият случай, при който изобщо се случва виртуална нагледна единственост. Емпиричната наука се прави, че не вижда или направо игнорира напр. факта, че тъкмо съзнанието избира темата, подрежда и оцелостява нагледното. Феноменологията от самото начало и по силата на наложените си правила не го прави, не е игнорант спрямо стерилността на *нагледността* (като самия опитен субстрат на виртуализацията), тя е остро критична спрямо прокарването на всякакви догматизми и метафизики около причинността, произхода и прочие излишни съдържателно-хипостазираци процедури и условности в познанието и практиката. На свой ред виртуализмът е конститутивистка критика на всяка възможна дескриптивност, произхождаща (уж) откъм самостоятелните обективности на света, все едно дали са обекти на психологията или на която и да е емпирична наука. Следователно виртуалистката парадигма е дело на едно *чисто съзнание*, което тепърва и всякога наново е в процес на изследване на формалните, което ще рече и трансцендентални, условия за възможното провиждане на категорията „същност отвъд съзнанието” с всичките ѝ последващи съдържателни догматизации и обвързаности от схемите и зависимостите на емпиричния разсъдък.