

# Theodore Celms's Critique of Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology<sup>1</sup>

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There are several phenomenologically oriented philosophers who have lived in or who have come from the Baltic States; Theodore Celms (1893–1989) was one of them.<sup>2</sup> Celms and Kurt Stavenhagen (1885–1951) are considered

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<sup>2</sup> For the most comprehensive publication about Celms's life and philosophy in Latvian, see Maija Kūle, Līva Muižniece, and Uldis Vēgners *Teodors Celms: fenomenoloģiskie meklējumi* (Rīga: FSI, 2009). For more about Celms's philosophy, see Ella Buceniece, "Teodors Celms, Kurt Stavenhagen and Phenomenology in Latvia," in *Analecta Husserliana*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. 80, *Phenomenology World-Wide: Foundations—Expanding Dynamics—Life Engagements—A Guide for Research and Study* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 312–316; Maija Kūle, "Understanding of Subject and Intersubjectivity in T. Celms's Philosophical Works," *Phenomenological Inquiry* 20 (1996): 30–43; Maija Kūle, "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, ed. Lester Embree et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 713–718; Maija Kūle, "Theodor Celms: Forerunner of the Phenomenology of Life," in *Analecta Husserliana*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. 54, *Ontopoietic Expansion in Human Self-Interpretation-in-Existence: The I and the Other in their Creative Spacing of the Societal Circuits of Life: Phenomenology of Life and the Human Creative Condition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 3: 295–302; Maija Kūle, *Phenomenology and Culture* (Rīga: FSI, 2002), 9–33; Maija Kūle, "Phenomenology in Latvia: Teodors Celms and Staņislavs Ladusāns," *Humanities and Social Sciences: Latvia* 2 (2006): 72–84; Maija Kūle, "Philosophy in the Baltic States: Past and Present Situation," in *Philosophy Worldwide: Current Situation* (Rīga: FISP, 2006), 91–106; Juris Rozenvalds, "Theodor Celms (1893–1989): Zur Einführung," in Theodor Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus Husserls und andere Schriften, 1928–1943*, vol. 21 of *Philosophie und Geschichte der Wissenschaften: Studien und Quellen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993), 13–26; Juris Rozenvalds, "Phenomenological Ideas in Latvia: Kurt Stavenhagen and Theodor Celms on Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology," in *Phenomenology on Kant, German Idealism, Hermeneutics and Logic*, ed. Olav K. Wiegand et al., vol. 39 of *Contributions to Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 67–82; Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Intro-*

to be the first philosophers of Latvia that dedicated their work to phenomenology and its problems. Stavenhagen is best known for his work in social philosophy and philosophy of anthropology, where one can detect the influence of early phenomenological thought, especially that of Adolf Reinach.<sup>3</sup> Celms gained international renown as the author of one of the most profound critiques of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, titled *Husserl's Phenomenological Idealism (Der phänomenologische Idealismus Husserls)*, first published in 1928.<sup>4</sup>

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the fundamental objection contained in Celms's critique of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, namely that the phenomenological reduction must be distinguished from phenomenological reflection, and that the reduction cannot be fully carried out. From this Celms infers that Husserl's phenomenology cannot claim to be a universal science. Prior to this, however, it is necessary to give a brief survey of Celms's relationship with the phenomenological movement and the genesis of his critique against Husserlian transcendental phenomenology. This will shed light on the question of how Celms, as a devoted follower of Husserl, became one of his most severe critics. More precisely, I will analyze the reasons that led Celms from his *Prolegomena to a Transcendental Historicism (Prolegomena zu einem transzendentalen Historismus, 1926<sup>5</sup>)*—a work praised by Husserl himself—to the publication of *Husserl's Phenomenological Idealism*, his critical interpretation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

### Celms and Phenomenology

Celms began his philosophical studies in 1917 at the University of Moscow, where he initially became interested in Plato and Immanuel Kant. During his studies, Celms stumbled upon a Russian translation of the first volume of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*.<sup>6</sup> He was so impressed with this work that he decided he must one day go and study under the author of the book himself. In 1922, Celms fulfilled his dream by enrolling at the University of Freiburg.

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*duction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht, 1994), 240, 253; Bernhard Waldenfels, *Einführung in die Phänomenologie* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1992), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 235.

<sup>4</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>5</sup> See note 25 below.

<sup>6</sup> *Логические исследования. Часть первая. Прологемы к чистой логике*, transl. E. A. Berstein (Е. А. Бернштейн), ed. S. L. Frank (С. Л. Франк) (St Petersburg: Obrazovanie, 1909).

Upon their first meeting, Husserl received Celms very kindly, though the master warned that, considering Celms's previous training in the philosophies of Plato and Kant, it would be hard for him to liberate himself from their influence and submerge himself in the phenomenological way of thinking, which required openness towards its field of inquiry.<sup>7</sup> Rising to the challenge, Celms attended all of Husserl's lecture courses and seminars during his stay in Freiburg. Nevertheless, Husserl declined the request to supervise Celms's doctoral dissertation on Kant's doctrine of concept (*Begriff*). After three semesters in Freiburg, Celms earned his doctoral degree *cum laude* in philosophy in 1923, with his dissertation, "The Nature, Origin, and Function of the Concept According to Kant's General Logic" ("*Kants allgemeine Auffassung vom Wesen, Ursprung und der Aufgabe des Begriffes*"), written under the supervision of Joseph Geysler (1869–1948). Husserl was an active supporter of his dissertation, and wrote on behalf of its acceptance.<sup>8</sup>

After returning to Latvia in 1923, Celms engaged himself more and more with the problems of transcendental phenomenology. He studied Husserl's works (mainly *Ideas I*) and in 1925 returned to Freiburg, spending the summer semester participating in Husserl's seminar on phenomenology and Jonas Cohn's (1869–1947) seminar on problems in Kantian philosophy. Celms came to the conclusion that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology ultimately leads to a *transcendental historicism*, where the pure flow of consciousness that constitutes the world is a transcendental historical process that contains in itself all the individual flows of consciousness. The idea of transcendental historicism is expressed in his unpublished work *Prolegomena to a Transcendental Historicism* (circa 1926). At the end of 1926, the work was submitted to the University of Latvia as a habilitation thesis. Celms also sent a summary of the thesis to Husserl, who replied with a letter praising Celms's ability to understand his life-long work. Husserl pointed out that only a few of his students had understood the meaning and significance of transcendental reduction as well as Celms had demonstrated.<sup>9</sup> During the next two years Celms continued to think about transcendental phenomenology, its methods and its object, and came to a conclusion that stood in a sharp contrast to the ideas expressed in *Prolegomena to a Transcendental Historicism*. He retracted his previous claims that Husserlian phenomenology leads to transcendental historicism, and, more importantly, he took a very critical stance towards Husserl's transcendental phenomenology in general. These criticisms resulted in

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<sup>7</sup> *Celms' Weg zur Philosophie und Phänomenologie* (Rock Island, IL, August 12, 1972), 2. This work is an unpublished manuscript, the authorship of which is unknown. The manuscript was kindly provided by Theodore Celms's son Peter Celms.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Briefwechsel. Die Freiburger Schüler," in *Husserliana dokumente*, vol. 3/4 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 67.

<sup>9</sup> Husserl, "Briefwechsel," 67.

the publication of *Husserl's Phenomenological Idealism* in 1928. The work was sent to Husserl as well as some members of the Munich-Göttingen circle; namely, the realist phenomenologists Alexander Pfänder and Moritz Geiger. Although Celms had not had any previous contact with Pfänder or Geiger, both of them quickly responded favorably to his critique.<sup>10</sup> Pfänder wrote a positive review of it,<sup>11</sup> concluding that Celms's critique was irrefutable.<sup>12</sup> The same conclusion was also shared by such philosophers as Maximilian Beck, Nicolai Hartmann (who was a Celms's colleague during the period of 1944–1949 at the University of Göttingen), and Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. In 1929 Celms visited Husserl, and was told “that he [Husserl] had read up on the book that was sent to him, but thought that the critique was “too sharp” and he still nurtured a firm hope to be able to give a justification of his conviction about the possibility of a purely phenomenological way to idealism in the nearest future.”<sup>13</sup> Celms, however, never gave up or reconsidered his criticism of Husserl; he did not reconsider his criticism after reading Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations (Méditations Cartésiennes. Introduction à la Phénoménologie, 1931)*—a text that might be considered a response to Celms's criticisms of the transcendental phenomenological project—nor after reading Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie, 1936)*.<sup>14</sup>

In this context, one might wonder what is Celms's true relationship with the phenomenological movement. Celms's view of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology was clear: the ultimate goal of every philosophy is to be a *universal science*, and phenomenology falls short in this respect.<sup>15</sup> He writes: “It is exactly because Husserl's transcendental method refrains from any position-taking with respect to transcendence, [that] the results yielded

<sup>10</sup> Celms' Weg, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Pfänder, “Celms T. Der Phänomenologische Idealismus Husserls. Acta Universitatis Latviensis XIX, 1928.—Riga, 1928. S. 251–439,” *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 43 (1929): 2048–2050.

<sup>12</sup> Celms' Weg, 4.

<sup>13</sup> “... daß er das ihm zugesandte Buch gründlich studiert habe, finde aber, daß die Kritik „zu scharf“ sei und daß er immer noch die feste Hoffnung hege, seiner Überzeugung über die Möglichkeit eines rein phänomenologischen Weges zum Idealismus in der nächsten Zukunft Begründung geben zu können.” Celms' Weg, 5.

<sup>14</sup> In the revised version of Celms's paper “Edmunds Husserls,” in *Truth and Appearance (Patiesība un šķitums, 1939)*, about Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* Celms writes on page 156: “From a phenomenological point of view it offers nothing principally new, but is an important confirmation to how close Husserl stands to Descartes.” (“Fenomenoloģiskā ziņā tās nekā principiāli jauna nesniedz, bet ir svarīgs apstiprinājums tam, cik tuvu Husserls stāv Dekartam.”).

<sup>15</sup> The reason for this will become clear later, when we discuss Celms's objection to Husserl's phenomenological method.

by this method cannot constitute a philosophy. Philosophy, after Husserl's own idea, must be a science that is absolutely universal, comprising in its problem area anything and everything, that is, its judgments must reach anything and everything; while to phenomenological method every judgment about transcendence, about its reducibility or irreducibility to consciousness is fundamentally denied.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Celms thought that transcendental phenomenology could not be a universal philosophy because it did not deal with a reality independent from consciousness, which he believed there to be. Celms's son Peter remembers: “He [Theodore Celms] always very strictly insisted that phenomenology is a method, maybe a great method, but from the basis of phenomenology it is impossible to achieve a philosophy of reality (or ontology, a solution to the question about essences).”<sup>17</sup> Celms held a view that scientific knowledge should not be confined to the level of mere description, which was characteristic to phenomenology; it should make use of inductive and deductive judgments as well.<sup>18</sup> In his “Subject and Subjectification” (“*Subjekt und Subjektivierung*”), published in 1943, Celms expressed the idea by using a distinction between reflection and construction of thought in the research of subjectivity. He writes: “There are two totally different ways for knowledge of the subjective existence, ways that cannot be substituted by one another but rather complement each other: the way of reflection and the way of the construction of thought.”<sup>19</sup> He did not want to limit himself to phenomenology, although he found it a valuable (yet not a sufficient) tool for the research of the subjective reality that constitutes *only a part of* the world. Celms saw phenomenology as being confined to the sphere of subjectivity, but he maintained that there was also a sphere of objectivity that exceeded

<sup>16</sup> “Gerade darum, weil die phänomenologische methode Husserls sich aller Stellungnahme zur Transzendenz enthält, können die Resultate dieser Methode unmöglich eine Philosophie ausmachen. Die Philosophie muß ja Husserls eigener idee nach eine absolut universelle, alles in jedes in ihren Problemkreis einbeziehende Wissenschaft sein, d.b. ihre Urteile müssen sich auf alles in jedes erstrecken, während der phänomenologischen Methode alles Urteil über die Transzendenz, über deren Reduzierbarkeit bzw. Nichtreduzierbarkeit auf das Bewußtsein prinzipiell versagt ist.” Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 198.

<sup>17</sup> “Viņš vienmēr stingri pastāvēja, ka fenomenoloģija ir metode, varbūt lieliska metode, bet no fenomenoloģijas pamata nekādā veidā nevar dabūt kādu īstenības filozofiju (jeb ontoloģiju, būtības jautājumu risinājumu).” Pēteris Celms, “Filozofs Teodors Celms: Visvalža Klīves un Pētera Celma saruna,” *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis. A.* 5/6 (1994): 64.

<sup>18</sup> Pauls Dāle, “Profesors Dr. phil. Teodors Celms: 50 mūža gadu atcerei,” *Izglītības Mēnešraksts* 6 (1943): 123.

<sup>19</sup> “Es gibt zwei total verschiedene Wege zur Erkenntnis des subjektiven Seins. - Wege, die einander nicht ersetzen können, sondern einander ergänzen: den Weg der Reflexion und den der gedanklichen Konstruktion.” Theodor Celms, “Subjekt und Subjektivierung,” in *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 315.

the limits of phenomenological investigation, and he thought that a proper delineation and relationship of these spheres should be investigated. Inquiry into the delineation of subjective and objective existence was the main task of Celms's philosophy after 1928. In his work "Subject and Subjectification," Celms gave an account of the different ways of understanding subjectivity in its relationship with objectivity in the history of philosophy. This project was developed further during the years he spent in Germany, and later in the USA,<sup>20</sup> contained in a soon to be published manuscript *Phenomenon and Reality of the I. Studies of Subjective Being (Phänomen und Wirklichkeit des Ich. Studien über das subjektive Sein)*.<sup>21</sup>

As to Celms's relation with realist phenomenology the situation is more complicated. On the one hand, he joined with the realist phenomenologists in criticizing Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as one-sided. On the other hand, there are persistent attempts from Celms's to reconcile phenomenology and natural sciences, trying to combine them in a consistent scientific system. This was first evidenced by Celms's consideration of phenomenological description as a confined approach to reality that should be complemented by thought constructions, as mentioned above. Secondly, it was evidenced by his attempts to offer a system in which there was a place for physical, biological and intentional elements. In "Environment of Life and Projection of Life" ("*Lebensumgebung und Lebensprojektion*," 1933) he writes that the "life of a human being is *physically really, psychically really, and intentionally* formed. The first means the spatial-temporal existence, the second means merely the temporal existence, the third means intentional existence."<sup>22</sup> Insofar as "human being" was a spatial-temporal being and an organism in the nature, she could also be an object of investigation by natural sciences,<sup>23</sup> although the results of this kind of investigation would not give a full depiction because there are three components, of which spatial-temporal being constitutes only one of them.

Taking into account what has just been said and the view of Peter Celms; namely, that his father did not think of himself as a phenomenolo-

<sup>20</sup> Celms moved to the USA in 1949 where he worked at the Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois as a philosophy professor.

<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Celms's son, professor Emeritus in History at the University of Wittenberg (Springfield, Ohio) Peter Celms, and his wife Barbro Celms, the manuscript is soon to be published by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia.

<sup>22</sup> "...das Menschenleben ist physisch-real, psychisch-real und intentional komponiert. Das erste bedeutet ein räumlich-zeitliches, das zweite ein bloß zeitliches, das dritte ein intentionales Zusammengesetzsein." Celms, "Lebensumgebung und Lebensprojektion," in Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 227.

<sup>23</sup> Celms, "Lebensumgebung," 225.

gist, but rather as a critical realist,<sup>24</sup> it is possible to maintain that Celms was not a "pure" phenomenologist. He believed phenomenology to be just one approach that could give specific knowledge about one aspect of the world, while natural sciences could give knowledge about another aspect of the world. Philosophy as a universal science should take into account both aspects.

### Celms's Criticism and its Genesis

As to the motives that led to Celms distancing himself from Husserl's transcendental phenomenological project, and led him to powerful criticisms of the project, it is safe to say that the most significant factor was the review of his habilitation thesis, which he received from his future colleague at the University of Latvia, Rūdolfs Jirgens.<sup>25</sup> Jirgens's critical remarks had a great impact on the content of *Husserl's Phenomenological Idealism*, as well as the formation of Celms's later thought in general. In his critique, Jirgens considered Celms a devoted disciple of Husserl, a loyal follower,<sup>26</sup> and so his criticism of Celms's work was meant as a critique of Husserl's project as well. Although it was perhaps unfair to equate Celms and Husserl the way he did, it is interesting that later Celms himself ascribed to Husserl the theses and ideas contained in the Jirgens's critique. A thorough investigation of Jirgens's critical remarks in comparison with those made by Celms concerning Husserl's phenomenology shows remarkable similarities in several crucial points, especially in regards to the transcendental or phenomenological reduction, and the problem of intersubjectivity.<sup>27</sup> What differentiated the two critical positions was mainly that Celms was far more competent in Husserl's phe-

<sup>24</sup> P. Celms, "Filozofs Teodors Celms," 64.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately Celms's habilitation thesis *Prolegomena to a Transcendental Historicism* is lost. However, Jirgens wrote an extended manuscript (circa 1926/27) which includes a summary of the thesis and his own critical remarks. Jirgens's manuscript, under the title *Jirgens R. Atsauksmes par citu autoru (T. Celma, A. Mesera u.c.) darbiem (Jirgens R. Reviews on the works of other authors [T. Celms, A. Messer etc.])* is stored in the National Library of Latvia.

<sup>26</sup> Rūdolfs Jirgens, *Jirgens R. Atsauksmes par citu autoru (T. Celma, A. Mesera u.c.) darbiem* (Rīga, circa 1926/27), 1. This unpublished material by Rūdolfs Jirgens consists of notes, summaries and reviews of works by several authors, including Celms. It is accessible in the Reading Room of Rare Books and Manuscripts of National Library of Latvia under the signature A 240 V. Šķiltera fonds, N 26.

<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Celms's critique of Husserl's philosophy in relation to the problem of intersubjectivity, see: Uldis Vēgners, "Theodore Celms' Critique of Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology in the Context of the Problem of Solipsism," *Humanities and Social Sciences: Latvia* 19, no. 1 (2011): 143–157.

nomenology; hence, Celms's critique, even though it advanced the same objections that Jirgens did, was more informed and substantiated. While there are several arguments in Celms's critical survey of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology that coincide with those previously advanced by Jirgens in his review of Celms's *Prolegomena to a Transcendental Historicism*, I will confine myself here to what I take to be the main objection that Celms makes in his *Husserl's Phenomenological Idealism*.

In his critical remarks about Celms's habilitation thesis, Jirgens asked whether it was possible to reduce the entire world to consciousness; that is, was the world merely something that is given in consciousness or was it something more and beyond consciousness? Jirgens saw the phenomenological reduction only as a way of considering the world, and found that the only difference between psychological and phenomenological investigation was that phenomenology ignored the relationship between mind and body, as well as the psychophysical world in general. Jirgens wrote: "If we in our contemplation due to a chosen standpoint ignore the connection of consciousness with body and the rest of the psychophysical environment, it does not follow that this connection has really ceased to exist."<sup>28</sup>

Celms gave a similar criticism in his own book. Central to his entire critique was a concern with the phenomenological method; that is, the transcendental or phenomenological reduction and the relationship between transcendental consciousness, on the one hand, and a transcendent reality or external world, on the other. Celms's argument was built upon what he believed to be a fundamental *polysemy* or equivocation on the phrase 'phenomenological reduction' (*phänomenologische Reduktion*) in Husserl's phenomenology. Celms claimed that the phrase meant two fundamentally distinct things, and that Husserl used the phrase both for a reduction in terms of *consideration* (*Zurückführung der Betrachtung*) and a reduction in terms of *being* (*Zurückführung des Seins*).<sup>29</sup> The first one Celms labeled 'phenomenological reflection,' or *epochē*, and the other he labeled 'phenomenological reduction' proper.

Phenomenological reflection implied "reduction as a leading-back of all objectively (transcendently) directed *consideration* to the consideration of the corresponding modes of consciousness."<sup>30</sup> However, phenomenological

<sup>28</sup> "Ja mēs savā apcerē, pateicoties izvēlētam viedoklim, ignorējam apziņas sakarību ar miesu un pārējo psihofizisko apkārtni, tad tāpēc šī sakarība taču nav reāli pārtrūkusi [izbeigusies]." Jirgens, *Atsauksmes*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> A passage where Celms deals with the two meanings of the phenomenological reduction and its consequences to Husserl's phenomenology: Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 83–91.

<sup>30</sup> "Reduktion als Zurückführung aller objektiv (transzendent) gerichteten Betrachtung auf die Betrachtung der entsprechenden Bewusstseinsweisen." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 83.

reduction implied "reduction as a leading-back of objective (transcendent) *being* to the being of the corresponding modes of consciousness."<sup>31</sup> So, on the one hand, there is the phenomenological reflection, a way of considering transcendent being that means that transcendent objects are viewed in terms of their modes of givenness in consciousness. On the other hand, there is the phenomenological reduction as a reduction of the *existence* of transcendent objects to their modes of givenness in consciousness. In each case, a different suspension (*Ausschaltung*) is at work. In phenomenological reflection one suspends judgment about something transcendent to consciousness (*Zurückhaltung von allen Stellungnahmen*); in the phenomenological reduction one denies the existence of transcendent things-in-themselves apart from consciousness (*Leugnung*).<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the things as they are presented in consciousness are the things themselves.

Phenomenological reflection, Celms maintained, did not commit itself to any statement about the existence or non-existence of a transcendent reality, and therefore remained neutral with respect to questions of idealism and realism as metaphysical and ontological positions. Phenomenological reduction, however, necessarily committed itself to some form of idealism.<sup>33</sup> If one treated an object of consciousness in its mode of givenness, for example, in visual sense perception, there is not already an implication of the object's ontological dependence on the act of visual perception. It is simply a way of considering the object, and not a reduction of its being. Celms thought that the possibility of phenomenological reflection, which could be described as ontologically silent or neutral (*Zurückhaltung von allen Stellungnahme*),<sup>34</sup> did not necessarily imply the further phenomenological reduction that denied the existence of the world outside consciousness. In phenomenological reflection, "I suspend all position-taking, all interest in the transcendent; consequently, I have interest neither for reducibility nor irreducibility of the transcendent."<sup>35</sup> Celms argued, firstly, that both of these methods did not coincide, and, secondly, that the domains which were attained by carrying out each of them do not coincide.

Celms claimed that the domain attained by the phenomenological reflection (*Reflexionsumfang*) was broader than that attained by the phenom-

<sup>31</sup> "Reduktion als Zurückführung des objektiven (transzendenten) Seins auf das Sein der entsprechenden Bewusstseinsweisen." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 85–86.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, 91.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> "... ich enthalte mich aller Stellungnahme, allen Interesses fürs Transzendente; ich habe also ein Interesse weder für die Reduzierbarkeit noch für die Unreduzierbarkeit des Transzendenten." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 85.

enological reduction (*Reduktionsumfang*).<sup>36</sup> He considered various types of transcendent objects one might encounter, as they are treated in Husserl's works, and came to the conclusion that, while phenomenological reflection "comprises the whole transcendence,"<sup>37</sup> the domain that resulted from the phenomenological reduction did not.<sup>38</sup> Namely, it was possible to consider everything transcendent with regard to its givenness in consciousness; however, it was not possible to ascribe all being of transcendence to its givenness as a mere intentional correlate of consciousness.

Celms posited that there were two classes of transcendent objects that could be considered phenomenologically, that is, in relation to the modes of consciousness corresponding to them, but whose existence could not be reduced to these modes. The first was the class of other pure I-subjects (*fremdes reines Ichsubjekt*), and the second was the transcendence of God. As for the transcendence of the other pure I-subjects, Celms wrote, "for me the life of the other I is transcendent to me, but immanent to itself."<sup>39</sup> According to this characterization, one could suspend the belief in the immanence of the other Ego in the phenomenological reflection and consider it only with regard to its givenness to one's own immanence, but one could not phenomenologically reduce it to one's own immanence, because the other Ego has its own immanence irreducible to and inaccessible to my consciousness. The other pure consciousness "is not just an intentional constitution of my consciousness."<sup>40</sup> Celms drew a similar conclusion concerning the transcendence of God. God could be submitted to the phenomenological reflection, but his existence could not be reduced to one's consciousness: "This would mean then: God is merely my intentional constitution, that is, He is precisely not what is meant by the term."<sup>41</sup> Namely, if God were my intentional constitution, he would be something that He is not. The term 'God' implies absoluteness, therefore to maintain His dependency on my consciousness is self-contradictory.

Celms ultimately identified the phenomenological method with the phenomenological reflection, which alone cannot constitute what Husserl intended to accomplish with his phenomenological project; namely, a phil-

<sup>36</sup> Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 86.

<sup>37</sup> "...umfaßt zweifellos die ganze Transzendenz." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 87.

<sup>39</sup> "Für mich ist das fremde Ichleben transzendent, für sich selbst aber immanent." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 89–90.

<sup>40</sup> "...nicht eine bloße intentionale Konstitution meines Bewußtseins ist." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 90.

<sup>41</sup> "Es biesse ja dann: Gott ist nur meine intentionale Konstitution, d.h. er ist eben das nicht, was mit diesem Terminus gemeint wird." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 90.

osophy that was an absolutely universal science. This could be accomplished only if reduction were to come into play, that is, if it were possible to phenomenologically reduce all transcendence. Celms's claimed that it was impossible to reduce all transcendence to consciousness and to deny the existence of transcendence in-itself,<sup>42</sup> and hereafter considered phenomenological reflection to be the sole method of phenomenology.<sup>43</sup>

### Critical Assessment of Celms's Criticism

Celms's argument concerning Husserl's phenomenological reduction will be evaluated in three steps, each of which can be formulated in terms of a question: (1) Even if one can distinguish between the phenomenological reflection and the phenomenological reduction, still, does the one not still presuppose the other? (2) Does the phenomenological reduction positively deny the existence of a transcendent reality? (3) Can anyone be completely certain of the transcendence of the other I-subjects or of God beyond one's own experience?

To address question (1), it is necessary to return to Celms's distinction of the two methods. On the one hand, Celms's distinction between reflection and reduction is well founded, especially bearing in mind that in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl uses reflection, but not reduction, which is only introduced into his phenomenology a few years later.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, it is of utmost importance that reflection in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology be considered in light of what Husserl calls the "principle of all principles" in *Ideas I*, the most fundamental methodical prescription in his phenomenology: "that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak, in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is

<sup>42</sup> It is interesting that after he has given arguments that the phenomenological reflection does not coincide with the phenomenological reduction and that not all transcendence can be deprived of its being in and for itself (not all transcendence can be reduced to consciousness), Celms declares that the possibility of a total reduction is still open and requires a special argument ("hier muß ein spezieller Reduktionsbeweis erbracht werden." Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 91). This fact would explain why Celms dedicated the rest of his life to enquiries concerning the criteria of delineation of subjective and objective being.

<sup>43</sup> Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> Husserl "discovered" the phenomenological reduction circa 1905, as we know from the *Seefelder Blätter*, four years after the publication of the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*.

presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there."<sup>45</sup>

It is true that if one does not take into account intuition (*Anschauung*) as a source of knowledge, reflection by itself is not capable of securing the self-sufficiency of the phenomenological domain. However, if one holds to the "principle of all principles" (as Husserl did in his transcendental phenomenology) reflection is necessarily accompanied by the phenomenological reduction, which ultimately leads to absolute, "pure," or transcendental consciousness. Husserl writes: "If reflective seizing-upon is directed to a mental process of mine, I have seized upon something absolute itself, the factual being of which is essentially incapable of being negated, i.e., the insight that it is essentially impossible for it not to exist; it would be a countersense to believe it possible that a mental process *given in that manner* does *not* in truth exist."<sup>46</sup>

What differentiates phenomenological reflection from the kind of psychological reflection that occurs in what Husserl calls the natural attitude, is that the latter still presumes that consciousness is only a part of the more encompassing world;<sup>47</sup> that the mental phenomena and processes being reflected upon are in the brain, and that the brain exists in the external world. Husserl writes:

Of course reflection can be effected by anyone and anyone can bring consciousness within the sphere of his seizing regard; but that is not necessarily to effect a *phenomenological* reflection, nor is the consciousness seized upon necessarily pure consciousness. Radical considerations ... are necessary in order to penetrate to the cognition that there is any such thing as the field of pure consciousness, indeed, that there is such a thing which is not a component part of Nature, and is so far from being that, that Nature is possible only as an intentional unity motivated in transcendently pure consciousness by immanent connections.<sup>48</sup>

Further on, he writes that "a transcendental investigation of consciousness cannot signify an investigation of Nature and cannot presuppose the latter as a premise because Nature is as a matter of essential necessity parenthesized in the transcendental attitude.... [O]ur disregarding of the whole world in the form of the phenomenological reduction is something different from a

<sup>45</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy I: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 44.

<sup>46</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 100.

<sup>47</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 114–115.

mere abstracting from components within more comprehensive interconnections, be they necessary or factual."<sup>49</sup> To effect a phenomenological reflection means also to effect a phenomenological reduction that in turn means to take consciousness as existing absolutely, without the requirement of an external world existing in-itself to ground its own existence or the existence of its content.

Phenomenological reflection in comparison to psychological reflection as it is carried out within the natural attitude is already motivated by the phenomenological reduction, and when viewed from this perspective phenomenological reduction is a necessary constituent of the former. If one leaves the phenomenological reduction out with regard to the phenomenological reflection, the latter is not a phenomenological reflection anymore, but simply psychological reflection.<sup>50</sup>

With regards to (2), it is questionable that the phenomenological reduction necessarily entails the denial of the existence of things outside or apart from consciousness, as Celms suggests. In my opinion, Husserl does not deny the existence of transcendence outside of consciousness. According to what he writes in *Ideas I*, it is possible to conclude that through "bracketing" Husserl only intends to suspend the validity of any judgments we might make about a realm of transcendent objects exactly because such objects, if they exist, have nothing to do with our experience. As such, we can neither affirm nor deny the existence of something transcendent to consciousness. Every attempt to reach beyond experience is surrounded with doubts, insoluble difficulties, and absurdities. Even the concepts of "thing," "object," and "external," have meaning for us only in the realm of immanence; that is, with relation to how phenomena are constituted or given in and by consciousness. This leads Husserl to consider consciousness as an absolute being, because there is no necessity to accept something independent (from what consciousness itself could be dependent) beyond consciousness in order to argue for its existence.

To develop this point, I will refer to the distinction, which is clearly made in Husserl's *Idea of Phenomenology*, but which is also present in *Ideas I*. In

<sup>49</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 115.

<sup>50</sup> The idea advanced here about the inseparable relationship between phenomenological reflection and phenomenological reduction is more clearly expounded in other works and lecture materials that were not accessible to Celms while he was writing his book; e.g., *The Idea of Phenomenology (Die Idee der Phänomenologie. Fünf Vorlesungen)*. See Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, in vol. 8 of *Edmund Husserl: Collected Works* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 33–35; and *Cartesian Meditations (Cartesiansche Meditationen)*. See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), 18–21, 25–26.

*Idea of Phenomenology* Husserl distinguishes between two types of transcendence, namely transcendence as an intentional correlate of consciousness, and transcendence as something outside consciousness "existing in itself."<sup>51</sup> What is accessible in experience is transcendence given as its intentional correlate through different modes of experience. Transcendence outside consciousness, however, is at best a riddle.<sup>52</sup>

Objects given to us in consciousness are objects of consciousness, and "objects" which might exist apart from consciousness, outside of it, are something else than those we experience (that are given in consciousness), and we cannot say anything with pretense to have knowledge about those objects that exist outside consciousness. They are nothing to us. It is possible to speak about objects of experience as dependent on the ways that they are given in consciousness; however, one must refrain from position-taking with regard to the world of objects outside of consciousness and experience.<sup>53</sup>

Consciousness does not lose anything with regard to its content if transcendence "in itself" is put into brackets.<sup>54</sup> If transcendent things-in-themselves are given in experience, then they can be reduced to their modes of givenness in consciousness. What the phenomenological reduction does is to make one realize that what is considered as transcendent with regard to consciousness is actually a result of the constitutional processes of consciousness. For example, about physical things Husserl writes,

...it must always be borne in mind here that *whatever physical things are*—the only physical things about which we can make statements, the only ones about the being or non-being, the being-thus or being-otherwise of which we can disagree and make rational decisions—*they are as experienceable physical things*.... As a consequence, one must not let oneself be deceived by speaking of the physical thing as transcending consciousness or as "existing in itself." The genuine concept of the transcendence of something physical ... can itself be derived only from the proper essential contents of perception or from those concatenations of definite kinds which we call demonstrative experience.<sup>55</sup>

The only world we know is the world of experience. Suspension or bracketing of transcendence is not a whim of Husserl's; it means putting aside the problem of transcendence outside consciousness, because it is a riddle that no one can solve. All claims about transcendence are merely speculative, and

<sup>51</sup> Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, 27–28.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 28–29.

<sup>53</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 115–116.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

thus do not coincide with Husserl's vision of phenomenology as a rigorous science. There are great problems with this kind of transcendence that lead us to absurdities and insoluble riddles, so it is better to suspend the belief about a "real world" existing outside of consciousness. The *real* world is precisely the world that is constituted in consciousness.

Question (3) was answered in a general way in the previous step. Already, Celms himself was aware of the problem that if one can prove that everything can be explained or considered by its modes of givenness in consciousness, and there is nothing left about what this kind of consideration cannot account for, it makes no sense to say that all or at least some of them have their own being apart from how they are given in consciousness. If that were the case, domains of the phenomenological reflection and the phenomenological reduction would be identical. Therefore, in order to support his objection Celms was forced to show that there must be something that cannot be wholly explained through its givenness in consciousness, namely the pure other I-subject and God.

Why Celms thought that the other I-subject was so special, that its existence "in itself" was ensured can be addressed by taking into account Husserl's statement: "No countersense is implicit in the possibility that every other consciousness, which I posit in empathic experience, is non-existent. But *my* empathizing, my consciousness of whatever sort, is originally and absolutely given not only with respect to its essence but also with respect to its existence."<sup>56</sup> Celms maintained that a genuine intersubjectivity presupposed subjects "in themselves" (*an sich*), which could not be reduced back to each other. But that, as Celms believed, required metaphysical assumptions. He assumed that Husserl, in order to escape solipsism, must assume the premise of subjects's existences apart from one another. In his argumentation, he arrived at a conclusion that Husserl must abandon the pure sphere of consciousness and accept a metaphysical premise of pre-established harmony between a multitude of pure consciousnesses or monads<sup>57</sup> that eventually lead to a pluralistic solipsism, because each monad could not reach or influence other monads.<sup>58</sup>

A similar line of thought can be detected also in Jirgens's critical survey of Celms's habilitation thesis. He assumed that Husserl abandoned

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> Celms thought that there were many egos, many Is, or consciousnesses (also pure consciousnesses) that exerted an influence on each other, although he believed that Husserl's phenomenology led to pure consciousnesses that cannot interact in any way with each other. For Husserl there is just one pure consciousness, but for Celms there are many: to each phenomenon of the other I in one's pure consciousness corresponds a pure consciousness of the other I in itself.

<sup>58</sup> Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus*, 87, 129–130, 161–168.



the phenomenological attitude and must return to the natural attitude. Jirgens came to such a conclusion because he misunderstood Husserl's conception of pure consciousness: "If my pure consciousness is really a pure consciousness and it constitutes every transcendence, all the perception is unnecessary for it...."<sup>59</sup> Jirgens thought that pure consciousness, if it is pure, must be free from all sensuality, and sensuality, he believed, was a crucial element when accounting for other I-subjects and solving the problem of solipsism. Therefore, Husserl and Celms must decide whether to remain with pure consciousness, never able to overcome solipsism, or give up the purity and admit that there were sensations; the causal results of interaction between psychophysical beings with their specific bodies with sense organs. Jirgens conceived of other I-subjects as self-dependent beings that have a body that one can perceive.<sup>60</sup>

What is common to both critics of Husserl is the assumption that Husserl left, or must leave, the field of pure consciousness gained through the phenomenological reduction. Jirgens's understanding of pure consciousness is clearly erroneous; pure consciousness does not imply that it has been freed from sense data, they just have been robbed of their physiological interpretation. Thus, his critique is unsubstantiated. Celms, on the other hand, does not follow Jirgens in this way, and yet he also ascribes to Husserl a position that cannot be justified. Celms's conclusion about pluralistic solipsism is valid only insofar as one assumes that Husserl wanted to treat or must treat intersubjectivity not only intentionally as an experienced intersubjectivity, but also as what Celms calls a "genuine intersubjectivity" that would not be confined to the experience, and reaches outside of it. However, that was neither Husserl's intention, nor a necessary consequence of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Husserl did not, and needed not, accept two kinds of intersubjectivity. He stuck to the phenomenological reduction throughout his analyses of intersubjectivity, maintaining that the only accessible, and in this sense genuine intersubjectivity, was the intersubjectivity given in the experience. If one insists on intersubjectivity outside of consciousness, Husserl could be considered a solipsist, although not a pluralistic solipsist, as Celms suggests. However, if one takes into account the fact that the only evidence of intersubjectivity can come from the experience alone and Husserl affirmed the evident givenness of such intersubjectivity, he was definitely not a solipsist or pluralistic solipsist. As long as one cannot prove the existence of other I-subjects without reference to experience, any talk of a genuine

<sup>59</sup> "Ja mana tīrā apziņa patiešām ir tīrā apziņa un visas transcendences konstitūētāja, tad viņai ir lieka visa apjaušana...." Jirgens, *Atsauksmes*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Jirgens, *Atsauksmes*, 8.

intersubjectivity outside experience in contrast to that of an intentional one, is unfounded.

With regard to the transcendence of God, Celms did not elaborate his argument, but as far as it can be understood, his argument is somewhat similar to that of St. Anselm of Canterbury's in the *Proslogion*. It is not possible here to deal with the argument in detail (especially, if it is considered together with Anselm's argument), but it will suffice here to say that a transition from a concept or intentional object to existence that was implied in Celms's argumentation is at best questionable; namely, there is a link missing that could secure the validity of the argument. It could be that there is a God that transcends consciousness, but with respect to Celms's argument, it could as well be the case that there is not.

It must be concluded that the arguments Celms provides in support of his objection that the phenomenological reduction must be distinguished from phenomenological reflection, and that the reduction itself is problematic, have considerable flaws and hence do not ultimately undermine Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. However, it must be emphasized that the conclusions arrived at in this paper about the validity of Celms's arguments are confined only to the main objection that he gave and the arguments used to support it. These conclusions are not meant to show that the whole of Celms's critique of Husserl or of the validity of phenomenology in general do not hold water.<sup>61</sup>

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