

PHENOMENOLOGICAL HYLETICS: THE ANIMAL,
THE HUMAN, THE DIVINE

The dimension defined as the hyletic one is discovered by Edmund Husserl while analysing the human being; but, the problem consists in asking whether it is possible to understand the animal with the tools given by hyletics. Though Husserl did not perform the application of hyletics to the animal world, in his analyses we can find, however, a general description of the animal. Further one can note that in the phenomenological school there was a great interest regarding the phenomena of animal and vegetal life, because the comprehension of the human being passes also through the comparison with these dimensions. This happens in particular in the case of Hedwig Conrad Martius and Edith Stein¹, but before them it was Husserl himself who began that kind of research.

The scheme of my contribution is, therefore, the following:

- (1) What Husserl wrote about animals.
- (2) What is the phenomenological hyletics in relationship to the human being and the possibility to extend it to animals.
- (3) Hyletics as a tool of interpretation of all the reality, as far as the Divine.

1. THE ANIMAL AND ITS INSTINCTIVE LIFE

As regards the question of the human world and the animal world and the theme of instinct that they have in common, particular significance seems to me to attach to some manuscripts that belong to different groups, A, C and E, and therefore concern also different core problematics – according to the subdivision utilized at the archives in Louvain – that yet converge on the topic with which we are here concerned.

That the theme was not exceptional in Husserl's reflections is brought out by the manuscripts that were to constitute the second volume of the *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy*², in which there appears an explicit reference to the psychic constitution of animals (Section II, IV, 45) as compared with the human world. The fact

that he subsequently returned to the topic shows that the attention Husserl paid to the animal world was not by any means occasional and, as we shall subsequently see, its treatment in particular contexts is a further motive of interest.

For the moment, however, I shall concentrate on the analysis to be found in ms. E III 10 in which the study of the pre-given world from the point of view of impulsive and instinctive life is used as the starting point for tackling the theme of knowledge of the human world and the animal world. The text opens with one of the very few passages where Husserl refers to S. Freud's analyses and seems to share their results. Husserl accepts the possibility of the existence of 'repressed' affects, of unsatisfied desires that are relegated to the level of the unconscious and generate an 'illness' of the soul; indeed: "Everything that is removed, everything that is of value, but remains hidden, continues to function in an associative and apperceptive manner, something that the Freudian method deems possible and presupposes"³. Starting from this consideration, Husserl examines the dynamics of the special intentionality that characterizes the instincts; the desire for food, for example, can be described by using the approach valid for the cognitive modality, for in this case, too, there is a tending towards a fulfillment that finds its realization in an object, particularly in the act of eating. In actual fact, hunger helps Husserl to understand the instinctive dimension, because the I is always hungry, hunger is its habitual condition that is only temporarily interrupted by the taking of food.

The analysis of instinctive life in human beings leads Husserl to establish two firm points: it is precisely thanks to habits that the unity of the I already constitutes itself at this level, so that the unity of subjectivity, though recognized by consciousness, is of anterior origin; secondly, the habits themselves influence and in some cases even determine the direction of the will and therefore passivity plays an important part in the sphere of the human will; as a supporting example one may note that the need for walking becomes transformed into a decision: "I want to go out". Rather, one can trace a typicality of the fundamental structure of needs that become articulated at different levels and constitute the structural form of all life, making it possible for the I to possess a systematic structure of the orientations of its will; in a wider sense, we can consider the modes of the will and of originary instinctive life to be the *Vorgestalt*, that is to say, the form that precedes the other forms.

All this leads Husserl to examine the 'vital' instinct of animals in general and not from the point of view of the naturalist scientist, who studies only its physical aspects, and not even – as we might add – from that of the ethologist or the scholars of animal psychology who, even though they seek