ESSAY VI

THE PERCEPTUAL WORLD AND THE RATIONALIZED UNIVERSE

In the final period of his life, Husserl did, more and more, call attention to the perceptual world, such as the latter plays a role in everyday, natural life. That is the world in which we find ourselves, in which we act, react, and work. It is in that world that we encounter our fellow human beings, to whom we are bound by the most diverse relationships. All our desires and hopes, all our apprehensions and fears, all our pleasures and sufferings (in short, all our affective and emotional life) are related to that

This study was originally published as “Appendix VI” to the French edition of An Outline of Constitutive Phenomenology. Its date of composition being unknown, one may, however, suppose, judging on the basis of its subject matter, that it was, as Prof. L. Embree points out in his prefatory note to the paper, “conceived at the same time” as Gurwitsch’s “Présuppositions philosophiques de la logique,” which appeared in the Revue de métaphysique et de morale, LVI (1951), pp. 395–405 (and as “Philosophical Presuppositions of Logic,” in SPP, pp. 393–402), and that it was probably contemporaneous with “Sur une racine perceptive de l’abstraction,” Actes du XIe. Congrès Internationale de Philosophie, II (1953), pp. 43–47 (which was included as “On a Perceptual Root of Abstraction” in SPP, pp. 433–438). Moreover, as Prof. Embree also indicates, “its central theme of investigation is pursued especially” in Gurwitsch’s “Perceptual Coherence as the Foundation of the Judgment of Predication,” published in Phenomenology: Continuation and Criticism. Essays in Memory of Dorion Cairns, ed. F. I. Kersten and R. M. Zaner (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) and reprinted in Phenomenology and the Theory of Science, ed. L. Embree, Chapter 6, pp. 241–267. Finally, to use Prof. Embree’s words, since “[t]his text is about Merleau-Ponty and other authors who have contributed to the development of the Husserlian program of research into the perceptual foundations of logical conceptualization,” one could refer as well to Gurwitsch’s “Quelques aspects et quelques développements de la psychologie de la forme,” Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique, XXXIII (1936), pp. 413–470, translated as “Some Aspects and Developments of Gestalt Theory” in SPP, pp. 1–62, where those foundations are discussed at length. For a further consideration of Gurwitsch’s position vis-à-vis Merleau-Ponty, cf. the former’s The Field of Consciousness, especially pp. pt. IV, ch. III, § 5.

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world; all our intellectual activities, both practical and theoretical, also refer to it. In describing and analyzing the perceptual world, one must take it such as it, in actual fact, offers itself to the natural consciousness of everyday life, such as it appears prior to the idealizations entailed by scientific interpretation and explanation.

The world is conceived by modern civilized human beings in the perspective of the physical sciences, such as they have been established since the seventeenth century. Even when we happen not to be physicists, or when we are not very familiar with the theories of physics and with the results arrived at by it, we conceive and interpret the world\footnote{The word “world” was inserted by the editor of the French edition of \textit{An Outline of Constitutive Phenomenology}.} in relation to the very existence of physics.\footnote{Cf. E. Husserl, \textit{Erfahrung und Urteil}, § 10.}

We conceive of the world as determinable. This means not only that there is the possibility of applying to the world the methods of analysis and explanation that belong to physics. Considered in itself, taken as it actually and really is, the world is determinate; its nature is rational; and its rationality cannot be other than the specific rationality of mathematics and of logic.\footnote{[According to the editor of the French edition of \textit{An Outline of Constitutive Phenomenology}, the French equivalent of “and of logic” is a handwritten phrase inserted by the author between the lines of the original text.]} If, therefore, the world is determinable, that means that we succeed in progressively disclosing the true structure of the universe by means of the physical sciences. Now, it is not science which renders the world determinate; it is not science which introduces mathematical rationality into the universe. All that science may do, and in effect does, is to bring out the true and real structure of the world; the latter possesses this structure, and has possessed it, “from time immemorial,” independently of science itself, that is to say, independently of the historical stage which science, at a given moment, has attained in the course of its development.

In the experience of everyday life, the world appears under an aspect quite different from that under which it presents itself in the explanatory theories of physics. Contrary to the doctrines advocated by some philosophers of Antiquity who dismissed perception as purely illusory (therefore, as deceptive), modern thought, while insisting on the dif-

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