The concept of essence

In the development of transcendental philosophy after Kant, this stabilization of the concept of essence was broken down and a dynamic theory of essence achieved. Hegel's dialectic, in which this dynamic theory of essence was developed, received no further elaboration in idealist philosophy: its development forms part of a different trend of thought and will be discussed later. When Husserl undertook to found anew the theory of essence, he based it on the theory of transcendental subjectivity as it was worked out from Descartes to Kant.

Phenomenology did not, to be sure, start out as transcendental philosophy. The pathos of purely descriptive, scientific objectivity which characterizes the Logische Untersuchungen ("Logical Investigations") is indicative of an inner connection with positivism, even where Husserl attacks it. Husserl himself pointed to Hume as the first to "make serious use of Descartes' pure inward focus." But where the theory of essence becomes central in Husserl's philosophy, its elaboration forces phenomenology to base itself ever more radically on transcendental apriorism. For this reason the stage represented by the Logische Untersuchungen does not need to be considered here.

Husserl defines essence in opposition to the individual, spatio-temporally existing real thing, the "fact," object of all empirical sciences:

"the significance of this contingency, which is called facticity, is limited by its correlation to a necessity that does not stand for the mere factual existence of a valid rule for the co-ordination of spatio-temporal facts; rather, it has the character of essential necessity and is this related to essential universality."

Part of the "meaning of everything contingent . . . is to have an essence and thus an eidos that is to be grasped in its purity. This eidos is a component of essential truths of various levels of generality." At first glance, these attributes do not differ at all from those of the traditional conception of essence as quiditas and essentia, as it was formulated by the Scholastics and incorporated into philosophy. But the context in which phenomenology deals with the concept of essence is completely different: the sphere of transcendental consciousness, "purged" of all acts intending spatio-temporal existence. For Husserl, the concept of essence is relevant only within the dimension of pure subjectivity that remains as a residuum after the phenomenological "annihilation of the world" and that "precedes the being of the world as constituting in itself the meaning of that being"—a "completely self-contained reality," "something existing absolutely." The essential truths that make their appearance in this dimension "do not contain the slightest assertion about facts, and thus from them alone not even the most meager factual truth can be derived."

After his Ideen ("Ideas"), Husserl programmatically defined his philosophical work in relation to Descartes. The relationship of Husserl to Descartes is not only one within the history of philosophy: it is the relationship of advanced bourgeois thought to its beginnings. Transcendental phenomenology itself represents, in its own content, an endpoint. Its attempt at a new foundation of philosophy as rigorous science presents itself as the end, no longer to be surpassed, of the line of thought that tried to anchor the absolute certainty, necessity, and universal validity of knowledge in the ego cogito. Once again the fundamental characteristics of bourgeois theory are at stake, and in the struggle for them resignation and the transition to a new stage are already in evidence. Only in this context does the significance of phenomenology's restitution of the concept of essence become clear.

In his Formale und transzendentale Logik ("Formal and Transcendental Logic") Husserl gives an account of his relation to Descartes and to transcendental philosophy. He sees Descartes as the originator of transcendental philosophy and accepts this origin as valid for himself as well, for "all objective knowledge must be founded on the single apodictic givenness . . . of the ego cogito." But he calls it a great error that Descartes saw in this ego a "primary, indubitably existing particle of the world" and deduced the rest of the world from it. This "realism" on Descartes' part, according to Husserl, is a naive prejudice with which phenomenology cannot concur. On the other hand, the Kantian critique of reason "erred" in directing itself toward the constitution of the given spatiotemporal world rather than toward "all possible worlds." Thus, for Husserl, Kant's critical thought remained caught in "mundane" realism. Phenomenology insisted on distinguishing itself from the start from this critical thought: "Phenomenology cannot distance itself from critical thought, because it was never at one with it."

Now, it is precisely this point—where the ego cogito is construed as an "indubitably existing particle of the world" and at the same time serves as the only springboard into the world—that links Cartesian philosophy with the progressive tendencies of the bourgeoisie. Only when the ego as something really existing in the world becomes the first certainty in the realm of beings can its reason provide the critical standard of real knowledge and serve as the organon for the ordering of life. And only as long as reason is constitutively directed toward empirically given "material" can its spontaneity be more than mere imagination. Once this connection between rational thought and spatio-temporal reality is severed, the "interest of freedom" disappears completely from philosophy.

But this severance belongs from the start to the program of the phenomenological reductions. Spatio-temporal facts in their spatio-temporal relevance are excluded from the field of genuine phenomenological study. What remains after the first reduction are the facts of consciousness, a world whose factual quality and richness are "the same" as the "natural" world's—with one very decisive difference: the phenomenological index modifies the meaning of reality in such a way as to make all facts, as facts of intentional consciousness, of equal validity; they are "exemplary" in principle. Thus

the whole spatio-temporal world, to which man and the human ego ascribe themselves as subordinate individual realities, acquires the meaning of merely intentional being, that is, being that has the merely secondary and relative meaning of being for a consciousness. It is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences, a being which in principle can be intuited and determined only as that which is identical in the motivated manifolds of appearances but which aside from that is nothing.
in the freedom of pure fantasy and in the pure consciousness of arbitrariness—of "pure at-all-ness" . . . thereby simultaneously entering a horizon of openly and endlessly manifold free possibilities for ever new variants. This variation is thus fully free, unbound from all a priori facts. It comprises all variants of the openly endless horizon, including the "example" itself, freed of all facticity, as something "arbitrary." . . . In this variation, they are in a continuous, pervasive synthesis of "coinciding opposites." But in this very coincidence appears the invariable, that which is necessarily constant in the free and continuously reformed variation, that which is indivisibly the same in that which is other and recurrently other—in short, universal essence—to which all "thinkable" modifications of the example remain tied.

This text, which leads deep into the inner mechanism of the phenomenological prehension of essence, also provides the best insight into the changed function of the theory of essence. All the decisive concepts which played a role in the theory of essence since its beginnings reappear here, and all in a characteristically changed form. Freedom has become a mark of pure fantasy, as the free arbitrariness of ideational possibilities of variation. The constant, identical, and necessary is no longer sought as the Being of beings but as what is invariant in the infinite manifold of representational modifications of "exemplars." Possibility is no longer a force straining toward reality; rather, in its open endlessness it belongs to mere imagination.

As the ego cogito and the essence which appear to it become the object of phenomenology, there is no longer a critical tension between them and factual existence. Phenomenology is therewith in principle a descriptive philosophy: it always aims only at describing what is as it is and as it presents itself, not, for instance, at showing what could and should be. The theoretical radicalness which seemed audible in the call, "To the things themselves!" reveals its quietistic, indeed positivistic, character as phenomenology progresses. The "things" become so for phenomenology only after they have been stripped of their actual materially objective character and have entered the levelling sphere of transcendental subjectivity for which everything is equi-valent (in-different) as a fact of consciousness. In this dimension, speaking of essence no longer means setting reality against its potentiality and what exists against what could be; essence has a purely descriptive and epistemological character. A philosophy that considers "all pre-given beings with their exact evidence" equally "prejudgments" no longer has any basis for distinguishing critically among these beings. Universal freedom from presuppositions here becomes equivalent to universal acknowledgment. Phenomenology's concept of essence is so far removed from any critical significance that it regards both the essential and the inessential, the object of fantasy as well as that of perception, as "facts." The epistemological antipositivism of this doctrine ill conceals its positivistic orientation.

The abatement of the dynamic movement contained in the concept of essence can also be seen in the few remnants of a position on Husserl's part with regard to knowledge of (spatio-temporal) facticity. The formal epistemological version of the concept of essence lets facticity subsist as a self-contained realm "alongside" the realm of essence. To know it does not involve changing or abolishing any aspect of it, but "only understanding." "Through my phenomenological reflection, the transcendental world . . . is neither abolished, devalued, nor changed, but only understood. . . ." The phenomenological epoché, which was intended to be so much more radical than Descartes' methodical doubt, contains a quietistic indifference, which regresses behind Descartes, with regard to the established order.

With Husserl, concern with the present has become concern with eternity: the eternity of pure science, whose timeless and absolute truth is supposed to provide the present with security. He considers the "spiritual distress" of our time the "most radical distress of life" and declares:

We must not sacrifice eternity for the sake of alleviating our distress in the present. We must not bequeath to our descendants an accumulation of distress such that it becomes an ultimately indestructible evil.

Positivistic indifference, however, is only one way in which the altered function of transcendental philosophy is expressed in phenomenology. Phenomenology appeared on the scene with the radical claim of beginning anew. That phenomenology explicitly speaks once more of "essence" in opposition to "fact" and makes essence the object of an independent "intuition" is a significant novelty that cannot be explained exclusively as a development of the transcendental method. The pathos of the evidence of universal, necessary, and objective truths, the demand of arriving at "the things themselves," and the renaissance of metaphysics in the wake of phenomenology belong to a new historical trend. While retaining the transcendental approach philosophy professes to be truly concrete and to take concrete objects as its point of departure. A sign of material "objectivity" and diversity can be seen in the renewed consideration of essence as the object of an independent, originally "giving" intuition. It is significant that phenomenology claims that the verification, "meaning," and truth of cognitive judgments no longer reside on the "side of the subject," of the ego cogito, but on the "side of the object." It is the object itself which appears there and whose essence prescribes, as it were, the cognitive acts directed toward it. The phenomenological doctrine of essence binds the transcendental freedom of the ego cogito to objectively pregiven essences and essential objects. This is the point where, within phenomenology, the new situation of thought imposes itself: the introduction of material eidos, in which the entire perspective is changed. The philosophy of the bourgeois era was founded by Descartes as a subjective and idealist one, and this resulted from an inner necessity. Every attempt to ground philosophy in objectivity, in the sphere of material reality, without attacking the real presuppositions of its conceptual character, i.e. without integrating into the theory a practice aimed at transformation, necessarily surrenders its rationally critical character and becomes heteronomous. This fate befall the material doctrine of essence; it led, just as with positivism, to the subjection of theory to the "given" powers and hierarchies. With regard to knowledge, the basic meaning of the intuition of essence is that it "lets itself be given" its object, that it passively accepts it and binds itself to it as "something absolutely given." That which gives itself in evident "congruent unity" (Deckungseinheit) is "at the same time absolute Being,
and the object that is now the object of such Being, such pure essence, is to an ideal degree adequately given.” The intuition of essence is (despite the “freedom” of ideational variations) receptive. At the apex of philosophy, the receptivity of the intuition of essence replaces the spontaneity of the comprehending understanding that is inseparable from the idea of critical reason.

The sacrifice of the idea of critical reason paved the way to resignation for the doctrine of essence, to its gradual transition to a new ideology. Bourgeois philosophy lost the Archimedean point where it had anchored the freedom of the knowing individual, and without it, it has no basis from which the weapon of critique can be employed against the claims of specific facts and hierarchies to be “essential.”


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In philosophy, essence is the property or set of properties that make an entity or substance what it fundamentally is, and which it has by necessity, and without which it loses its identity. Essence is contrasted with accident: a property that the entity or substance has contingently, without which the substance can still retain its identity. The concept originates rigorously with Aristotle (although it can also be found in Plato), who used the Greek expression to Τί ἦν εἶναι (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι).
The concept of essence and phenomenon. All thinking people want to get at the essence. They seek it like hidden treasure, which lies at the heart of things and controls them. Essence may be considered in global terms, as the ultimate foundation of the universe, in terms of various categories, such as the essence of the human being, for example, and in the sense of the main thing in an individual object.[1]. In the early forms of philosophical thought essence was that from which everything that existed had originated and that to which it would return. The religious consciousness contrasted the 1.1. The essence, principles and functions of marketing. 1.1.1. Basic concepts in marketing. Marketing - is a broad and multi-faceted concept. The initial meaning of the word marketing was associated with the definition of "market" (from the English market). Specialists offer a literal translation - "market-making", i.e. activities aimed at the formation of the market. The concept of needs underlies the theories of motivation of Freud and the hierarchy of consumer preferences of A. Maslow and others, including those determining the behavior of consumers in the market. In turn, need - this sense of lack of something. If the need is not satisfied, the person feels deprived, unhappy. The concepts of substance and essence are among the most fundamental in metaphysics. They are also among the most sharply questioned, in both Eastern and Western philosophy. Today, "essentialism," the belief in essences, is regarded a fallacy in much academic opinion, both sensible and foolish. Nevertheless, what the ideas represent is something that it is difficult to do without, in both ordinary language and any serious ontology. Some simple definitions are in order.