

The precise details of the publication are as follows: Bence Peter Marosan: “Main Stages and Features of the Development of Husserl’s Conception of Metaphysics: Or How Might We Themmatize the ‘Supreme and Ultimate Questions’ in a Phenomenologically Legitimate Manner?”. In *Husserl Studies*, 2024, 40 (3) :309-329. Please, quote accordingly!

Main Stages and Features of the Development of Husserl’s Conception of Metaphysics: Or How Might We Themmatize the ‘Supreme and Ultimate Questions’ in a Phenomenologically Legitimate Manner?

Bence Peter Marosan

Abstract

In this paper, we provide an overview of the main stages in the development of Edmund Husserl’s conception of metaphysics, highlighting its most significant characteristics. We propose that Husserl’s views on metaphysics traversed three main stages: 1) from the early 1890s until his so-called ‘transcendental turn’ around 1906/07; 2) from his ‘transcendental turn’ until the late 1920s, and 3) the metaphysical conceptualization during the 1930s, aptly characterized as – following the interpretation of László Tengelyi – a ‘metaphysics of primal facts’ (*Urfakta, Urtatsache*). We further demonstrate that Husserl’s considerations concerning metaphysics – throughout his entire opus – span three essential levels: 1) the epistemological level, in particular, phenomenological preparations to establish a foundation for metaphysics; 2) a level concerning metaphysics as the universal and ultimate science of reality, and 3) a level addressing metaphysics as a proper field of phenomenological investigations into the ‘highest and ultimate questions’ (such as God and immortality). We argue in detail that Husserl attempted to render this field – which radically transcends the domain of possible intuitions (*Anschauungen*) and direct experience – accessible to a legitimate phenomenological treatment via the method of *phenomenological constructions*, prior to the efforts of Eugen Fink.

Keywords: Edmund Husserl, phenomenological metaphysics, phenomenological constructions, László Tengelyi, metaphysics of primal facts

1. Introduction¹

A close examination of Husserl's opus reveals a massive textual basis undergirding the assumption that he was profoundly and intensively preoccupied with the problem of metaphysics throughout his philosophical career, from the late 1880s through his last manuscripts of the late 1930s and death in 1938. Metaphysics was clearly a central problem for him and the ultimate object of his philosophical efforts. Furthermore, two distinct and clearly differentiated senses of metaphysics appear in his work. The first is metaphysics as 'the ultimate science of reality' (e.g., Husserl, 1988, p. 182, 2008a, pp. 123, 360–361; see also Bernet et al., 1993, pp. 229–234; Trizio, 2017, 2019). Secondly, he conceived of metaphysics as a discipline related to the 'supreme and ultimate questions' (Husserl, 1960, p. 156) or 'the highest and ultimate problems' (Husserl, 1971, p. 89), such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, teleology, or the highest and ultimate ethical values. This distinction refers to a more general and a more specific sense and level of metaphysics, somewhat akin to the traditional distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* in classical metaphysics.² In Husserl's writings, a clearly defined foundational relationship exists between these two senses and forms of metaphysics: the second (*metaphysica specialis*, understood here as metaphysics in a more specific sense) was founded upon the first (as 'the ultimate science of reality'), and both referred back to phenomenology as their ultimate basis.

Husserl's metaphysically related investigations comprise three main periods. The first ranges from 1890 to 1906/07, from his first philosophical endeavours to the transcendental turn. During this period, we can already identify the three above-mentioned levels of metaphysical

¹ The author is the associate professor of the Budapest Business University. This study was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (project: BO/00143/23/2) and by the No. 138745 project of Hungarian Scientific Research Fund.

² To be more accurate, this difference between a more general and a more specific level and sense of metaphysics cannot be precisely equated to the traditional distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. Rather, this distinction dates back to the Lutheran theologian Jakob Martini (1570–1649) (Salatowsky, 2022, p. 2097), although it only became truly influential and widely known due to the work of Alexander Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant. In Baumgarten, *metaphysica generalis* referred to ontology (*ontologia*), while *metaphysica specialis* embraced the fields of *theologia rationalis*, *psychologia rationalis*, and *cosmologia rationalis* – that is to say, the problems of God, the soul, and the world.

This is not exactly the case in Husserl. What we call 'metaphysics in a more specific sense' surely refers to the 'highest and ultimate problems' – such as God, the soul, historical teleology, and the ultimate ethical values. The 'ultimate science of reality', however, cannot be entirely equated to the classical sense of *metaphysica generalis*. This discipline in Husserl comprises both formal and material ontology with their phenomenological grounding, as well as the philosophically elucidated and clarified totality of the empirical – natural and cultural – sciences. In traditional metaphysical discourse, however, according to my interpretation, these two terms tendentiously referred to a more general and a more specific level of metaphysical investigation. When we use these terms in the context of Husserl's conception of metaphysics, we take them in this very broad sense, which we believe is rendered legitimate by this terminological tendency.

I would like to express my gratitude to my anonymous reviewer for the corresponding clarificatory remarks in this regard.

considerations. During second period, 1906/07 until the late 1920s, Husserl defines phenomenology as *a universal eidetic discipline* and as ‘first philosophy’ that should serve as a foundation for metaphysics ‘in the new sense’ (i.e., phenomenologically founded metaphysics). This metaphysics will serve as a point of departure for rigorous phenomenological investigation into the ‘highest and ultimate questions’. Finally, we can date the third period, in its clear and crystallized form, to the 1930s, although it finds its roots in the early 1920s; thus, the middle and final phases partially overlap. The fundamental metaphysical conception of this last period can be characterized, as László Tengelyi correctly observed, as ‘a metaphysics of primordial facts (*Urfakta*)’ (see Tengelyi, 2011, 2014, pp. 180–191). In his final period, Husserl centred his thought on certain *ultimate experiential singularities* that, in a certain manner, precede every fact and essence and make them possible in the first place.

Regarding the ‘the highest and ultimate problems’, that is, questions concerning the problems of *metaphysica specialis* (e.g., God and immortality), even Husserl faced an obvious difficulty, namely that the answers to these questions apparently lie beyond the boundaries of possible experience.³ Thus, they evaded Husserl’s famous ‘principle of all principles’,

³ At this point, it is pertinent to question whether Husserl explicitly addressed this methodological challenge or if it is merely an interpretative gesture or hypothesis to attribute this idea (i.e., the attempt to answer the ‘highest and ultimate questions’ in a constructive manner) to Husserl in an explicit form. To address this question, we offer here the following considerations, which we will elaborate on in greater detail in subsequent sections of our study. To begin, we should mention that Husserl phrased his ideas regarding the assumed immortality of the ego (e.g., Husserl, 1973b, pp. 154–158, 1993, p. 332, 2001d, pp. 466–471, 2008, pp. 176–177) and the existence of God (e.g., Husserl, 1956, p. 289, 1970a, p. 66, 1973c, p. 381, 2014, p. 168) in a manner that exhibits, on the one hand, *a clear tension* between these considerations and, on the other hand, the standard framework of phenomenology and its demand for intuitive givenness. In particular, he emphasizes from time to time that we cannot *imagine* that the transcendental ego ceases to exist once and for all (see also Hess, 2011), although he did not explain how exactly we should imagine the reincarnation or re-embodiment of the transcendental ego in the form of a personal ego (or its otherworldly existence). He also speaks about God as a necessary end pole or ideal pole of a teleological order; however, God, in his view, is an absolutely infinite being or power that transcends every finitude and, as such, also every finite intuition that a finite phenomenologist could possess (see also Lo, 2008).

In this context, the various meanings of the word ‘construction’ used by Husserl are highly relevant. Of course, firstly, especially in his writings dedicated to mathematics and logic, Husserl spoke about mathematical and formal-logical constructions. Secondly, he also used this terminology to refer to constructive, self-completing moments, processes, and structures in experience in general (cf. Schnell, 2007). Thirdly, Husserl spoke about ‘construction’ as a counter-concept to phenomenology, that is, as illegitimate metaphysical and philosophical speculations that lack a proper intuitive foundation (e.g., Husserl, 1976, pp. 41–42, 119, 246). Fourthly, and most pertinently for us, he allowed the application of constructions within the horizon of phenomenology in a legitimate manner – prior to Eugen Fink. In this regard, he spoke about constructing the idea of God as an end pole of a teleological order within phenomenology (Husserl, 1988, pp. 170–176, 225–226). In my opinion, these considerations in Husserl – regarding ‘construction’ in the fourth sense – could be rightfully called a form of ‘phenomenological construction’ or ‘constructive phenomenology’ to overcome the (at least implicitly) indicated difficulties of the boundaries of possible intuition.

To answer the question indicated at the beginning of this footnote, we should say that Husserl perhaps never faced this methodological challenge in a fully explicit and systematically elaborated way. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that the specific way in which he treated the ‘highest and ultimate questions’ of philosophy and metaphysics, namely how he articulated his proposals to solve these problems in a constructive manner (see, e.g., Husserl, 1988, pp. 170–176, 225–226), at least apparently indicates that he was clearly aware of this difficulty.

according to which ‘every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition’ (Husserl, 1913/1983a, p. 44), and appeared almost insurmountable from a phenomenological perspective. As we discuss in Subsection 3.2 below, prior to his student Eugen Fink’s completion of the manuscript for the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* in 1932 (Fink, 1988), Husserl had already arrived at the idea of *phenomenological constructions* around 1908, a relatively early stage in his philosophical development. He attempted to apply them to the problems of *metaphysica specialis* (see, e.g., Husserl, 2014, pp. 137–168; see also Husserl, 1988, pp. 170–176, 225–226), concluding that *a priori necessary indications* emerge in our experiences and intuitions (*Anschauungen*) that lead us beyond the boundaries of the realm of possible experiences. In Husserl’s opinion, we can follow these indications in a phenomenologically legitimate manner beyond the realm of possible intuition, provided that we exercise careful discernment to discover the proper way to elucidate and grasp them from a phenomenological stance and effectively unfold their implications.⁴

The final section of this illustrates how, in the later period of Husserl’s metaphysical endeavours, he forged an intriguing synthesis between his ‘metaphysics of primordial facts’ and phenomenological constructions. To this end, we discuss how in Husserl’s late thought, God served as the ultimate foundation for every primordial fact, every transcendental ego, transcendental intersubjectivity, and, in general, all facts, possibilities, and necessities.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four main sections: 2) Husserl’s Early Thoughts on Metaphysics; 3) First and Second Philosophy Within the Context of Transcendental Phenomenology; 4) Husserl’s Late Phenomenological Metaphysics: A Metaphysics of Primordial Facts and God as the Ultimately Foundational Fact, and 5) Concluding Remarks.

2. Husserl’s Early Thoughts on Metaphysics

Husserl’s lifelong interest in metaphysics began in the late 1880s (see, e.g., Husserl, 1983b, pp. 216–233).⁵ Although his related terminology was somewhat vague, uncertain, and unstable

Thus, we should speak not of a fully elaborated conception, but of something more substantial than a mere interpretative hypothesis.

⁴ In this context, we should refer to the works of Alexander Schnell, who has been researching Husserl’s idea of phenomenological constructions and the problem of phenomenological constructions in general for at least 23 years (see, e.g., Schnell, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2010).

Schnell focuses on constructive moments in experience and the structurally necessary constructive functions of consciousness that are ultimately responsible for rendering experience concrete rather than using this term within the context of the ‘highest and ultimate’ metaphysical questions (e.g., God and immortality); however, he also acknowledges this latter domain as a legitimate field of phenomenological investigation.

⁵ ‘Historical Overview of the Philosophy of Mathematics’ (winter semester, 1887/1888). This was part of the lecture, ‘Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge and Metaphysics’ (1887/1888).

until his 1906/07 lecture *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge* (2008a), at the level of broader meanings, he clearly distinguished among the *three different levels* that we discussed in the Introduction. This means that Husserl interpreted metaphysics as *a rigorous, all-embracing, universal science of factual reality*, one which demanded an epistemological (in his earlier writings, a psychological or psychologically related epistemological) foundation. Finally, questions of *metaphysica specialis* that related to God, immortality, and ultimate ethical values fascinated him. Husserl held regular lectures on topics concerning the ‘supreme and ultimate questions’,⁶ and his early letters clearly show the special importance of this field to him.⁷ However, as the next section will outline in detail, until his ‘transcendental turn’ around 1906/07, Husserl simply lacked the methodological tools necessary to handle these questions in a proper and truly original way.

From Husserl’s time in Halle (1887–1901), only sporadic fragments of his seminar notes and research manuscripts dedicated to the problem of *metaphysica specialis* survive. Although Husserl had strong religious and rationalist commitments, he continued to eschew systematic investigations into such problems before 1906/07, or, if he undertook any, he did not preserve the related texts. This was likely due to his dissatisfaction with those texts and perhaps his lack of a proper methodological toolkit,⁸ but also because in his metaphysically oriented investigations, he simply had other priorities. Until 1906/07, he first and foremost devoted himself to clarifying the relationship between epistemology and metaphysics, as ‘ultimate science of reality’ or ‘factuality’.

The first stage of Husserl’s metaphysical endeavours, from *On the Concept of Number: Psychological Analyses* (1887) through *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891) to *Logical Investigations* (1900/01) and shortly after, was embedded within his wider project of securing a deeper theoretical foundation for logic and mathematics in an essentially *psychological* way (Husserl, 1970b, 1983b, 2005a, 2005b). In this early period, Husserl thought that the ultimate theoretical grounding for every scientific effort, including metaphysics, should be provided by a philosophically clarified and rigorous psychological study of our epistemic and cognitive capabilities. Thus, logic and mathematics should be built upon this secure theoretical basis, and

⁶ From the end of the 1880s and throughout the 1890s, Husserl held lectures on ethics, the philosophy of religion, freedom of the will, and proofs for the existence of God (see Bernet et al., 1993, pp. 236–237).

⁷ See, e.g., Husserl, 1994, pp. 10, 15–16 (‘Letters from Husserl to Franz Brentano from 1892 and 1894’). To Husserl’s religious commitments, see Varga, 2021.

⁸ Such as a fragment from the lecture ‘Ethics and Philosophy of Right’ from 1897 (see Husserl, 1988, pp. 381–384).

We should also mention from the period before his ‘transcendental turn’ the texts and seminars dedicated to ‘The Fundamental Questions of Ethics’ from 1902 (summer semester) and 1902/03 (winter semester) (Husserl, 1988, pp. 384–419; see also Varga, 2021, especially p. 40).

ultimately, *metaphysics, as a general science of factuality* that would also integrate the properly validated results of particular empirical sciences, could be erected upon this firm foundation.

In the 1890s, before the publication of *Logical Investigations*, we should principally highlight two posthumously published lecture series: *Logic* from 1896 (2001a) and his 1898/99 winter semester lecture, *Theory of Knowledge and Main Points of Metaphysics* (2001c, pp. 223–255). In the former, Husserl conceptualized metaphysics in terms of Aristotle's *first philosophy*, deeming theory of knowledge or epistemology to be identical 'or partly identical' with metaphysics. The empirical and factual sciences could be defined as belonging to *second philosophy*; consequently, they are always built upon metaphysical presuppositions. It would be the duty of a properly articulated first philosophy to supervise and, if necessary, revise and correct these presuppositions. In the latter lecture series, Husserl engaged in nuanced and sophisticated investigations into the relationship between epistemology and metaphysics. His final remarks on the topics indicate a position according to which the theory of knowledge represents a part of the broader discipline of metaphysics (Husserl, 2001c, pp. 252–255; see also Trizio, 2019, pp. 320–321). He also explained that epistemology serves as a first step in wider metaphysical investigations by supervising and clarifying the metaphysical presuppositions of specific sciences.

After publishing *Logical Investigations* until 1906/07, Husserl struggled to grasp the ultimate meaning of metaphysics and delineate its relationship with epistemology permanently. In 1902/03, in his *Logic* lectures, Husserl again endorsed Aristotle's conception of first philosophy as a foundational discipline for every specific branch of the sciences, although with certain constraints (2001b). First philosophy should be conceptualized more broadly than in Aristotle to embrace 1) the study of 'absolute Being' and 'absolute determinations of Being' while allowing 2) critical examination of the presuppositions of specific disciplines and scientific areas. Later on, in 1905 and 1906/07, in the lecture series *Theory of Judgement* (2001a, pp. 29, 41–43) and *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*, Husserl introduced a distinction between 'formal' and 'material' metaphysics (2008a, pp. 97–99). Formal metaphysics involves understanding and describing reality's formal and a priori aspects, encompassing pure logic and epistemology. His material metaphysics, building upon formal metaphysics, is charged with determining what belongs, ultimately and in general, to *factual existence*.

In *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*, Husserl finally clarified the precise relationship between first and second philosophy, epistemology, and metaphysics, as well as the proper meaning and scope of these concepts. The lecture series was held in the winter

semester of 1906/07, during which he also initially established the ‘transcendental turn’ of phenomenology. In these crucial lectures, Husserl apparently abandoned the traditional identification of first philosophy with metaphysics (see also Trizio, 2019, p. 326). Metaphysics no longer encompassed epistemology or logic. In this text, Husserl defines first philosophy as epistemology (more specifically, transcendental phenomenology), upon which metaphysics, as the ultimate science of reality, was constructed. This remained Husserl’s standpoint until the end of his life.

3. First and Second Philosophy Within the Context of Transcendental Phenomenology

3.1 Eidetic Phenomenology as First Philosophy and Metaphysics of Ultimate Factuality as Second Philosophy

A landmark in the development of Husserl’s conception of metaphysics is his transcendental turn, achieved around 1906/07 and first systematically presented in *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*. This new stance helped clarify his terminology, secure firmer foundations for his metaphysical efforts, and acquire new and more effective methodological tools to grapple with the ‘supreme and ultimate’ metaphysical problems. The main achievement of this period was transcendental phenomenology. Its intricate methodology focused the philosopher’s gaze on the purely phenomenal aspect of things,⁹ opening completely new horizons for Husserl and enabling him to thematize entirely new topics in novel ways. According to this primary, crystallized conception, the ultimate foundational discipline was phenomenology as an *eidetic* theory of knowledge and constituting consciousness,¹⁰ upon which was built metaphysics, a scientific approach to real being in an absolute sense, and, ultimately, to the ‘supreme and final questions’. A dominant theoretical consideration of this second phase of Husserl’s metaphysical thought was the precedence of *eidetic structures and possibilities over facts and concrete, real entities*.

⁹ This is one way to see Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. There are also metaphysically stronger interpretations – supported by Husserl’s own texts and words – according to which reality is dependent on the constituting activity of the transcendental consciousness for its existence (see Smith, 2003).

¹⁰ According to Husserl’s new terminology, which was also elaborated during this period, *phenomenological* (or *transcendental*, or *transcendental-phenomenological*) *reduction* focused attention on the phenomenal aspect of things (i.e., revealed everything as a phenomenon). *Eidetic reduction* (from the Greek word ‘*eidos*’ meaning ‘form’ or ‘essence’) helped the philosopher or theoretician concentrate her regard on the universal and universally valid features of phenomena.

In the previously mentioned *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*, Husserl already grasped the major outlines of the relationship between phenomenology and metaphysics, although in a less lucid or crystallized version. The ultimate foundation for every higher theoretical effort – metaphysics included – is provided by phenomenology as *epistemology* and *theory of the essences* of the constituting consciousness. Thus, phenomenology grounds metaphysics in a double sense: *formal metaphysics* as an ‘a priori ontology of the Real’ (2008a, p. 99), and *material metaphysics* as an ‘a posteriori metaphysics’, the ‘radical science of Being’ (2008a, p. 96), ‘absolute science of Being’ (2008a, p. 361), or ‘science of absolute Being’ (2008a, p. 175). Material metaphysics is – according to Husserl – metaphysics in the proper sense, which rests upon formal metaphysics, which ‘comes after all empirical sciences’ (2008a, p. 99), and whose task is to incorporate the results of the empirical sciences in a phenomenologically legitimate manner and thereby elucidate the ultimate facts of reality (see also Trizio, 2019, 2021, pp. 58–95; Zahavi, 2017, pp. 48–50).

Husserl sketches a somewhat simpler picture in his 1907 lecture series *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1999). The foundation of metaphysics ‘as a science of Being in the absolute and final sense’ (1999, p. 25) is phenomenology, as both an epistemological critique of knowledge and a theory of the essential structures of consciousness. Metaphysics, as the ultimate science of reality, comprises the ‘metaphysics of nature and the metaphysics of the entire life of culture and history [*Geistesleben*]’ (1999, p. 43.). In these lectures, Husserl did not treat directly and explicitly the ‘supreme and ultimate questions’ of metaphysics as he did, in systematic fashion, in numerous contemporary texts.¹¹

In his books, lectures, articles, and manuscripts of 1912–1930, Husserl was quite clear and definitive about the relationship between first and second philosophy and their specific content, structure, and realms of authority.¹² First philosophy was phenomenology as the *pure eidetic* discipline of constituting transcendental consciousness, while second philosophy, as metaphysics, was the phenomenologically founded and clarified scientific study of the ultimate facts and relations of *reality*.

This conception had certain fundamental implications for Husserl’s ontology and metaphysics: namely, it implied the ontological and metaphysical *precedence of possibility over*

¹¹ See Subsection 3.2: Phenomenological Constructions within the Context of Transcendental Phenomenology.

¹² Such as *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), *Cartesian Meditations* (1929), *First Philosophy* (1923/24), or the ‘Phenomenology’ article for Encyclopaedia Britannica from 1927 (see Husserl, 1956, 1960, 1971, 1913/1983a, 2019).

actuality and reality (Husserl, 1983a).¹³ Subsection 3.2 will show that in this regard, Husserl's view began to change in the early 1920s, although in his main texts, it remained his explicitly expressed opinion until the end of the 1920s that essences and essential possibilities – in particular, the essential (eidetic) structures and possibilities of the transcendental consciousness – maintain an absolute and unambiguous primacy over reality, actuality, and facts. In Husserl's view, pure eidetic phenomenology lays down the theoretical foundations of specific empirical sciences. It also phenomenologically elucidates investigations into the ultimate nature of reality by incorporating the findings of concrete empirical scientific research. Metaphysics in this sense, as second philosophy, embraces the study of 'supreme and ultimate questions'.¹⁴ The main topic of the following subsection is the peculiar way in which Husserl attempted to handle these questions within the framework of his newly elaborated transcendental phenomenology.

3.2 Phenomenological Constructions Within the Context of Transcendental Phenomenology

Readers familiar with the philosophy of Edmund Husserl might be surprised or confused to see the method or procedure of 'construction' referred to with a positive connotation before Eugen Fink's 1932 manuscript, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (1988). Husserl mostly mentions the term 'construction' with a negative tone and juxtaposes it against genuine phenomenological achievements that rest upon 'originally presentive intuitions' (e.g., Husserl, 1983a, pp. 35–36, 128). After 1907, however, in his research manuscripts and lecture texts, we can detect the emergence of the idea of phenomenologically legitimate constructions, which – in Husserl's view – might enable the phenomenologist to approach the 'supreme and ultimate questions' in a phenomenologically intelligible manner (see also Marosan, 2015).

Regarding the 'supreme and ultimate questions' – the domain of *metaphysica specialis* – in this article, we focus first and foremost on the questions of God and, in certain places, immortality. The conundrum is readily apparent. The answers to these questions evidently fall beyond the borders of possible intuitive givenness and accessibility. Consequently, the possibility of answering them seemingly falls short of meeting the conditions of legitimate knowledge raised by the famous 'principle of all principles' of Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a*

¹³ 'The old ontological doctrine that the cognition of "possibilities" must precede the cognition of actualities is, in my opinion, so far as it is correctly understood and made use of in the right ways, a great truth' (p. 190).

¹⁴ In this context, I should refer to the elegantly written reconstruction of the development of Husserl's notion of metaphysics by Daniele De Santis (2021), whose essay provides a sophisticated and careful presentation of the inner relationships between the different layers and aspects of Husserl's metaphysical endeavours. For a more elaborate discussion of this problem by the same author, see De Santis (2023a, 2023b).

Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (1913/1983a) (henceforth *Ideas*): ‘[E]very originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition’ (p. 44). Husserl was clearly aware of the problem when he achieved his transcendental phenomenology breakthrough around 1906/07, prompting him to begin experimenting with the idea of phenomenological construction after 1907. This idea rests upon the conception that in certain phenomena that are present in an apodictically evident and originary way, we can identify certain *indications* that point beyond every possible intuitive givenness. The philosopher herself, striving after evident and legitimate knowledge, cannot follow these indications beyond the realm of intuitive accessibility; nevertheless, by relying on them, she can engage in certain a priori necessary and phenomenologically legitimate constructions.

God was a central problem for Husserl that accompanied him throughout his entire life and appeared in his published books – such as *Ideas*¹⁵ – or in texts directly written for publication – such as *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936/1970a) – not to mention lecture notes, letters, and research manuscripts. In his first systematic attempts to approach this problem in a phenomenologically legitimate manner, he brought to the fore two additional notions that are crucial in this context: *infinity* and *teleology*. In Husserl’s view, *both* are implicated in the phenomenal horizons that the philosopher opens via the procedure known as *phenomenological reduction*. Regarding infinity, according to Husserl, the internal and external horizons pertaining to every experiential and – in general – phenomenal appearance refer, by eidetic phenomenological necessity, to ever new horizons. *This chain of indications* of a priori reasons can never be closed; in each particular horizontal appearance the constitution of a new phenomenal horizon is necessarily indicated, and this continues *ad infinitum*. The chain of horizontal appearances refers to *an actual infinity of the phenomenal world*.¹⁶ As regards teleology, Husserl posits that the careful phenomenological regard can identify a structurally inherent and intrinsic directedness in every phenomenal appearance to a *telos* (i.e., an end result or objective): an *intention* is directed towards fulfilment (although it may fail); a *hypothesis* is related to a revelation of truth (either its falsification – eventually as nonsensical – or its verification); and an *idea* – as an ideal goal or objective – governs our actions, etc. A *telos* plays a regulative role in the course of experience, action, and historical

¹⁵ Husserl, 1913/1983a, pp. 133–134, 187, 362.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Husserl, 1973a, pp. 14–17, 136, 172, 205–218, 234, 321, 345–347, 370, 395–398, 413, 462, footnote 2; 1980, pp. 54–55. In later texts, see, e.g., Husserl, 1973b, pp. 126, 136, 214, 256, 295, 307, 322, 548; 1973c, pp. 23, 40 (in footnote), 49, 75, 138, 149, 153, 157, 181–182 (in footnote), 193, 195, 199, 206–208, 220, 226, 234, 239–242, 266, 317, 338 (in footnote), 341, 388–393, 439–440, 467, 498, 501, 523, 531, 547, 568, 609, 638–639. Also to this problem, see Geniusas (2012) and Tengelyi (2006, 2014, pp. 507–548).

processes. Individual factual – natural, mental, and spiritual – processes may eventually fail to reach their goals; however, according to Husserl, the philosopher, in generality, can identify an intrinsic *teleological force or drivenness* in every phenomenal process, which, in the long run, governs the development of the world in general, and finite processes in particular, towards higher forms of realization and accomplishment and, ultimately, towards the *ideal of infinite perfection*. The latter idea connects Husserl’s considerations on infinity and teleology to the *axiological investigations* and ideas that he developed after 1906 (e.g., Husserl, 1988, 1995, pp. 333–381; see also Caminada, 2023; De Monticelli, 2021; Melle, 1990; Smith, 2007, pp. 356–401).

Infinity, a key concept for Husserl throughout his career, became even more crucial and prominent after his ‘discovery’ of transcendental reduction. More specifically, after 1906, within the scope of his transcendental phenomenology, he began to scrutinize ever more frequently and deeply the infinity of the world in his research manuscripts, lecture notes, and books, such as *Ideas* (see also Mühlenbeck 2020; Tengelyi, 2005). His touchstone in elaborating on this problem was the notion of *horizon*, into which he commenced investigations in a systematic and detailed way after his ‘transcendental turn’ around 1908/09. As noted above, Husserl posited that the *eidos* of every experiential phenomenal appearance contained *an a priori necessary indication* of further horizons, which, in turn, referred to the total horizon of the world as ‘a horizon of all horizons’ (see, e.g., Husserl, 1976, p. 586). To be precise, we must note that Husserl was sometimes hesitant to attribute ‘actual infinity’ to the mind-transcendent world (see Husserl, 2003b, p.194, see also 1989a, p.313). Husserl most frequently opts for the term ‘open infinity’ (*offene Unendlichkeit*). However, there are various places where Husserl clearly indicates that this ‘open infinity’ ultimately refers to an actual infinity (see Mühlenbeck, 2020; Tengelyi, 2005, 2014, pp. 507–548). In either case, the world’s infinity seems open from such a finite perspective as that possessed by humans. We cannot conceive of the actual infinity of the world, which is indicated through the aforementioned horizons, each of which indicates a further horizon until an actual infinity of horizons is reached, embraced by the world itself. Although this actual infinity, due to our inevitable limitations, cannot be intuited and thus eludes the ‘principle of all principles’, it can, however, be *reconstructed* by comprehending the a priori necessary indications characteristic of every horizon. Thus, we can apodictically, but yet unintuitively, grasp *the infinity of the world* in the form of an apodictic insight.

Regarding teleology, more specifically, Husserl used this term with at least three different meanings. First, it referred to the directedness of any process directed towards an *end result* or ‘final destination’ (a *telos*) – as, for example, an intention is directed towards its fulfilment.

Second, teleology could indicate relatedness to *a norm* – in other words, the self-normalizing and self-regulatory character of experience (see Reszeg, 2021; Steinbock, 1995). Third, teleology could be an epistemic or epistemological strategy: a way of approaching and interpreting communicative and socio-historical processes and tendencies (see, e.g., Miettinen, 2014). In this article, we prioritize the first meaning. In Husserl's view, most phenomenal processes have a certain direction; they either explicitly or implicitly indicate a goal or a '*telos*' towards which they are directed, independent of the *fact* of whether they manage to reach or fulfil that goal. Their *eidos* contains this directedness to a goal: intentions are directed towards fulfilment, a communicative act is directed towards an understanding reception by an open listener, ideas are related to at least partial realization, etc. Furthermore, Husserl held that the course of natural and socio-historical processes also has a direction (see, e.g., Husserl, 1983a, p. 134, 2014, pp. 165–167, Ms. B I 4). He contended that there is a form of development in the natural and social human worlds. Of course, there are setbacks and reverses in this history, and a process could eventually miss its inherent *telos*; however, in the long run, for Husserl, tendencies that are directed towards development and reach higher stages will prevail.

It is of crucial importance that Husserl, after 1906, placed acts of theoretical, practical, and axiological reason on the same level and granted to the correlates of *axiological reason* and attitude the same degree of *objectivity* as to the correlates of perception itself. This is because after 1906, when Husserl began to elaborate in detail on the problems of teleology, he closely connected teleology to the idea of a completely objectively conceived axiology.¹⁷ For Husserl, everything in the world has a certain axiological aspect. The world is full of axiological possibilities, which, in turn, are *teleologically* directed towards realization, towards axiological

¹⁷ One could say that this teleological and axiological order is ultimately entirely contingent because it depends on the actual existence of the world. We could also imagine a world that does not show a tendency toward improvement. This is, however, not the case for Husserl, at least regarding many of his metaphysically related manuscripts. In his view, the teleological and axiological order of the world does not lack inner necessity, as it finds its final basis in God Himself/Herself.

Even if the world did not exist, consciousness would nonetheless possess axiological features of different grades. However, it manifests its axiological attributes and potentialities through an actual state of things and the world. Every axiological actuality implies a higher grade of perfection – suggesting that in certain regards, everything could be better than it actually is.

Worldly processes may factually deviate from a phenomenologically conceivable axiological and teleological order of things – but they cannot do so forever. Sooner or later, things must approach a general level of axiological potentialities and realities. What is the source of this assumed necessity of development? In Husserl's opinion, it is God as the ultimate motor of every teleological development; moreover, it is God who, in the end, makes teleological development necessary. However, this idea presupposes a proof of God's existence. As we shall soon see, one can reconstruct such an argument based upon Husserl's considerations regarding transcendental idealism and the infinitude of phenomena.

realities. Every process in the world, and even the world itself – which, according to Husserl, is undergoing constant change – is directed towards evolving higher and higher axiological potentialities and realities. The changes and processes in the world – those of natural and cultural history or scientific progress – are directed towards *the idea of a world which is perfect in every regard (allervollkommenste Welt)* (see Husserl, 1988, pp. 170–185). The idea of infinite perfection also results from the phenomenological construction aimed at extending the graduality of *immediately given axiological possibilities and realities* to infinity.¹⁸ A further crucial link in Husserl’s chain of reasoning is that the idea of an absolutely perfect world is related to an absolutely perfect consciousness, that is to say, to the consciousness of *God* (1988, p. 177; see also 1983, p. 134).

After constructing the idea of infinity and infinite perfection, one can construct the idea of an infinite mind, which – for Husserl – can constitute an infinite world, with the infinite graduality of axiological possibilities and realities pertaining to this world. According to Husserl, the constitution of an infinite world prescribes with a priori necessity the existence of an infinite mind as a *constitutive source* for this world. The teleology of this world is a reflection of the idea and reality of an infinite mind. The different methodological steps in Husserl’s construction of the idea of an infinite mind were deeply embedded in his conception of *transcendental idealism*, which he – after his transcendental turn – also began to develop in this period after 1906 (see Husserl, 2003b). First, Husserl connected the idea of an actually existing individual thing and that of an actually existing and experiencing consciousness. He asserted that the former prescribes an actually existing consciousness that is capable of experiencing it (Husserl, 2003b, p. 77). Here, it is essential to recall that on the one hand, Husserl defined actual existence in terms of possible verification by an actually existing consciousness (2003b, p. 73), while on the other hand, he saw the actually existing thing ‘as an idea in the Kantian sense’ (2003b, p. 77; see also Tengelyi, 2005, 2010). The idea of an infinite world, however, *prescribes the idea of an infinite mind* capable of constituting the former in its entirety and in a coherent, unified, and harmonious way (cf. Husserl, 1988, pp. 176–177; see also Marosan, 2024).

It would seem, judging from many passages that Husserl dedicated to the problem, that he constructed God solely as an *idea* or *pole-idea (Polidee)* (e.g., Husserl, 1973c, p. 610, 1988, pp. 225–226, 1989b, p. 234, 2014, p. 250). According to this view, God for Husserl was nothing

¹⁸ For Husserl, due to the capability of categorial intuition – a notion that he elaborated in *Logical Investigations* – and intuition of essences – an idea immediately derived from the latter concept, which is elaborated in detail in *Ideas* – we are capable of immediately intuiting or experiencing values and possibilities of values in the world, in facts, events, and situations. Max Scheler had the same conception in this regard, which he systematically elaborated in his *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* (1916/1973).

more than an ideal of ultimate perfection or a completely impersonal cosmic force that guides the evolution of the universe, and in particular, human and non-human life on Earth. For this reason, interpreters of Husserl, such as Stephan Strasser, have claimed that God for Husserl was an idea or a universal cosmic force lacking any personal aspects (Strasser, 1979, p. 330). This is, however, only part of the story, and – in my opinion – a rather narrow, one-sided reading of the related textual places in Husserl. Many other passages in Husserl’s works make it absolutely clear and explicit that he also conceived of God as a *personal* being and power (cf. Lo, 2008; Varga, 2021;¹⁹ in Husserl, see, e.g., 1956, p. 289, 1970a, p. 66, 1973c, p. 381, 2014, pp. 168, 424). Our most important source in this regard is manuscript B II 2, written in 1908/09, in which Husserl emphatically emphasizes that God is an absolutely personal Being who is in empathy with every sensitive and suffering being and who guides the evolution of the world towards absolute perfection (2014, p. 168). For Husserl, God is definitely a subject, and a monadic one, which should, however, be referred to as the ‘supreme monad’ (*Übermonade*) (1973b, pp. 300–302). In God are unified personal and impersonal features in a coherent way. Nevertheless, God remains a subject with personal characteristics (see also Marosan, 2022).

In Husserl’s opinion, individual souls – as the transcendental self-apperceptions of each subject’s transcendental ego (1973c, pp. 541–542) – are integral to the universal teleological development of the world. They serve as individual, finite viewpoints of God, the Absolute, of the world, and of Herself/Himself, which ultimately renders Herself/Himself concrete (1973c, p. 381). The viewpoints of these souls that pertain to transcendental egos are – in Husserl’s view – completely irremovable from the fabric of reality. Thus, they could be considered ‘immortal’ (see Hess, 2011; MacDonald, 2007; Steinbock, 2017, pp. 21–35; Toronyai, 2023). Husserl also refers to transcendental egos with the term ‘transcendental substance’ (Husserl, 2006, p. 176). In Husserl’s view, individuals’ transcendental egos should be conceived of as formal, structural moments of reality or the Absolute itself, and whose ultimate destruction cannot be imagined at all – only their momentary inactivity (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 154–158). For Husserl, the phenomenologically based constructive application of phenomenological self-reflection could disclose this formal aspect of a transcendental ego that cannot emerge and decay and is – in a deeper and phenomenologically verified meaning – ‘immortal’ (e.g., Husserl,

¹⁹ To be precise, Lee Chun Lo emphasizes that Husserl’s conception of God is not a theistic concept (2008, pp. 192–195); nevertheless, he also highlights the personal features in Husserl’s notion of God. Peter Andras Varga (2021) rejects Lo’s view on Husserl’s approach. Varga, on the one hand, refers to Husserl’s religious commitments, although he is eager to add that it is a rationalist view of religion (2021, p. 43). On the other hand, in his interpretation – in contrast to Lo’s – this is also a *theist* conception of God (2021, p. 50).

1973b, pp. 154–158, 1973c, pp. 609–610, 1993, pp. 332–333, 2001d, pp. 466–471, 2002b, 471, 2014, pp. 140, 151).

4. Husserl's Late Phenomenological Metaphysics: A Metaphysics of Primordial Facts and God as the Ultimately Foundational Fact

4.1 The Changing Background of Husserl's Conception of Metaphysics in the 1920s and 1930s: Reversing the Relationship Between Possibility and Facticity in the Manuscripts

As we have seen, Husserl had a relatively clear picture of the relationship between first and second philosophy after 1906. According to this view, phenomenology, as the eidetic science of pure essences and the possibilities of consciousness, played the role of first philosophy, while metaphysics, which was required to embrace and integrate the phenomenologically revised results of the empirical sciences and fulfilled the further duty of providing an ultimate science of reality, had to be conceived of as second philosophy, 'a metaphysics in the new sense', a phenomenologically grounded metaphysics (see Husserl, 1960, pp. 144, 156, 2019, p. 194, footnote). This model presupposed a strict metaphysical order between factuality and possibility, between facts and essences, and it declared the absolute precedence of the latter – possibilities and essences – over the former, namely, reality. This was the case in his posthumously published lecture series – including *First Philosophy* of 1924–1925 (2019) and *Phenomenological Psychology* of 1925 (1977) – and in books and articles for publication – such as *Cartesian Meditations* (1931/1960) and the Encyclopaedia Britannica article 'Phenomenology' (1927/1971). This situation began to change in the background, as the research manuscripts from the 1920s reveal.

In a 1921 manuscript, Husserl says that 'facts lead every eidetic' (Husserl, Ms. B III 10, p. 19; see also Holenstein, 1972, p. 24; Yamaguchi, 1982, p. 140).²⁰ In his thought, from the beginning of the 1920s, facts and factuality acquired ever greater importance.²¹ Husserl was increasingly sensitive and attentive to the peculiar *entwinement* of facts and essences, of reality

²⁰ To this, see also Husserl, 1973b, pp. 154–160, 2019, pp. 621–633 (e.g., 'History is the grand fact of absolute being', p. 633), and manuscripts from 1921–1924.

²¹ In my interpretation – in partial accordance with László Tengelyi's reading – we should speak of more than just a collection of isolated textual places. Beginning in the early 1920s, there is a clear tendency in Husserl to increasingly emphasize the importance of factuality. The manuscript mentioned above (Ms. B III 10) is only one link in the chain. Other textual places include Husserl 1973b, pp. 154–158, 1973c, pp. 378–386, and 1993, pp. 84–89. This tendency strongly supports the idea of a clearly distinguishable third period in the development of Husserl's metaphysical thought.

and possibility, which his ‘genetic phenomenology’ disclosed to him.²² This path led him to the insight that there are certain ultimate, foundational facts that precede and undergird every other particular fact, essence, and possibility. In the background, Husserl, in his manuscripts, began to adumbrate *a new metaphysical conception*, which László Tengelyi labelled ‘the metaphysics of primal facts’ (*Urfakta, Urtatsache*) (Tengelyi, 2011, 2014, pp. 180–191). This new conception was dominated by the precedence and foundational function of certain absolute primordial facts, without which no experiential appearance would be imaginable.

The phenomenologist must employ the method of ‘constructions’ to disclose, grasp, and describe the ‘primal facts’ lying beyond every fact, possibility, and essence, and which ultimately fall beyond the borders of immediate intuitive appearance because they are peculiar factual structures that make every intuitive appearance possible in the first place (see also Marosan, 2015). Despite the fact that Husserl rarely mentions the term ‘construction’ in those manuscripts in which he explicitly and thoroughly treats ‘primal facts’ (e.g., Husserl, 1973b, pp. 151–160, 1973c, pp. 361–386,²³ 593–597), the method itself is clearly used in his related

²² The phenomenological discipline of the a priori principles of every experiential genesis – a perspective that began to dominate his philosophical efforts at the beginning of the 1920s (see, e.g., Husserl 2001c; see also, e.g., Lee, 1993; Steinbock, 1995).

²³ In a manuscript from 5 November 1931, ‘Teleology. The Implication of the Eidos of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in the Transcendental Eidos Ego. Factum and Eidos’ (Husserl, 1973c, pp. 378–386), Husserl explicitly refers to the method of phenomenological construction, although in the context of constructing an eidōs, an alien transcendental ego, and transcendental intersubjectivity (1973c, pp. 383–384). However, the idea that we should acquire the ultimate facts through a sort of phenomenological construction by questioning beyond the borders of intuitive givenness is – at least in my opinion – also clearly present in this text.

Earlier, in footnote 3, we have already attempted to clarify the question of how consciously Husserl used the method of phenomenological constructions, especially before he read Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*. As we have said, Husserl did not provide a fully and systematically elaborated conception of phenomenological construction. Nevertheless, it is not a completely hypothetical interpretative gesture to interpret Husserl’s use of the terms ‘construction’ or ‘constructive’ in a phenomenological context, or to read his speculative trains of thought concerning God and immortality as examples of performing a sort of constructive phenomenology.

In this context, the following points are relevant. When Husserl spoke about problems of immortality and God from a phenomenological viewpoint, the broader context of such trains of thought, in my opinion, indicates that they are special issues to which the phenomenological method cannot be applied in the same manner as to other, less speculative topics. For example, concerning death, Husserl (2006, p. 436) argued, ‘It would be nonsensical to want to experience death as death’. In the case of God, Husserl usually turns to a procedure of ideal construction to construct the idea of an absolute, infinite being and mind – thereby indicating that the phenomenologist should leave behind the realm of accessible finite intuitions.

Furthermore, we should emphasize that Husserl regularly and repeatedly uses the terms ‘construction’, ‘to construct’, and ‘constructive’ with a positive connotation in a phenomenological context. Moreover, he actually performs the procedure in question – phenomenological construction – over and over again. He does so mostly to construct eidetic structures and ideal possibilities – but he also uses this method beyond the field of the theory of essences (*Wesenslehre*) and eidetics. In particular, he speaks extensively about construction regarding the conception of a phenomenologically grounded ethics in constructing ethical ideals (Husserl, 1988, 2014), albeit with more than a solely ethical meaning. He also discusses constructing the idea of God as a teleological end pole and constructions related to teleology as such. We should interpret these constructions – I argue – as *following apodictical indications in the evidently given* beyond the boundaries of intuitive givenness. In this way, they bear a deeper and stronger metaphysical meaning (Husserl, 1988, pp. 170–176).

trains of thought. Husserl clearly realized that he had reached the boundaries of possible intuitive givenness and was forced to question beyond these boundaries and attempt to *speculate* (Tengelyi, 2014, pp. 187–188) about the *structures* that made any intuitive and experiential givenness possible.

How should one imagine the peculiar ontological character and status of these ‘primal facts’, which precede facts, factualities, and reality on the one hand, and possibilities and essences on the other? László Tengelyi uses Aristotle’s idea of ‘*hypothetical necessity*’ from *De Interpretatione* (*Peri Hermeneias*) to shed light on Husserl’s conception of ‘primal facts’ with greater accuracy and specificity (Tengelyi, 2014, pp. 189–190; see also Breuer, 2017). As Aristotle wrote, ‘What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not’ (1975, p. 52 [19a, 23]). Husserl’s ‘primal facts’ unify in themselves characteristics of singularity and generality and of possibility and necessity. They appear to be factual because they exhibit the peculiarity of being ‘so-and-so, and not otherwise’, which apparently cannot be explained further through other ‘deeper’, more specific, or more accurate explanatory terms or considerations. Therefore, Husserl also spoke about the ‘irrationality of the transcendental fact’, that is, the irrationality of primal facts (2019, p. 194, footnote). On the other hand, these facts ultimately make possible every possibility, actuality, and necessity that appears and is accessible in our experience, *as if they were ultimate conditions of possibility*.

Husserl makes reference to a number of different primal or primordial facts.²⁴ Tengelyi identifies *four* fundamental groups of primal or primordial facts in Husserl’s work (2014, pp. 184–187). The *first* group is characterized by every flow of experience necessarily pertaining to an experiencing ego. There is no experience without a subject who experiences it. The *second* group refers to the fact that every ego necessarily possesses a world (*Welthabe*) that belongs to the factual existence of an ego that necessarily constitutes this world (see, e.g., Husserl, 2008b, pp. 251–258). The *third* group relates to the intersubjective character of the ego. This

As regards the immortality of the transcendental ego, Husserl had to meditate on the question of a disembodied ego, which is quite problematic from a phenomenological viewpoint, as my ego always appears to me as embodied (see, e.g., Husserl, 1973b, pp. 256–257). Although Husserl insisted that I cannot imagine the nonexistence of my transcendental ego (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 154–158, 1993, pp. 332, 338), he was also aware of the fact – his particular way of articulating the problem, in my opinion, makes it clear – that we cannot access a disembodied pure ego as we can other phenomenological topics, because the phenomenologically peculiar status of such an ego forces us to relate to this question in a constructive manner.

I believe that Husserl’s regular and positive usage of the word ‘construction’ with both phenomenological and metaphysical connotations, coupled with Husserl’s specific approach to questions like the existence of God or immortality within a phenomenological context, make it legitimate to speak of phenomenological constructions – or constructive phenomenology – in Husserl prior to Eugen Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*.

²⁴ Such as *there is only one world* (see, e.g., Husserl, 2008b, p. 57; see also Held, 1991). I am grateful to Professor Dermot Moran for drawing my attention to this example.

necessitates characterizing the concrete, actual being of the ego in terms of the phenomena of ‘being-for-each-other’ (*Füreinandersein*) and ‘being-in-each-other’ (*Ineinandersein*) (see Husserl, 1973c, p. 366). The ego cannot be specific without being part of an intersubjective community. Last, but not least, the ego is necessarily a *historical being*. Thus, the *fourth* group entails the historical and teleological features of the ego’s concrete existence. *Without historical reality, there is no specific and concrete experiential appearance* (e.g., Husserl, 1973c, pp. 391–394, 593–597).²⁵

A closer look reveals that these four groups – the ego-centric perspective, world-possession, intersubjectivity, and historicity – are not separate but rather form a systematically interrelated and coherent network. Together, they make possible every concrete and specific experiential phenomenon as its condition of possibility, but they themselves lie beyond the borders of intuitive givenness, where they could be accessible through the method of phenomenological construction. One question remains, however: What principle can make this set or network of primal facts truly coherent and cohesive? Is there an actually ultimate fact among primal facts that can integrate them all into one single and unified system? As the next subsection discusses, for Husserl, there was indeed such a principle: *namely God*.

4.2 A Metaphysics of Contingency or of the Absolute? Husserl’s Last Words Concerning the Ultimate Nature of Reality in the 1930s

In László Tengelyi’s view, Husserl, in his late period of the 1930s, abandoned his earlier efforts to answer the ‘supreme and ultimate questions’ of metaphysics. These questions – concerning immortality of the soul and the existence of God – belong to the terrain of *metaphysica specialis*, and engaging with them promised to lay down the foundations of a metaphysics that was essentially different from classical and traditional metaphysics, namely, a *metaphysics of contingency* (Tengelyi, 2014, pp. 180–182). To be fair, Tengelyi mentions that with the fourth group of primal facts relating to historicity, Husserl connected historical teleology ‘to the idea of God’ (Tengelyi, 2014, p. 185). However, it is Tengelyi’s well-considered opinion that these motifs became relatively marginal in Husserl’s late period, by which time he was pursuing a fundamentally new direction in his metaphysical reflections. Actually, Tengelyi contends that

²⁵ In my opinion, in Husserl’s last main work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936/1970a), one can identify all these primal or primordial facts: 1) the ultimate facticity of the transcendental ego as ‘primal ego’ (1970a, pp. 184–186, § 54/b); 2) this ego necessarily has a world; 3) it is intersubjective and necessarily constitutes intersubjectivity; and 4) it is also historical; it should also be considered part of ‘transcendental historicity’ (1970a, pp. 188, 208–209). To the problem of ‘primal ego’ (‘Ur-Ich’), see also Kühn (1998) and Taguchi (2006).

Husserl's late metaphysical conception – whose roots can be traced back to the time of *Ideas* (1913/1983a) – could be regarded as *an overture of a new era in metaphysical thought, the era of a metaphysics of facticity and contingency*. In this last section, I provide certain considerations on Husserl's later views concerning metaphysics, which might help to nuance and partially recontextualize Tengelyi's reading of Husserl.

First, an enormous number of texts in Husserl's late period provide evidence that he never abandoned his earlier metaphysical endeavours to answer the 'supreme and ultimate questions' of *metaphysica specialis*.²⁶ Based on these texts, it seems certain that the role of the 'metaphysics of primal facts' in Husserl's thinking in the 1920s and '30s was not to *replace* his earlier metaphysical ambitions with a completely new type of metaphysics; rather, it was to *secure a more solid grounding for his metaphysical ambitions* by attempting to raise classical metaphysical questions in an entirely new way and seek answers to them through the novel paths opened via this reformulated and rearticulated approach. In my opinion, the emergence of Husserl's 'metaphysics of primal facts' was intimately connected to his 'discovery' and elaboration of 'genetic phenomenology' (see, e.g., Husserl, 2001d), and just like the latter, the former resulted in circular and mutually foundational relations between different spheres, levels, and segments of constitution. The constitution of facts, essences, and possibilities appeared to be *entwined* from the genetic viewpoint; this, in turn, indicated certain 'deeper facts' that preceded their entwinement. However, the entwinement itself could not be properly understood without adequately understanding these 'deeper facts'. The 'metaphysics of primal facts', in my interpretation, served as the ultimate explanatory foundation and context for Husserl's epistemology, ontology, and *metaphysica specialis*; therefore, he had no motivation to replace any of them.

As regards Tengelyi's interpretation of Husserl's late thought – according to which Husserl replaced theologically related questions of *metaphysica specialis* (God, immortality) with the 'metaphysics of primal facts' – perhaps the two most important textual sources are manuscripts from 1922 (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 154–158) and 1931 (Husserl, 1973c, pp. 378–386). The 1922 manuscript is important for Tengelyi because in it, Husserl relates every possibility, essence, and essential possibility to the factual being of *my concrete ego* (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 154–155). This text shows the facticity of the ego as a necessary point of departure in metaphysical and generally philosophical regards. However, a closer look at the text reveals that this particular train of thought about the foundational role of my specific, singular ego in the constitution of

²⁶ In this regard, we should particularly emphasize the importance of his E-Manuscripts, which were partly published in volume 42 of *Husserliana*, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Husserl, 2014).

possibilities and essences is embedded in a wider series of reflections on the immortality of the ego. According to these reflections, each single transcendental ego and the particular perspective that pertains to it belong, in a peculiar way, to the very fabric or structure of reality. For Husserl, these perspectives cannot be ablated or ‘surgically removed’ from the fabric of reality. We can imagine that a transcendental ego is temporarily inactive or remains dormant for an indefinite period; however, it is unimaginable that a transcendental ego and its perspective would remain inactive forever, as in an everlasting ‘dreamless sleep’ or ‘black night’. Sooner or later, it must be reactivated (Husserl, 1973b, pp. 157–158).

Tengelyi considers the abovementioned 1931 text as perhaps the clearest and most detailed account of ‘primal facts’ provided by Husserl (1973c, pp. 378–386). Again, Tengelyi highlights how Husserl relates every essence, possibility, and necessity back to the factual existence of the ego as primal fact. He quotes the following passage from Husserl: ‘We arrive at ultimate “facts” – primordial facts, ultimate necessities, primordial necessities’. Husserl adds, ‘*I am, however, who ponders over them; it is I who question back to them from the world that I already “have”, and finally arrive at them. I think, I perform reduction – I, who I am and am for myself in this horizontality*’ (Husserl, 1973c, pp. 385–386; Tengelyi, 2011, 2014, pp. 183–184). It is not explicit, however, in Tengelyi’s chain of reasoning, that the broader context of these words in Husserl is *a reflection on God as the ultimate ground for every possibility, reality, and necessity and as the absolute foundation of every ego*. It is worth taking a closer look at the passages that precede and follow the words quoted by Tengelyi:

Given this situation, can one say that this teleology, with its primordial facticity, has its grounding in God? We arrive at ultimate ‘facts’ – primal facts and ultimate necessities, the primordial necessities.

I am, however, who ponders over them; it is I who question back to them from the world that I already ‘have’, and finally arrive at them. I think, I perform reduction – I, who I am and am for myself in this horizontality.

I am the primordial factum in this progression. I recognize that within my factual capacity for essential variation, etc., in my factual inquiries, specific primal elements arise as inherent structures of my facticity, and that within myself, I carry a core of ‘primal contingency’ in forms of essence, in forms of potential functioning, in which the worldly essential necessities are then grounded. I cannot transcend my factual being and therein the intentionally resolved coexistence of others, etc., and hence absolute reality. The Absolute has its grounding in itself and in its groundless being, its absolute necessity as the one ‘absolute substance’. Its necessity is not an essential necessity that

would leave something contingent. All essential necessities are moments of its factum, are modes of its functioning with regard to itself – its modes of understanding itself or being able to understand.

I believe, given this context, that this train of thought implies not solely a ‘metaphysics of contingency’ but also an attempt to provide a phenomenological account of the being of God, who – in this reflection – appears as the ultimate foundation of every ego, teleology, contingency, necessity, reality, and possibility. What makes this line of thinking ambiguous is the identity of the subject of the last three sentences, beginning from line 14 in the Husserliana edition (‘The Absolute has its grounding in itself . . .’). Which does it refer to – God or the transcendental ego? If the subject is the ‘transcendental ego’, which is the case in earlier sentences from lines 38–39 at the bottom of page 385 (‘*I am, however, who ponders over them . . .*’), it would support László Tengelyi’s reading.

However, beginning with line 14 on page 386, the subject suddenly and unmistakably changes. The broader context of the sentences on the last page of this particular text – specifically, the question at the bottom of the previous page on lines 36–37 (‘Given this situation, can one say that this teleology, with its primordial facticity, has its grounding in God?’) – make it unambiguous and, in my opinion, incontrovertible that the ‘Absolute’ on the last page is not the transcendental ego but rather *God Himself/Herself*. Lee Chun Lo endorsed this interpretation when he attempted to decipher the above-cited sentences. He wrote: ‘The “Absolute” that grounds itself from itself, of which we are speaking here, cannot be the transcendental subject, because that would leave room for contingencies as something essential; therefore, the only possibility remaining is to determine the groundless “Absolute” mentioned here as the divine Absolute’ (Lo, 2008, p. 84). I believe Lo is correct. The phrasing of the final three sentences of the paragraph and the entire context of the text (Husserl, 1973c, pp. 378–386) support the reading that Husserl changed the subject beginning at line 14 on page 386, after which he no longer mentioned the transcendental ego but rather God Himself/Herself.²⁷

Based on this specific text (Husserl, 1973c, pp. 378–386) and others from the 1930s (see, e.g., Husserl, 2014, pp. 212–235, 246–251, 256–263), it seems certain that for Husserl, God – as personal and impersonal power – served as the ultimate foundation and teleological principle for every Being, fact, possibility, necessity, ‘lower grade’ primal fact (related to the individual and factual existence of egos), and individual egos as such, as well as for transcendental

²⁷ It is also essential to keep in mind the particular *genre* of this text when we interpret it. It is a ‘research manuscript’. Research manuscripts have a rather protean character – Husserl was thinking as he wrote them, and he sometimes changed the *grammatical subject* of a particular train of thought within one paragraph or passage.

intersubjectivity. As mentioned earlier, in the light of his ‘genetic phenomenology’, foundational relations became quite complex, in many cases mutual and circular, but God remained the final and ultimate foundational principle for everything real and ideal, although in a very strange way: namely, Husserl thought that transcendental intersubjectivity played a foundational role in confirming the existence of God, although in a circular manner (Husserl, 1973c, p. 381). Nevertheless, he always emphasized that no specific and concrete – no subjective or intersubjective – constitution could take place without God, who, in turn, could also be accessed indirectly from the phenomenological perspective, via a constructive process, as the final explanatory principle of every concrete phenomenon.

5. Concluding Remarks

This study provided an overview of the development of Husserl’s metaphysical perspective and his attempts to tackle ‘supreme and ultimate questions’ through the method of phenomenological construction. We saw that Husserl made several crucial discoveries that helped him thematize these questions in a way that he felt was appropriate from the phenomenological point of view. The ‘transcendental turn’ around 1906/07 opened the way for the idea of phenomenological construction and its proper application to metaphysical problems in a phenomenologically legitimate manner. Subsequently, the ‘discovery’ of ‘genetic phenomenology’ around 1917/18 was a crucial means that allowed him to develop his ‘metaphysics of primal facts’ in the 1920s and 1930s – as László Tengelyi also highlighted. In this last period of his metaphysical thought, he combined phenomenological construction with his conception of ‘primal facts’, and in this final, unified framework, God appeared as the ultimate primordial fact, serving as the unitary basis for every ego, transcendental intersubjectivity as such, and every possibility, reality, and necessity. Regardless of whether one accepts or rejects the legitimacy of Husserl’s particular way of using the method of phenomenological construction to answer the ‘supreme and ultimate problems’, I believe that this method continues to hold huge potential for phenomenology (as, e.g., Alexander Schnell also believes); in this regard, how Husserl tried to use constructive operations in phenomenology remains highly informative.

Acknowledgements. I would like to express my gratitude to the following persons for their contributions to this article: Paul MacIntyre, Balázs M. Mezei, Gábor Toronyai, Tamás Ullmann, Péter András Varga, and my anonymous reviewer.

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Conflict of interest: None.