A Clarification of Edmund Husserl’s Distinction between Phenomenological Psychology and Transcendental Phenomenology

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Edmund Husserl in several of his writings maintains that, while phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology have certain elements in common, the two disciplines remain radically distinct. Historically Husserl’s development of phenomenological psychology was occasioned by prior advances made in the conceptualization of transcendental phenomenology, and, in this way, the two sciences were closely correlated in content and method. At the same time, while Husserl devoted a certain amount of attention to the distinction between phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology, the nature of the distinction remained obscure and undetermined in a formal sense. In point of fact, the two lines of analysis seem to converge in texts in which Husserl deals specifically with this distinction.

Although commentators such as Herbert Spiegelberg, Enzo Paci, Hermann Drüe, and Joseph Kockelmans have given critical consideration to the notion of phenomenological psychology in Husserl’s works, the nature of the distinction between the psychological and transcendental disciplines has not been considered in depth, and the obscurities surrounding the distinction have not been dispelled.

The task to which this paper addresses itself is two-fold: to exhibit the nature of the distinction maintaining between phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology and to provide a formal clarification of the distinction upon the basis of Husserl’s part-whole logic.