Husserlian phenomenology is at bottom an attempt to fulfill the Aristotelian ambition to establish a science of being qua being. Specifically, phenomenology reinscribes the twofold fundamental sense of being, or \( \text{oùσία} \), as 1) the primal category or the primordial sense in which being can be said to be, in other words, the \( \dot{a}ρχή \) or the \( \piρός \ εν \lambdaεγόμενον \), 2. addressing things in their \( τὸ τί ἦν εἴναοι \), that is, in their “what it was to be” for them, or in what the scholastics called their \textit{quidditas}: first philosophy is an investigation into the essence or the whatness of things. What form does this basic structure of ontology take in Husserl’s phenomenology? In §76 of \textit{Ideas I}, Husserl postulates that we need to distinguish between two senses of being: first, there is being as consciousness, and second, being as “announcing itself” (\textit{sich bekundedes}) in consciousness. The first sense of being is the one attained by way of the phenomenological reduction and corresponds with the domain of “absolute” being. It is, Husserl claims, in perfect accord with Aristotle, the \textit{Urkategorie} of being, the primordial sense and category from which all others unfold. It is also the transcendental dimension of being: consciousness is not of this world, it is not innerworldly, but “before” the world, since the world is constituted in and for it. As such, consciousness is not a region alongside other regions (e.g., empirical consciousness, or nature, or thing), but is the first region, or the region of all regions. This amounts to saying that it is precisely not a region, and that phenomenology, insofar as it takes consciousness thus defined as its object, is not a regional ontology, but the ontology of all ontologies: “pure
phenomenology seems to contain within itself all ontologies.” The second sense of being is that of transcendence, or of beings as such and as a whole. And it becomes an object for phenomenology through the eidetic reduction, that is, through the operation that converts an empirical intuition, or the experience of a concrete singularity, into a vision of essence (Wesensorschauung). Within the latter sense of being, then, it is that of quiddity which is retained, leaving the τόδε τι or the hic et nunc outside of the sphere of philosophical inquiry. Thus, in a way, Husserl is even quicker than Aristotle in converting the question of οῦσία, originally envisaged by Aristotle in its primordial sense (πρώτην οὐσία), as παρουσία, or presence (subsequently identified as existentia), into the question of quidditas, or essentia: “The universal essence can be unfolded in thought, and its unfolding necessarily leads to an ontology.” And the further distinction drawn by Husserl between “matters of fact” (or existents) — toward which the empirical sciences are directed—and “essences”—towards which the pure sciences in general, and philosophy in particular and exemplarily, are oriented, takes place within the prior interpretation of being as quiddity. Such is the reason why, ultimately, phenomenology and psychology are two radically different sciences: they do not deal with the same objects. Whereas the objects of phenomenology are unreal (irreale), those of psychology—or of any such empirical science—are “realities” (Realitäten) or actual events: they are spatially and temporal individuated singularities. Let us note, then, from the start, that phenomenology does not deal with events, or with existents, but with essences, and that it is a science that is developed, at least in principle, completely independently of experience (phenomenology is a “pure” science, like mathematics or logic). Furthermore, whereas essences are considered to be “necessary,” concrete individuals—which are always an instance of an essence, and thus of a necessity—are themselves deemed merely “contingent” or “factual” (tatsächlich).

Now the primary consequence of ontology thus understood is the undisputed and unquestioned privilege granted to identity and permanence as sustaining and guaranteeing the twofold sense of being as absolute ἀρχή (whether as prime mover or as transcendental consciousness) and as essence or quiddity. Ousiology, whether in its Aristotelian or Husserlian version, is committed to the twofold principle of permanence and of identity, which legitimize and ground both the ego-substance in its archaic status as constitutive power as well as the idea-essence in its manifesting power. Transcendental consciousness—as the origin or primal horizon within which the world is constituted—and the essence of any given phenomenon both share the structure of self-identity. Both are exclusive of heterogeneity and differences. Leaving aside for the moment the first sense of being (I shall return to it only toward the end of this analysis), I wish to focus on the second, and emphasize the structure that underlies it, in an attempt to tease out all the consequences attached