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## PENITENTIAL METHOD AS PHENOMENOLOGICAL: THE PENITENTIAL *EPOCHE*\*

Synthesizing Thomism and phenomenology, this paper compares the kind of reflective thinking and willing that goes on in penitential acts to Edmund Husserl’s method of the phenomenological *ἐποχή* (*epoche*).<sup>1</sup> As with the other sacraments, St. Thomas takes penance to be a kind of virtue, which means that it is a habitual disposition with corresponding acts.<sup>2</sup> Analysis of penance up through the act of contrition shows it to have three primary acts: (1) the examination of conscience, and (2) the reordering of the will and (3) the resolve not to sin again in regret. After presenting this Thomistic conception of contrition, the essence of Husserl’s *ἐποχή* as a method intended to “suspend” certain beliefs in order to discover the truth about knowledge will be presented. In conclusion, it will be shown that a particular form of the

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<sup>2</sup> See section “The Sacrament of Penance,” and especially footnote 3, below.

ἐποχή—a penitential ἐποχή—must be employed in these three penitential acts so that a disposition of grace may be made present in the penitent. The key to the comparison made in this study between phenomenology and penance is that each act involved in contrition entails a “suspension” analogous to that of the ἐποχή on the part of the penitent. While the intentional analysis pursuant to Husserl’s ἐποχή, being limited in its scope to the critique of knowledge, requires only a νόησις-νόημα (*noesis-noema*) or knower-known view of the structure of consciousness, the penitential ἐποχή, extending in its scope to acts of will themselves, requires also a βούλησις-βούλημα (*boulesis-boulema*) or willing-willed view of the structure of consciousness. Expressing these penitential activities by way of analogy to the ἐποχή can aid the penitent in making an act of contrition and returning to a virtuous disposition of grace.

### The Sacrament of Penance

In book IV of *Summa Contra Gentiles*, after treating the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist, St. Thomas Aquinas turns his efforts to the sacrament of penance. While the sacraments bestow grace and communion, they do not render the Christian incapable of sinning. The reason for this pertains to the nature of the sacraments themselves as “gratuitous gifts [that] are received in the soul as habitual dispositions (*habituales dispositiones*)”—i.e., as a special kind of virtue.<sup>3</sup> As a habitual disposition, the grace of a sacrament is something

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<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, ch. 70, sec. 2: “Gratuita enim dona recipiuntur in anima sicut habituales dispositiones . . .” Significantly, question 85 of the *supplementum* in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, also states that penance is a virtue (*virtus*) since, in one manner of speaking it is grief or sorrow that follows on an act of choice (*electio*) and, as Aristotle says at *Nicomachean Ethics*, B, 6: “Ἔστιν ἄρα ἡ ἀρετὴ ἕξις προαιρετικὴ . . . ὡς ἂν ὁ φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν . . . (Thus, virtue is a disposition deliberately choosing . . . as the prudent man would so define . . .).” Penance as grief in the sense of a passion, of course, is not a virtue. The translations of St. Thomas Latin

that a man need not act in accord with.<sup>4</sup> “Nothing prohibits him who has a habit to act according to the habit or contrary to it,” says Thomas.<sup>5</sup> This is shown by the example of the grammarian, who possesses the habitual disposition of the knowledge and practice of proper grammar, but who may yet choose to speak with proper *or* improper grammar. Thomas then relates this point to the moral virtues:

And, thus, it is also the same concerning habits of moral virtues. One who has the habit of justice is able to act contrary to justice. The reason for this is that the use of the habit in us is from the will, and the will is related to either of a pair of alternatives. It is manifest, therefore, that, receiving gratuitous gifts, man is able to sin, acting contrary to grace.<sup>6</sup>

Having shown that man can indeed sin (post-baptism), and also that he may return again to a state of grace,<sup>7</sup> Thomas then turns to the necessity of penance and its nature. In order to explain this sacrament, he begins by drawing an analogy between acts of physical healing and acts of penitential (spiritual) healing: “as it is in the case of those things which have obtained a natural life through generation, that if they should contract some disease which is contrary to the perfection of life, they are able to be cured from the disease . . . by a certain [physical] alteration,” so too, persons having committed post-baptismal acts of sin

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are my own. Aristotle’s Greek is taken from *Aristoteles et Corpus Aristotelicum Phil., Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. I. Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894; repr. 1962); the translation of Aristotle, here, is also my own.

<sup>4</sup> *S.C.G.* IV, ch. 70, sec. 2: “[N]on enim homo secundum ea semper agit,” the antecedent of *ea* here being *dispositiones*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: “Nihil autem prohibet eum qui habitum habet, agere secundum habitum vel contra eum . . .”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: “Et ita est etiam de habitibus virtutum moralium: potest enim qui iustitiae habitum habet, et contra iustitiam agere. Quod ideo est quia usus habituum in nobis ex voluntate est: voluntas autem ad utrumque oppositorum se habet. Manifestum est igitur quod suscipiens gratuita dona peccare potest contra gratiam agendo.”

<sup>7</sup> This is the topic of chapter 71 of *S.C.G.* IV.

can be healed by the sacrament of penance, “which is, as it were, a type of spiritual alteration.”<sup>8</sup> By parsing out this analogy, Thomas exposes the essential characteristics of the act of penance.

Causal explanation for acts of physical healing can be divided into two kinds. (1) At times, they have their principle solely from *within* (*ab intrinseco*), following from the nature of the organism itself healing.<sup>9</sup> (2) At other times, as when medicine is administered, physical healing may also require an extrinsic principle (*ab extrinseco*). However, Thomas is careful to qualify, a person is never cured entirely by external principles. The person must necessarily have within himself the principle of life, which, in this case, along with the external principle, allows him to heal.<sup>10</sup> Because grace is necessary for the human to overcome his fault(s),<sup>11</sup> spiritual healing can never be brought about entirely from within, or by the intrinsic spiritual principles of the sinner’s nature.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, and like physical acts of healing, man’s spiritual cure cannot come entirely from an extrinsic principle

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 72, sec. 1: “Sicut enim qui vitam naturalem per generationem adepti sunt, si aliquem morbum incurrant qui sit contrarius perfectioni vitae, a morbo curari possunt, non quidem sic ut iterato nascantur, sed quadam alteratione sanantur; ita Baptismus, qui est spiritualis regeneratio, non reiteratur contra peccata post Baptismum commissa, sed poenitentia, quasi quadam spirituali alteratione, sanantur. (For, as it is in the case of those things which have obtained a natural life through generation, that if they should contract some disease which is contrary to the perfection of life, they are able to be cured from the disease, not indeed as though they are born again, but that they are healed by a certain alteration, so too, Baptism, which a spiritual regeneration, is not repeated against sin after Baptism has been received, but [post baptized sinners] are healed by penance, which is, as it were, a type of spiritual alteration.)”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 72, sect. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Here, we can understand the analysis with respect to *original*, and *post-baptismal* sin.

<sup>12</sup> *S.C.G.* IV, ch. 72, sect. 1: “In spirituali vero curatione accidere non potest quod totaliter ab intrinseco fiat: ostensum est enim in tertio quod a culpa homo liberari non potest nisi auxilio gratiae. (However, in the case of the spiritual cure, it is not able to happen that it be accomplished completely by an intrinsic principle: for it is apparent from book III that man cannot be freed from sin except through the assistance of grace.)”

either. Rather, penitential healing is wrought by the intrinsic principle of *will* in cooperation with the extrinsic principles of grace.<sup>13</sup>

In order to accomplish spiritual healing, and where sin is understood as a kind of disorder, Thomas conveys that penance requires the ordering of the mind and the resolve to avoid the re-commission of sin in regret. The essence of the act of contrition, and what penance requires, is that “the mind be turned back toward God and away from sin, grieving from its commission, and proposing not to commit it again.”<sup>14</sup> This reordering of the mind toward God cannot occur without grace and the Charity of God which follows on it.<sup>15</sup> Once this grace and Charity are received, the penitent is freed from condemnation: “through contrition the offence to God is removed and also the sinner is freed of the guilt of eternal punishment, which cannot be at the same time with grace and charity.”<sup>16</sup> Thomas then emphasizes, again, that this reordering of the mind through contrition, which re-establishes a virtuous state

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 72, sect. 2 & 5: “Similiter etiam neque potest esse quod spiritualis curatio sit totaliter ab exteriori: non enim restitueretur sanitas mentis nisi ordinati motus voluntatis in homine causarentur. Oportet igitur in poenitentiae sacramento spirituales salutem et ab interiori et ab exteriori procedere. (At the same time, neither is it possible that spiritual healing be from a totally exterior principle: for the health of the mind would not be restored unless the ordained movements of the will were caused in the human. Thus, it is necessary that in the sacrament of penance spiritual health proceed both from an interior and an exterior principle.)” See footnote 17 below concerning the will as the intrinsic principle and God’s grace as the extrinsic principle.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 72, sec. 4: “Primum igitur quod in poenitentia requiritur, est ordinatio mentis: ut scilicet mens convertatur ad Deum, et avertatur a peccato, dolens de commisso, et proponens non committendum: quod est de ratione contritionis.”

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 72, sect. 5: “Haec vero mentis reordinatio sine gratia esse non potest: nam mens nostra debite ad Deum converti non potest sine caritate, caritas autem sine gratia haberi non potest, ut patet ex his quae in tertio dicta sunt. (But this reordering of the mind is not possible without grace, for our mind cannot be duly turned toward God without charity, and charity is not able to be possessed without grace—as is apparent from those things which have been said in book III.)”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: “Sic igitur per contritionem et offensa Dei tollitur et a reatu poenae aeternae liberatur, qui cum gratia et caritate esse non potest: non enim aeterna poena est nisi per separationem a Deo, cui gratia et caritate homo coniungitur.”

of grace, “proceeds from an intrinsic principle, i.e., from free choice (*a libero arbitrio*), along with the assistance of divine grace [the extrinsic principle].”<sup>17</sup>

Implied in Thomas’ claim that the *will* is the intrinsic principle of spiritual healing, is the notion that knowledge is also a necessary intrinsic principle for a person to be spiritually healed. As he conceives it, the will is not a raw un-intelligible and un-intelligent desire, e.g., in the utilitarian sense, but rather a desire informed by what is intellectually apprehended as what is good for one: *voluntas nominat rationalem appetitum*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the *will* as intrinsic cause of spiritual healing must be placed in the context of the human’s possession of the intellectual faculty, which allows him to understand the state he is in. The role of knowledge in penance emerges where the penitent must seek to know his own moral failings in examination of conscience before asking for forgiveness. To accomplish this task, the penitent must have knowledge of moral precepts (universals), and apply this knowledge in intellectual acts of judgment to particular actions. Only after such an activity can one regret sin and form the resolve not to commit it again. The penitent will desire a contrite heart because he knows his defect and that the virtuous state of grace it will accomplish in him is what is good and best. Thus, it is apparent that penance also entails the act of examination of conscience.<sup>19</sup>

The foregoing Thomistic analysis allows for a threefold division of contrition. First, one must become aware, one must *know* one’s sin, and this is accomplished through the reflective act of the examination

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: “Haec igitur mentis reordinatio, quae in contritione consistit, ex interiori procedit, idest a libero arbitrio, cum adiutorio divinae gratiae.”

<sup>18</sup> *S.Th.* I–II, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 1. See also, *Ibid.*, q. 14, a. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Thus, tradition has included the act of examination of conscience as a preparatory aspect of penance. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1454.

of conscience with the grace of God.<sup>20</sup> Second, in a state of regret, one's will must be ordered to God as the ultimate good, removing the disordered desire for lower goods. Third, one must desire not to return to the state where the object or good at hand is related to improperly.

## The Phenomenological ἐποχή

### *The Natural Attitude*

Husserl's way to phenomenology through the ἐποχή begins with a description of what he terms the *natural attitude* (*natürliche Geisteshaltung*). The natural attitude is first characterized as the most basic knowing-conscious experience of a world and the objects that reside in it.<sup>21</sup> Immediately experienced and intuited as “endlessly spread out in space, [and] endlessly becoming and having become in time,”<sup>22</sup> the world is taken as singular from the perspective of consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Experience of the world comes primarily through the “field of perception,” where objects are simply present to the experiencer—“on

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<sup>20</sup> God, at times, must, in a kind of way, *present* to us our sins in his mercy. Notice, even with such *divine presentation*, the rational faculty is still necessary for apprehension. If our faults are revealed to us by God, it must be precisely that He presents such faults to us as objects of intellectual apprehension. Where there is no knowledge of the fault, there can be no penitential act.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (I, 27), trans. F. Kersten, in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 51–53. Hereafter, this work will be referred to simply as *Ideas*. Emphasis is retained from both Husserl texts cited in this study from the translated source throughout.

<sup>22</sup> *Ideas* (I, 27), 51.

<sup>23</sup> As Fr. Sokolowski says, the *world* is given in experience as a “singular tantum.” Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44. It is spatially and temporally limitless for the experiencer in the sense that the notion that there is some object of experience beyond it, or another world, is unintelligible: such an object/world would have to be both part of the world and not part of the world of conscious experience.

hand”—and their actual existence is taken for granted.<sup>24</sup> This experience of a world includes the animate—especially other persons with their accompanying feelings, actions, thoughts, and desires, with which they are blended and taken as immediately given.<sup>25</sup> While attention in the natural attitude is actually “turned—in acts of intuition and thought—to things given to us,”<sup>26</sup> it holds an interrelated temporal and perceptual potency. Acts of consciousness occur in a horizontal stream between retention and protention and they extend to objects that are partially or wholly absent or not given *now* and directly or immediately in the field of perception.<sup>27</sup>

Along with being mundane, the *natural attitude* also constitutes the mode of consciousness we call *positive science*, i.e., the study of objects.<sup>28</sup> In acts of both mundane and scientific thought, consciousness is presented with the opportunity to focus in on, *categorize*, *predicate with respect to*, and *judge*<sup>29</sup> particular objects of experience and their

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<sup>24</sup> *Ideas* (I, 27), 51: “By my seeing, touching, hearing and so fourth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are *simply there for me*, ‘on hand’ in the literal or figurative sense, whether or not I am particularly heedful of them and busied with them in my considering, thinking, feeling, or willing.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy (Dordrecht-Boston-London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1907), 15 (Lecture I). Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *The Idea*.

<sup>27</sup> See *Ideas* (I, 27), 51–52: “Along with the ones now perceived, other actual objects are there for me as determinate, as more or less well known, without being themselves perceived or, indeed, present in any other mode of intuition. I can let my attention wander away from the writing table which was just now seen and noticed, out through the unseen parts of the room which are behind my back, to the verandah, into the garden, to the children in the arbor, etc., to all the Objects I directly ‘know of’ as being there and here in the surroundings of which there is also consciousness . . .” On retention and protention, see *Ideas* (I, 2, sec. 75), 175. Retention is constituted through the memory of what has just been, but no longer is actually. In contrast, protention is constituted by the anticipation of what is potentially, but not yet actually given immediately in experience.

<sup>28</sup> *The Idea*, 15 (Lecture I).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



relationship(s) with one another. The natural attitude is non-reflective to the extent that, while its characteristic acts may lead to the acknowledgement that some things are “otherwise” than once supposed, and thus, not actually part of the world (e.g., hallucinations), they do not lead to a dismissal of what Husserl calls the “general positing” of the natural attitude.<sup>30</sup> This “general positing” of the natural attitude is defined through the concepts of transcendence and immanence.

In the *natural attitude*<sup>31</sup> consciousness always takes for granted or understands the objects which it *intends* as distinct from *itself* in the sense of their being *outside* its knowing act.<sup>32</sup> In the natural attitude, consciousness “takes its objects as transcendent,”<sup>33</sup> or as separate and or discrete from itself. Taking the object as transcendent, as Husserl

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<sup>30</sup> *Ideas* (I, 30), 57: “I find the ‘actuality,’ the word already says it, as a *factually existent actuality and also accept it as it presents itself to me as factually existing*. No doubt about or rejection of data belonging to the natural world alters in any respect the *general positing which characterizes the natural attitude*. ‘The’ world is always there as an actuality . . .”

<sup>31</sup> For pictorial diagrams of the natural, phenomenological, and penitential attitudes, see Appendix I (page 500).

<sup>32</sup> This is the first taste of a move on Husserl’s part that appears to conflate the natural attitude with the Cartesian attitude—i.e., the *cogito*. At *Ideas* I, 28, he makes a similar claim. Having described both mundane and scientific “theorizing” modes of consciousness, Husserl goes on to say, “All of them—including the simple Ego-acts in which I, in spontaneous advertence and seizing, am conscious of the world as immediately present—are embraced by the one Cartesian expression, *cogito*. Living along naturally, I live continually in this *fundamental form of ‘active’ [aktullen] living* whether, while so living, I state the *cogito*, whether I am directed ‘reflectively’ to the Ego and the *cogitare*.” See *Ideas* (I, 28), 54. In spite of such passages, it is clear that Husserl understands Descartes’ *cogito* as the result of a kind forced and artificial (non-rational) reflection on the nature of knowledge in the natural attitude. While there is ambiguity in the text of Husserl regarding the relation of the natural attitude to that of the Cartesian, an important distinction between the natural attitude and the Cartesian attitude is also manifest in the text of Husserl itself—if not explicitly, at least latently. See the subsection “The ἐπιχώρη,” below, and especially Appendix II, where Husserl’s comparison of the Cartesian approach to a form of sophism is highlighted.

<sup>33</sup> *The Idea*, 27 (Lecture II). Husserl says further, “All positive knowledge, prescientific and even more so scientific, is knowledge that takes its objects as transcendent . . .”

says, means that, “the known object is not really [*reell*] contained in the act of knowing.”<sup>34</sup> Correspondingly, the *immanence* of the object *as known* means that it is—in a reductive sense—“really [*reell*] immanent to the experience of knowing.”<sup>35</sup> There is a tendency in the natural attitude to reduce to an immanence which takes for granted that object as known is really and only “contained” in the act of knowing and does not extend to that to which it is taken to refer outside of the knowing act. In other words, the same object, which is supposed to be *transcendent*, is most precisely not contained *immanently* in the act of knowing—lest, this sense of *transcendence* would evaporate in contradiction. Thus, what is known is not the transcendent object itself, but a likeness or impression, which is *immanently* contained in the supposed act of knowing.<sup>36</sup> An equivocation, thus, comes to light from reflection on the natural attitude itself between two senses of “object.” First, there is “object” taken in the sense of that which transcends subjective aware-

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Husserl, identifies another related form of transcendence assumed in the natural attitude, which is even more problematic, but beyond our scope. In a second sense, *transcendence* refers to any kind of knowledge the object of which is not immediately evident, i.e., where there is no immediate and pure act of seeing—where the knowledge claim goes “beyond what can be directly seen and apprehended.” *The Idea*, 28 (Lecture II). In other words, there is apprehension of some object, but not full apprehension, not full disclosure in perception. Here, we might think, for example, of our ability to intend a house only in partial and temporally individuated moments—we perceive the front, the sides, the back, the inside, perhaps even the roof in the course of time, but there is no single temporal moment (what Sokolowski calls a *profile*) in which the whole house phenomenon is given to us in perception. Thus, we come to understand that parts/moments of objects which are intended but not directly perceived, are transcendent in this manner. In spite of our intention of a singular object with a singular identity, perception gives us only temporally individuated moments of the whole, so that we are always “reaching,” as it were, for the whole through parts of presentation given in perception. This form of transcendence is taken further, thus, in as much as we will want to say that we intend the house as a singular identity, even when we are not currently perceiving it at all, but rather have a blend of full and empty intentions of it. For another example, see Sokolowski’s treatment of the “Perception of a cube as a paradigm of conscious experience,” which is chapter 2 of his *Introduction to Phenomenology*.

ness, and then there is “object” taken as what is merely immanently present to awareness.<sup>37</sup>

Through a critical philosophical reflection on the natural attitude, which emanates from these very senses of *transcendence* and *immanence*, epistemology (historically speaking) is essentially confronted with the Humean skeptical critique of the Cartesian view of knowledge. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes utilized a method of hyperbolic or universal doubt, negating the whole of objective reality along with the sense faculties, in order to establish *res cogitans* as the indubitable foundation of all knowledge.<sup>38</sup> Consequentially, he separated consciousness from its known object. As the *cogito* is grasped clearly and distinctly at a point in the methodological enquiry where nothing else is so given, it must exist in its own immanence and any object it might have must be taken as really transcendent.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Descartes

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<sup>37</sup> In a chapter on critical realism (“Le Réalisme Critique”), in his *Degrees of Knowledge*, Jacques Maritain very helpfully draws this distinction between “thing and object (choses et objets)” following the scholastics. Maritain uses “thing” to designate object in the transcendent sense, and “object” to designate object in the immanent sense. See Jacques Maritain, *Distinguer Pour Unir ou Les Degrés du Savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1946), 176–195.

<sup>38</sup> See René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *Modern Philosophy*, ed. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003). At the end of the first Meditation, having enlisted the imagined all powerful evil deceiver to help him accomplish a doubt that reason cannot, Descartes sums up the act of hyperbolic doubt in its scope. Denying the existence of the “sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all other objective things,” he then severs the faculties corresponding to these objects from consciousness also: “I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing that I have all these things.” *Ibid.*, 22. In the *Second Meditation*, he can then conclude that, even in his radical universal doubt of everything, he cannot help but reaffirm the existence of something, namely, the very “I,” the thinking thing, or *res cogitans*, which was so convinced that nothing else existed. See *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> This separation becomes most salient and explicit in Descartes’ conception of the soul—in his mindbody dualism—which he presents in *Meditation VI*: “[S]ince on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself insofar as I am only a thinking and not an extended being, and since on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body insofar as it is only an extended being which does not think, it is certain that this ‘I’—that is to

took this very fact as the foundation of his substance dualism.<sup>40</sup> In perception, the senses of the body, then, produce for the mind a representation of the sensed thing. The immanently perceived representation is what is grasped by the mind and known. The thing, which the immanent perception is supposed to be a representation of, must be taken as really transcendent and other than the perception. It is this understanding of objects of experience as really transcendent in relation to the *cogito* that provides the basis for Hume's skeptical critique of knowledge.

If we assume *transcendence* and *immanence* to have a kind of relationship characteristic of the natural attitude, i.e., one where what is claimed to be known is also claimed to be discrete and separate from the knower, where the known is not really contained immanently in the act of knowing, then the question becomes, how do we bridge the gap between the knower and the known in such a way as to have certain knowledge about the things that we study? This is precisely the question behind Hume's formulation of skepticism in section 12 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. His answer is clear: no such bridge can be established, so that no necessary knowledge is obtainable about things in themselves.<sup>41</sup> As Husserl will ask, if the essential struc-

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say, my soul, by virtue of which I am what I am—is entirely and truly distinct from my body and that it can be or exist with out it." *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> This is, of course, a fallacious argument for substance dualism. Even given Descartes' method, the ontological claim of substance dualism does not necessarily follow from the fact that the idea of the *cogito* can be conceived clearly and distinctly prior to that of the body. This is an *error abstractionis*.

<sup>41</sup> Consider the following passages from David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), section 12: "[N]othing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and . . . the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object." Hume continues, "No man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we consider, when we say, this house and that tree, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and

ture of knowing is characterized by *transcendence*, how can experience “go beyond itself?”<sup>42</sup> Thus, we are faced with the possibilities of both skepticism and solipsism; with the fact that what we call knowledge is merely a matter of prejudice, since we can no longer get at the essence (εἶδος) of the thing in itself.<sup>43</sup> It is in the face of this skepticism that Husserl will propose phenomenology as a rigorous scientific critique of knowledge.

### *The Phenomenological Attitude*

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl indicates that the methodology of any science is formulated with respect to its end.<sup>44</sup> The method for obtaining scientific knowledge of a subject must be functionally and teleologically fitted to the subject itself. The end of the phenomenological method is an understanding of the possibility of conscious knowing. Unlike Descartes, Husserl does not take the existence of this subject matter itself as provable by thought experiment and hyperbolic doubt.

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independent.” His presentation of the *problema pontis* then hits its crescendo: “The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.”

<sup>42</sup> *The Idea*, 27 (Lecture I).

<sup>43</sup> In the second sense of *transcendence* mentioned above in note 35, an even more difficult question arises: “[H]ow can knowledge posit something as existing that is not directly and genuinely given to it?” How, without direct apprehension of it, can I claim there is a back to the house I am currently seeing the front of, let alone that the back of the house must be in certain way? If I presuppose that the house itself is not part of the intentional act I am engaged in, I simply cannot perform these basic epistemic functions. *The Idea*, 27 (Lecture I).

<sup>44</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. I, ch. 1, §11, trans. J. N. Findlay (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 25: “Sciences are creations of the spirit which are directed to a certain end, and which are for that reason to be judged in accordance with that end. The same holds of theories, validations and in short every thing that we call a ‘method’. Whether a science is truly a science, or a method a method, depends on whether it accords with the aims that it strives for.” This is somewhat reminiscent Aristotle’s statement at *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 3, that the clarity achieved in a science concerning its subject matter is determined by the nature of the subject matter itself.

Rather, it is discovered through candid reflection on the natural attitude. The senses of *transcendence* and *immanence* that characterize the natural attitude coupled with the inability of the special sciences to provide firm epistemological basis for their findings, provide *rational cause* for questioning the possibility of knowledge. This enquiry can be seen as the basis for establishing a distinct subject matter (conscious-knowing) for a distinct science (phenomenology).<sup>45</sup> Because this enquiry points to the *existing* subject matter of phenomenology, it can be called an ontological reduction.<sup>46</sup> It is motivated by the desire for true and complete scientific knowledge and recognition of the fact that the particular sciences cannot provide such completeness, since their focus is limited to the objects of experience that constitute their own subjects. Each treats its own “marking off of being,”<sup>47</sup> as it were, but does not address the subjective mode of consciousness itself which makes knowledge of these objects possible. The subject matter of phenomenology is already indicated, though in a vague and indeterminate form.<sup>48</sup> Thus, a *need*

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<sup>45</sup> Husserl, here, appears to follow the Aristotelian method for establishing science through a formal designation of its subject matter. On Aristotle, see Michael W. Tkacz, “Albert the Great and the Revival of Aristotle’s Zoological Research Program,” *Vivarium* 45, no. 1 (2007): 30–68.

<sup>46</sup> This phrase is well used by Fr. Sokolowski. See his *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 52. It appears to be a most appropriate phrase of Sokolowski’s, which is not used by Husserl.

<sup>47</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E, 1 (1025b9).

<sup>48</sup> Here again, a comparison of Husserl’s approach to that of Aristotle strongly suggested. Aristotle’s comments on methodology at *Physics*, I, 1, are most relevant. Here, Aristotle explains that, in our process of coming to know, or forming an *episteme*, we begin with a whole or universal of perception grasped only vaguely confusedly. By analysis or division, we then come to define the phenomenon as what it is. Reflection on the natural attitude brings to light consciousness as a possible subject for a distinct science. This is vaguely grasped. Most importantly, intentionality has not yet been analytically identified as the basic form of consciousness, and thus, there is not a complete definition of the general form of its subject matter. I would further point out that, given our natural, and I think Husserl would say, *reasonable* tendency to take objects of experience as *transcendent*, a question naturally arises as to how we know objects themselves. This kind of questioning cannot, without the kind of forced manipulation

arises for a scientific investigation of the very conscious-knowing that is the fundamental possibility for the objective sciences whatsoever.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, and along Aristotelian lines of formulating a science (ἐπιστήμη/*episteme*), Husserl begins by positing the existence of a subject matter (γένος) known only in a vague and confused manner.<sup>50</sup> It is with the aim of fully formulating a definition of this subject matter and

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that is illustrated by Descartes above, result in radical skepticism about our ability to know things of experience. At the same time, it can point toward the possibility of *knowing-consciousness* itself taken as a distinct subject matter for a distinct science. Here, I would suggest a reading of, for example, Aristotle's *De Memoria et Reminiscencia*, in which, in order to explain the process of recollection, he draws an explicit distinction between the thing itself as recollected and the concept or impression of it imminently existing in the mind. He emphasizes that the remembering is of the former and not the latter. One may further reflect and draw similar conclusions from his conception of first and second substance (οὐσία) at *Categories* 5. In these texts, we find an ancient premonition of the problem of epistemology born in Descartes' *Meditations*, and discovered by reflection on the natural attitude by Husserl.

<sup>49</sup> See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 53. As Fr. Sokolowski points out, this need is not unlike that indicated by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, Γ, 1—the need to go beyond particular sciences to that of the whole or the science of being *qua* being. This analogy holds insofar as both phenomenology and metaphysics (as conceived by Aristotle) seek a science that is prior to the particular/special sciences and unifies and grounds them. While Aristotle's concern is to found this science on a unifying subject matter which is substance objectively speaking (see, e.g., *Metaphysics*, Λ, 1) phenomenology seeks a similar unity through the subjective reality of knowledge and the relation it must have to its objects in order to know them. Most interestingly, Husserl will refer to the subject-object phenomenon, or intentionality, which phenomenology studies, as a “this-here,” at times using Aristotle's phrase for indicating a primary substance (τὸ δε τῷ). Not only does this express a unity of subject and object in intention—that these are moments in one concretum—but it suggests a harkening back to a philosophy grounded in our perceptual experience of things in the world, like that championed by Aristotle. In Husserl, and keeping in mind that phenomenology is epistemology, or the critique of knowledge, see, for example, *The Idea*, 19 (Lecture I): “What is required is a science of what exists in the absolute sense. This science, which we call metaphysics, grows out of a ‘critique’ of positive knowledge in the particular sciences.”

<sup>50</sup> For the positing of the existence of the subject matter, see *Posterior Analytics*, A, 10 (76b12–16). Compare, again, to Aristotle's account of scientific methodology at *Physics* A, 1, and his initial formulation of the subject matter of physics at A, 2 (185a12–14).

in enquiring into the appropriate methodology for treating it, that Husserl produces the *ἐποχή*.

### *The ἐποχή*

The *ἐποχή* is a method for transcending the natural attitude, which is sharply contrasted to Descartes' method.<sup>51</sup> In fact, Descartes' exercise of hyperbolic doubt and reduction to the *cogito* make it impossible for him to transcend the natural attitude, and the whole of his thought is caged in it (in a way that is quite un-natural). While Descartes intends the exercise of "universal doubt" to strip away all untested assumptions in order that an un-doubtable epistemic foundation may be un-covered, such doubt, in its *negation* of material objectivity, amounts to an un-founded assumption itself: namely, that any object, as it is related to *res cogitans*, is actually discrete from the same, and vice versa. This is to fall into an idealism and a solipsism, and it is a trap, as Hume has shown, which cannot be escaped once it has been entered. To avoid these pitfalls, Husserl proposes the *ἐποχή*.

In performing the phenomenological *ἐποχή*, Husserl exhorts the practitioner, not to "universally doubt," but to "suspend" or "neutralize," most exactly, that natural belief (*δόξα*) in the object as *transcendent*, as actually existing discretely from consciousness.<sup>52</sup> We do not, then, negate our belief in the world, we simply suspend it, or, view it here as an un-necessary, superfluous, supposition. In a word, "We put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude"<sup>53</sup>—precisely what Descartes, through his method, could not accomplish. By supplying all forms of transcendence with the

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<sup>51</sup> Husserl will substitute for "*ἐποχή*" as the phenomenological method, and also as "transcendental-phenomenological-reduction." On Husserl as distinguishing his method from that of Descartes, see Appendix II (501–506).

<sup>52</sup> *Ideas* (I), 64.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



“index of indifference” through the *ἐποχή*, the practitioner reduces to a state of pure phenomenological immanence and “sees,” in this case, intentional acts of knowing which are immediately given and available for phenomenological analysis.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, an “individual region of being” is acquired as the distinct subject of the science: conscious-knowing.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thus, Husserl notes, with respect to epistemology, which he takes as phenomenology, “immanence is the necessary mark of all knowledge that comprises the critique of knowledge.” *The Idea*, 26 (Lecture II). Again, however, this “pure immanence” is not to be taken, as it is often interpreted to be, as an idealistic divorce of the mind from things-in-themselves. How could this be the case when the express end of the *ἐποχή* is to suspend belief in transcendence, which such a distinction presupposes? Far from committing the phenomenologist to such a divorce, the *ἐποχή* actually requires that the phenomenologist remain silent on this issue—at least initially. “Phenomenological immanence” means only that the phenomenologist’s stance is such as to take all objects of experience as integral to consciousness. It does not mean, and cannot mean, that objects of experience exist only in the mind.

<sup>55</sup> In *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Husserl compares this subject to Aristotle’s concept of the primary sense of substance as individual or some “this here” (τόδε τι): “Every intellectual experience, indeed every experience whatsoever, can be made into an object of pure seeing and apprehension while it is occurring. And this act of seeing it is an absolute givenness. It is given as an *existing* entity, as a ‘this-here.’” *The Idea*, 24 (Lecture II). Compare to *Categories* 5, 2a10–15, and 3b10. First, defining substance (οὐσία) in its primary sense as “that which is neither predicated of, nor present in, a subject,” Aristotle gives as examples “this man,” or “this horse” (ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος ἢ ὁ τις ἵππος), indicating by the combination of the indefinite pronoun “τις” and the definite article “ὁ” the designation of an individual and not a species. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle, thus, even in his logic makes individual subjects of sensation the first principles of knowledge—these, as opposed to separated forms, are the primary sense of the real, the “what is,” and the οὐσία for Aristotle. At 3b10, he emphasizes that substance in the primary sense signifies the “this here” or the individual: “Πᾶσα δὲ οὐσία δοκεῖ τόδε τι σημαίνειν.” For Aristotle, the point of departure for all knowledge is sensation of particulars of experience, which is made clear at *Posterior Analytics* II, 19, where induction (ἐπαγωγή) is treated to explain how intellectual insight (νοῦς) is achieved concerning the fundamental principles of a science, and also in Aristotle’s initial comments concerning scientific methodology at *Physics* I, 1. Husserl’s appeal to the Stagirite’s terminology seems indicative of his own desire to locate the source of human knowledge directly in experience. As opposed to taking the *cogito* or any a priori concepts of the understanding as his point of departure, Husserl takes the experience of consciousness as intentional as his point of departure, and this means that his founda-

Analysis of consciousness shows its essence to be that of *intentionality*, consisting in correlated moments of νοησίς (*noesis*) and νοήμα (*noema*), or knower and known. The first fruit of the phenomenological reduction is the concept of *intentionality* itself. Having reduced to the *transcendental-phenomenological attitude* through the ἐποχή, I am first made aware of myself, not as the Cartesian *thinking I*, the isolated *cogito*, but necessarily as a “consciousness of” something—a *cogitationis* that always takes with itself a thought-object or *cogitatum*. In the phenomenological attitude, the subject, my reflection on myself as the “consciousness of” something, becomes the νοησίς (*knowing-consciousness*), and the object, which in this purely immanent transcendental and phenomenological sphere is not posited as something discrete from myself, is now termed the νοήμα (the object of my thought), viz., the “something” to which the “consciousness of” is directed and must be correlated. Νοησίς and νοήμα, then, exist, in this properly reduced sphere, as *moments* to each other, as parts in a single whole or *concretum*.<sup>56</sup> Human consciousness, thus, is not foundationally severed from its objects, and a properly philosophical account can be given of knowledge.<sup>57</sup>

### The ἐποχή and Contrition

Husserl’s ἐποχή is a method aimed at disclosing the essential structure of consciousness. In suspending belief about real transcendence, the ἐποχή shows forth the intentional structure of consciousness and results in the practitioner’s capacity to perform *noetic-noematic*

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tion incorporates all of the world as sensually perceived as the objective correlate of consciousness.

<sup>56</sup> See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 60–61.

<sup>57</sup> *Ideas* (I, 32), 61. For an extended defense of Husserl’s phenomenology as compatible with the type of realism presupposed by St. Thomas Aquinas account of the sacrament of penance, please see Appendix II.

analysis in the phenomenological attitude. This version of the *ἐποχή* might well be named the “originary *ἐποχή*.” It is the first version of the *ἐποχή* that Husserl employs and, from an epistemological perspective, all other inquiries terminating in knowledge will presuppose it. Indeed, Husserl himself has recourse to other versions of the *ἐποχή*.<sup>58</sup> As in the case of the originary use of the *ἐποχή*, the nature of the subject matter being studied determines what is to be “suspended” through the *ἐποχή*. Accordingly, while all possible versions of the *ἐποχή* will be identical insofar as they involve an act of suspension of judgment, they will differ in their functional fitting to their subjects in the manner of which beliefs they suspend. It can thus be said from the outset that an analogy between Husserl’s phenomenological method and penitential acts is possible because penitential acts also involve a *suspension of judgment*—an *ἐποχή*. At the same time, a fundamental difference is immediately clear: while Husserl’s originary *ἐποχή* is aimed at the critique of knowledge, or epistemology, this is not the aim of the penitential method. What, then, will the penitential *ἐποχή* seek?

Recall that, as was seen above, the acts of penance up through contrition have three primary aspects: (1) the examination of conscience, and (2) the reordering of the will and (3) the resolve not to sin again in regret. With respect to the examination of conscience, the aim of the penitential *ἐποχή* is knowledge for the sake of spiritual healing. Without first knowing that one has sinned, one can have neither regret nor purified intention. Thus, the penitential *ἐποχή* is initially a method-

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<sup>58</sup> For example, at *Cartesian Meditations* V, Husserl employs a “peculiar *ἐποχή*,” essentially bracketing his natural belief in the real transcendence of other persons in conscious experience and reducing to a “sphere of ownness,” with the aim, precisely, to see if others really constitute transcendent objects of experience as subjects. See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, section 44, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 92–99. As noted above, Husserl’s work here terminates in disclosing others as really transcendent objects—because they are phenomenologically given through the lived body as other subjects with their own corresponding transcendental egos.

ological employment of a kind of *suspension* in order to put the practitioner in a position to gain *knowledge* regarding his actions/dispositions so that spiritual healing can be accomplished. In order to apprehend myself as being in a state of (post-baptismal) sin or not, I must be able to view myself objectively. I cannot assume (1) that I have not sinned or (2) that I have sinned. The first assumption—probably the normal error as a consequence of sin itself—will prevent me from seeing my sin and seeking spiritual healing. The second results in or simply is scrupulousness and has a range of negative consequences beyond the scope of this study. Accordingly, the penitential ἐποχή is employed by the penitent so that he may suspend judgment as to whether he has committed an act of sin (or not). This method of examination, then, entails neither the presumption of innocence nor of guilt. In this manner alone one can candidly evaluate his intentional actions and dispositions.

Since acts of sin require that the agent have knowledge of the impropriety of the act, it is clear that *noetic-noematic* analysis is part of this penitential act. What the penitent seeks by way of this kind of suspension is to observe himself (νόησις) in relation with a certain object (νόημα) in such a way that he can actually determine, without any bias, whether or not his *intention* came to fruition with knowledge of the fact that it was *disordered*, or that he actually comported himself toward some object in a way he *knows* is disordered.<sup>59</sup> However, since sins follow properly on acts of the will, the examination of conscience requires, further, a βούλησις-βούλημα view of the structure of conscious-

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<sup>59</sup> Here, the etymological roots of “conscience,” as we mean it in the phrase “examination of conscience,” is begging explicit presentation. The word “conscience” comes from the Latin *con*, which means “with,” and *scientia*, from the verb *scire*, which means “to know.” The kind of examination the penitent is performing pertains specifically to himself as a knower in at least two ways: first, as one *with knowledge* about himself and how he ought to be oriented toward particular objects; second, as one *with knowledge* of the fact that on such and such an occasion, he actually was not oriented toward some object(s) properly, or in the way he knows he ought to be.

ness. It is not simply that the penitent reflects on himself as relating to objects of consciousness as known, but as desired and willed, where intention just means a “tending-toward-something.”<sup>60</sup> Since all proper acts of will are informed both by knowledge that an end is good, and judgment as to its moral appropriateness, the βούλησις-βούλημα structure of consciousness analyzed by the penitent implies the νόησις-νόημα structure. Such *bouletic-boulematic* analysis could involve, for example, reflection on the fact that I once intended a glass of Scotch over and above other objects/goods, in a way which, because of my *understanding* of myself and the same objects (some of which are other persons), and in light of the moral law, was improper and disordered.

Even in this initial stage of contrition, i.e., examination of conscience, grace plays a role. Knowing that we have in fact reduced to this state of examination, and just what it is that we are looking for, allows us as penitents to ask and to pray to God for the disclosure of precisely what we seek. Thus, I can pray: “Christ, let me *see*, without prejudice,<sup>61</sup> the points in my life at which I related (as βούλησις) improperly, that is, in a mentally and naturally disordering fashion, to any gift (βούλημα) which you have given me.” In the very act of asking for this, I have moved closer to healing in contrition. While the act of suspense here appears primarily *noetic*, pertaining to my belief about my state of sin or grace, the second and third parts of contrition require a *bouletic* ἐποχή, i.e., a suspense pertaining to the desiring will itself.

With respect to the second aspect of contrition, that is, the penitent’s attempt to achieve regret and re-orient his mind toward God, the comparison to the ἐποχή is especially conducive to bringing about contrition because the penitent is actually asking God for the grace to perform the suspending act in this respect. In other words, the penitent *sees*

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<sup>60</sup> See *S.Th.* I-II, q. 12, a. 1, resp.: “Dicednum quod intentio, sicut ipsum nomen sonat, significat ad aliquid tendere.”

<sup>61</sup> Here, I mean to emphasize the *epoche*-like exhortation for a kind of suspension.

both himself (βούλησις) as improperly oriented toward some object (βούλημα), and the possibility of a yet to be actualized version of himself (βούλησις) in the proper relation with the same object (βούλημα). The penitent then asks God for this which he himself cannot accomplish, precisely because he is actually mentally and spiritually disordered. The penitent, in positive terms, is asking God to help him make the proper *bouletic-bouleumatic* relationship, which is merely potential at this point, as an act of intellectual apprehension, *actual*. In negative terms, and this brings the ἐποχή features to the fore, the penitent is asking God to allow him to *see* himself as actually *not being* in the improper relationship with the object at hand, that is, as having the proper desire or a *good will*; he is praying for the *suspension* of a particular intention which he obviously cannot accomplish on his own—lest, why would he be in this state of sin?

Finally, with respect to the third aspect in the act of contrition, that is, that one must desire not to return to the state where the object at hand is related to improperly, it is clear that the penitent must pray for, even simultaneously with the second step, the same kind of suspension. This is to say, that the penitent must pray for what he himself cannot be the internal cause of, namely a possession of himself (βούλησις) as *actually* not desiring to be in an improper relationship with the particular object (βούλημα) at hand, now and in the future for all time. Knowing, then, that what I need to be spiritually healed is to transcend these improper forms of intentionality, I can pray for the accomplishment of just this end. And so, *seeing* myself (βούλησις) as desiring to drink this glass of Scotch (βούλημα) in an improper and disordered way, say, over and above serving my friends, family, or profession, and yet also *seeing* that I am utterly incapable of changing this desire by my own power, in spite of the fact that I know it is wrong now, I can pray: “Christ, please give me the grace to suspend this judgment of myself as actually disordered and to understand myself as the kind of person who

*actually* serves, and thus loves, God and his friends and family over and above this glass of Scotch.”

## Conclusion

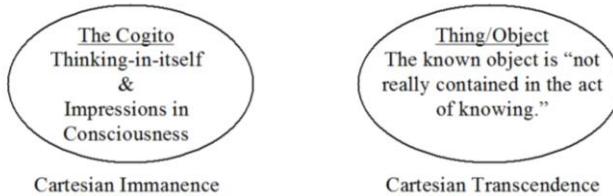
This study has presented St. Thomas’ explication of the Sacrament of penance and Edmund Husserl’s conception of the phenomenological ἐποχή, and argued that a fruitful analogy exists between them. While the intentional analysis pursuant to Husserl’s ἐποχή, being limited in its scope to the critique of knowledge, requires only a νόησις-νόημα view of the structure of consciousness, the penitential ἐποχή, extending in its scope to acts of will themselves, requires also a βούλησις-βούλημα view of the structure of consciousness. Looking to the act of contrition, it has been shown that a penitential ἐποχή is first employed in the examination of conscience, where there is a need to suspend belief as to whether one is in a state of sin or not. In the second and third stages of contrition, in order to accomplish a reordering of the will and a resolve not to sin again in regret, the penitent must suspend his will to the disordered end itself. With the aid of divine grace, these acts will lead the penitent back to a virtuous state of grace.



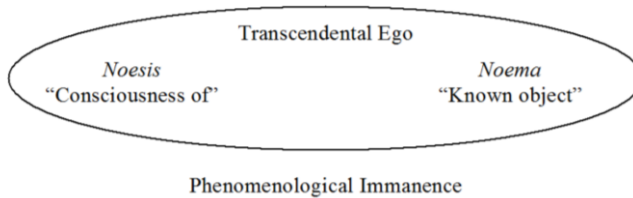
## APPENDIX I

### Pictorial Diagrams of the Natural, Phenomenological, and Penitential Attitudes

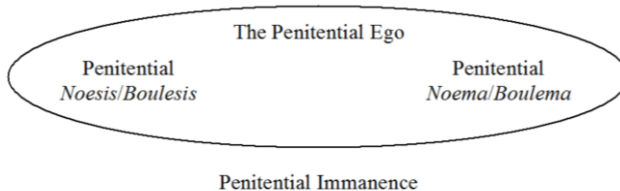
#### *The Natural/Cartesian Attitude*<sup>62</sup>



#### *The Phenomenological Attitude*



#### *Penitential Attitude*




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<sup>62</sup> The quotation in the encircled object portion of the diagram is from *The Idea*, 27 (Lecture II). The diagrams are primarily intended to depict the relation of consciousness to its object(s). Thus, the key difference depicted between the Cartesian attitude and those of the phenomenological and penitential is that the former excludes objects of knowledge from the field of consciousness, whereas the latter do not.



## APPENDIX II

Throughout the treatment of Husserl's phenomenological method, I emphasized its distinction from the Cartesian method. This distinction is especially relevant to the end of this study to the extent that it shows Husserl to be open to the kind of realism presupposed by penitential acts, which seems un-achievable once one has entered into the Cartesian attitude. On what has even been called the common reading, Husserl's method is essentially Cartesian and either necessitates or just is in its nature idealism and solipsism.<sup>63</sup> In Husserl's own lifetime, a group of his students and followers centered at Munich, including—most importantly—Roman Ingarden and Max Scheler, took his method as committing him to idealism.<sup>64</sup> Ingarden identified idealism as the “fatal defect of the philosophic method introduced in [Husserl's] *Ideas* and *Cartesian Meditations*.”<sup>65</sup> Preferring Husserl's critiques of psychologism and historicism in his earlier work, *Logical Investigations*, Scheler shared the sentiments of Ingarden.<sup>66</sup> This idealist reading of phenomenology is also strong in Thomistic circles and, consequently, in the Thomistic commentary literature on the phenomenological thought of Karol Wojtyła.<sup>67</sup> Here, Jacques Maritain provides a likely

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<sup>63</sup> See Karl Ameriks, “Husserl's Realism,” *The Philosophical Review* 86, no. 4 (October 1977): 498, as cited and concurred with by Harrison Hall in his “Was Husserl a Realist or an Idealist?,” in *Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus in collaboration with Harrison Hall (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: MIT Press, 1982), 169, footnote 2.

<sup>64</sup> See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 212–213.

<sup>65</sup> See Hall, “Was Husserl a Realist or an Idealist?” For the text of Ingarden as cited by Hall, see *Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt*, vol. 2 (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1965); and “Die vier Begriffe der Transcendenz und das Problem des Idealismus in Husserl,” in *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. 1, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1971), 37–74.

<sup>66</sup> See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 213.

<sup>67</sup> In contemporary literature on the work of Karol Wojtyła, see the following: Jaroslaw Kupczak, O.P., *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol*

origin of this reading in Thomistic circles. In *Distinguer Pour Unir ou Les Degrés du Savoir*, referring to the phenomenology as a form of idealism, he says, “This is the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* [first falsehood] of phenomenology.”<sup>68</sup> He continues:

This fundamental misunderstanding is connected to the phenomenological *ἐποχή* insofar as it “puts into parentheticals” the whole register of extramental existence and in this way separates the object (the essence-phenomenon) from the thing . . .<sup>69</sup>

Those who adopt this anti-realist reading of Husserl’s method will, no doubt, have serious objections to the comparison this paper draws between penitential acts and the *ἐποχή*. Whereas, such interpreters will hold that the *ἐποχή* places the phenomenologist in a state of idealism and absolute presuppositionlessness, the penitent brings a

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*Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 75; Kenneth L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 68; Thomas D. Williams, L.C., “What is Thomistic Personalism?,” *Alpha Omega* VII, no. 2 (2004): 170. While it is clear that Karol Wojtyla sees (1) a fundamental compatibility between realism and the phenomenological method, he does think that it is not sufficient to establish realism in itself and (2) he appears to follow the idealist reading—at some level—which he obtained from Ingarden and Scheler. On (1), see Karol Wojtyla, “The Problem of the Separation of Experience from the Act in Ethics,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 32–33; and Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, in *Analecta Husserliana*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 10. On (2), see Karol Wojtyla, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 210. While Wojtyla actually credits the Husserlian phenomenological tradition with breaking down the “line of demarcation,” between subjectivity and objectivity precipitated by the Cartesian reduction, he nonetheless characterizes Husserl’s *ἐποχή* as “bracketing the existence, or reality, of the conscious subject.” See also Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 46 and the corresponding endnote 21 (page 305).

<sup>68</sup> Maritain, *Distinguer Pour Unir ou Les Degrés du Savoir*, 197: “C’est là le *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* de la phénoménologie.” My translation.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*: “Cette méprise fondamentale est liée à l’*ἐποχή* phénoménologique, en tant qu’elle «met entre parenthèses» tout le registre de l’existence extramentale et sépare ainsi l’objet (l’essence-phénomène) de la chose . . .” My translation.

great number of realist type assumptions into his reflections. First, there is the penitent's basic assumption that he is related to really existing objects in the world (persons and goods), and then one would obviously have to point out that he assumes the existence of God and His moral law. The fundamental error of this idealist or "presuppositionlessnes" reading is to take Husserl to be universally bracketing all of reality/existence through the *ἐποχή*—a reading so well captured by Maritain above. The following remarks on Husserl's method are intended to show that his phenomenology is not idealist, and that it is fully open to a realism. This will serve as a response, accordingly, to what is likely to be the most significant criticism of this study's thesis.

Clearly looking to distinguish the *ἐποχή* from the Cartesian method, Husserl has the following to say at *Ideas* I, 32: "We could now let the universal *ἐποχή*, in our sharply determinate and novel sense of the term, take the place of the Cartesian attempt to doubt universally."<sup>70</sup> A few lines later, Husserl goes on to note that in employing the *ἐποχή*,

I am *not negating* this "world" as though I were a sophist; I am *not doubting its factual being* as though I were a skeptic; rather I am exercising the "phenomenological" *ἐποχή* which also *completely shuts me off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being*.<sup>71</sup>

Characteristic of this suspension is not a negation of transcendent objective reality, but a complete setting aside of the question of real transcendence. This notion of suspension and setting aside is not all together foreign to natural modes of thinking. The mathematician, for example, does not need to negate the world of perceived objects in order to study mathematical objects, which he takes in abstraction from the sensuously perceived world. The natural world is there for him in experi-

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<sup>70</sup> *Ideas* (I, 32), 65.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

ence—it is, in fact, always with him—though it is not considered in his mathematical mode of consciousness.<sup>72</sup> So too, in the phenomenological attitude, belief in transcendence of objects of experience is suspended, bracketed, or set aside. It is simply not considered in this mode of thought—a demand of the subject matter of this science—though it is thereby in no way negated. Such a negation, in fact, is incompatible with the very meaning of the *ἐποχή* as an attitude of “suspension,” “neutrality,” or “cessation of belief.”

Now, it must be said that the phenomenological method and its discovery of intentionality, certainly do not in themselves establish the transcendent existence of objects of experience, which is necessary for realism. No, it is just such transcendence that the method is initially intended to put out of consideration. At the very same time, and as Harrison Hall has well pointed out, in his “Was Husserl a Realist or an Idealist?,” this suspension also requires a non-commitment to idealism. All Husserl’s method commits him to is not considering the possibility of real transcendence, at least initially in his phenomenology. By no means is he committed by it to the claim that objects of consciousness are not transcendent. Far from it, he must be open to the possibility of real transcendence if he is going to successfully employ the *ἐποχή*. In short, and at the outset, if one is still asking questions about the real extra-mental existence, the transcendence or immanence of objects of experience—if one is still asking questions the answers to which would commit him to an idealist or a realist position—then one is still operating in the natural or Cartesian attitude and he has not yet entered into the phenomenological attitude. Therefore, interpreters of Husserl’s method who claim that this method is an idealism have neither understood nor employed this method.

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<sup>72</sup> Husserl uses this example at *Ideas* (I, 28), 62.

As has already been stated in the subsection “The Phenomenological Attitude,” that Husserl does not intend the ἐποχή as the universal negation of the existence of objects of experience is also clear from his formulation of phenomenology as a rigorous science. Through the ontological reduction, Husserl formulates the subject matter of phenomenology (conscious-knowing), which already exists as a given datum capable of rigorous analysis. Through phenomenological analysis disclosing the essence of conscious-knowing, the basic structure of consciousness is then disclosed as intentional—as a noetic-noematic concretum. It must be understood thus, that phenomenology presupposes the existence of its subject matter (conscious-knowing) and that, by way of analysis, it quickly defines this subject matter in such a manner as to include in its essence both the knowing (noesis) and the known-object (noema). The existence of objects of experience is, thus, not negated, even though judgment about the real transcendence of these objects is initially suspended by the ἐποχή.

As it turns out, Husserl demonstrates his openness to the possibility of real transcendence, and that he sees phenomenology as terminating in a full blown realism, in the fifth meditation of his *Cartesian Meditations*, where his explicit goal is to answer the charge of thinkers like Ingarden and Scheler that phenomenology is a solipsism and an idealism mired in skepticism.<sup>73</sup> Here, Husserl works from analysis of the phenomenon of empathy, which shows the necessity of an intuition of the other through a “pairing” of the lived body (*Leib*) with that of the other. Essentially, there is an analytic connection between the lived body of the other and the transcendental ego of the other, which necessitates that the other be a really transcendent other existing in its own sphere of oneness, just as I do. Full explanation of this novel and enormously important philosophical work by Husserl is far beyond the

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<sup>73</sup> See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 89–157.

scope of this study. However, it is enough here to say that, by way of this phenomenological analysis, Husserl certainly takes himself to have established the real transcendence of the other, and consequently of any intersubjective objects of experience—he takes himself to have moved from a phenomenological attitude that is initially neutral about real transcendence to one that must necessarily assert it and fully embrace realism.

One may still want to defend the notion, however, that Husserl is an idealist. After all, he himself used the term to describe his phenomenology. Thus, and finally, I will provide two sources in which Husserl makes it clear that his “transcendental idealism” is no Kantian idealism, but that it is actually a realism, or at least open to it.<sup>74</sup> In a 1934 letter he wrote to Abbé Baudin, Husserl says the following: “No ordinary ‘realist’ has ever been as realistic and concrete as I, the phenomenological ‘idealist’ (a word which by the way I no longer use).” Husserl also had the following to say in the preface to the first English edition of the *Ideas* (1931):

Phenomenological idealism does not deny the factual [*wirklich*] existence of the real [*real*] world (and in the first instance nature) as if it deemed it an illusion. . . . Its only task and accomplishment is to clarify the sense [*Sinn*] of this world, just that sense in which we all regard it as really existing and as really valid. That the world exists . . . is quite indubitable. Another matter is to understand this indubitability which is the basis for life and science and clarify the basis for its claim.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Here, I am greatly indebted to Dr. Dan Bradley for having brought these texts to my attention, and for offering his helpful thoughts on Husserl in our discourses.

<sup>75</sup> Edmund Husserl, preface to W. R. Boyce Gibson’s translation of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931). Cited after Dagfin Føllesdal’s “Husserl and the Categories,” in *Categories: Historical and Systematic Essays*, ed. Michael Gorman, Jonathan J. Sanford, *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, vol. 41 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 122.

**PENITENTIAL METHOD AS PHENOMENOLOGICAL:  
THE PENITENTIAL *EPOCHE***

SUMMARY

Synthesizing Thomism and phenomenology, this paper compares the kind of reflective thinking and willing that goes on in penitential acts to Edmund Husserl's method of the phenomenological *ἐποχή* (*epoche*). Analyzing penance up through the act of contrition, it first shows it to have three primary acts: (1) the examination of conscience, (2) the reordering of the will and (3) the resolve not to sin again in regret. After presenting this Thomistic conception of contrition in detail, it then focuses on the essence of Husserl's *ἐποχή* as a method intended to "suspend" certain beliefs in order to discover the truth about knowledge. In conclusion, it shows that a particular form of the *ἐποχή*—a penitential *ἐποχή*—must be employed in these three penitential acts so that a disposition of grace may be made present in the penitent.

KEYWORDS

Thomism, phenomenology, Thomistic personalism, Edmund Husserl, realism, idealism, *epoche*, consciousness, conscience, penitence, penance, contrition, will, sin, belief, truth, knowledge, grace, *noesis-noema*, *boulesis-boulema*, virtue.

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