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# INTRODUCTION

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This special issue focuses on the core task of phenomenology: the description of concrete phenomena. In particular, this means that it is not primarily historical or meta-theoretical questions about phenomenology that are to be discussed, nor the works of specific phenomenologists. The intention is to practice phenomenology as a special form of philosophy in an exemplary way; descriptions of the most diverse phenomena are to be developed and their validity put up for discussion - and exclusively descriptions that are specifically phenomenological due to two criteria: First, they address an experience as an experience from the perspective of the first person singular and second, they claim to be able to determine necessary characteristics for this type of experience through eidetic variation. Descriptions of classical phenomena - such as perception, imagination or the experience of time - are discussed, as well as attempts to discover phenomena as phenomena sui generis.

The title “Zurück zu den Sachen selbst” is a deliberate, historical recourse that can be explained as follows: phenomenology represents a method of how philosophy should be practiced. This method was not only, but in particular developed by Edmund Husserl. The aim of this method is to work systematically on philosophical problems in a way that justifies speaking of phenomenology as a science. According to Husserl, although this claim was necessary for any philosophy, it no longer played a role in the prevailing parts of the philosophy of his time. Instead, the discussion of opinions of other philosophers had come to the fore within philosophy. In the worst case, this led to the historicist view that there were only socially and historically determined and thus psychologically explainable opinions on philosophical questions. It was against this relativistic tendency that Husserl formulated his programmatic call “Zurück zu den Sachen selbst”. He understood this appeal in the sense of a judge who sternly calls on the lawyers of the parties in dispute to finally get back to the matter at hand. From the point of view of phenomenology, in philosophy this matter can only be a phenomenon as it is given to someone in experience. Only a phenomenon in its experiential quality allows philosophy to gain reliable insights. “Zurück zu den Sachen selbst” therefore always also means: back to the things about which philosophy can be seriously pursued from the perspective of phenomenology. Behind Husserl’s programmatic call is therefore by no means just the idea of giving philosophy a specific thematic orientation, but rather the expression of the highest possible claim to validity. A phenomenological description is a description that focuses only that, which permits true propositions - or in Hans Blumenberg’s words:

Die erreichbare Qualität der Erkenntnis bestimmt, welche Gegenstände den Rang

der philosophischen erhalten, gleichgültig welchen Wertbetrag sie aus den sonstigen Motivationen des Erkennenden an sich ziehen können. Die Frage: *Was können wir in Evidenz, in Selbstgegebenheit als Phänomen haben?* Was nicht auf diese Weise gewußt werden kann, ist der phänomenologischen Anstrengung nicht würdig (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 10).<sup>1</sup>

Against this background, it becomes clear why this is not intended to be a meta-linguistic or metatheoretical discussion of this quotation or this thought in Husserl; it is not intended to be a further programmatic presentation and abstract interpretation of the strengths of a possible phenomenology. The background is the conviction that after more than one hundred years of phenomenological history, Husserl's admonishing interjection not to lose sight of the systematic problems should be turned back to parts of this movement itself in order to strengthen phenomenological research by reflecting on the original idea. What can be observed so often in people's lives applies to the history of phenomenology: Intention and realization, idea and execution, aspiration and reality are not always closely related. A glance at the programs of relevant conferences on phenomenology or at the tables of contents of phenomenological book publications or journals can create the impression that phenomenological research is concerned to no small extent with questions that, according to Husserl, phenomenology wanted and should have distanced itself from for the sake of philosophy. The history of the reception of phenomenology - just think of the works of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty - is a sensational success on the one hand. On the other hand it has also led to the phenomenological movement itself becoming the object of numerous detailed historical and metatheoretical studies. The unintended downside of this historicization of phenomenological research is that the practice and core business of phenomenology, namely the description of concrete phenomena, has to some extent moved out of the focus of phenomenological research. This tendency is downright encouraged, if not demanded, by the academic world. As a result, it has become the norm for final theses with a focus on phenomenology - from bachelor's to doctorate to habilitation - to not turn to the 'things themselves', but to address classical opinions about these things.

To avoid misunderstandings about the intention of this issue: This concept in no way denies metatheoretical, work-historical and philosophical-historical studies their philosophical justification or doubts their relevance in the slightest. But as important as this research is, it must not and cannot replace the core business of phenomenology: the description of phenomena. In this respect, the topic is a conscious reaction to the current state of phenomenological research. There is a danger in phenomenology of remaining merely programmatic. It is precisely this decided claim to general validity of phenomenology, the step from personal narrative to substantiated proposition, which must be emphasized because phenomenology is increasingly confronted with the alarming development that the term "phenomenology" is sometimes already used when someone only says how they feel or experience something. But phenomenological philosophizing is based on the fundamental assumption that two characteristics are indispensable for a phenomenological description. The selection of contributions for this special issue was based on the criterion that they fulfill these two characteristics:

1. A phenomenological description is a description from the perspective of the first-person singular. It is about phenomena in the specific sense of the word, i.e. not about

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<sup>1</sup> "The achievable quality of knowledge determines which objects receive the status of philosophical, regardless of the amount of value they can derive from the other motivations of the philosopher. The question: What can we have in evidence, in self-givenness, as a phenomenon? What cannot be known in this way is not worthy of phenomenological effort."

things or events that can be grasped scientifically, but about the experience of things and events of all kinds. In the spirit of Husserl (1950), a phenomenological description of a phenomenon must be committed to the “Prinzip aller Prinzipien”, “daß alles, was sich uns in der ‚Intuition‘ originär, (sozusagen in seiner leibhaften Wirklichkeit) darbietet, einfach hinzunehmen sei, als was es sich gibt, aber auch nur in den Schranken, in denen es sich da gibt” (p. 52).<sup>2</sup>

2. A phenomenological description attempts to determine structures that are characteristic of the phenomenon. The systematic aim of the special issue is to demonstrate in exemplary descriptions how the step from a phenomenography to a phenomenology can be made. If a phenomenography is limited solely to describing how something is for someone, the attempt at phenomenology is linked to the claim of being able to determine necessary structures in the phenomena.

### REFERENCES

- Blumenberg, H. (2006). *Beschreibung des Menschen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp;  
Husserl, E. (1950). *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I*. Husserliana, vol. 3, The Hague 1950.

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<sup>2</sup> “that everything originally (so to speak, in its ‘personal’ actuality) offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there”.