Abstract: The following essay argues that the Husserlian idea of the epoché could be expanded to cover all aspects of practical life. The first part summarizes the extensive debate developed on this issue in English speaking Phenomenology in the 1970s, one that focused on the relation between the notions of epoché and reduction. In fact, the notion of reduction seems to run counter to the idea of expanding the epoché, insofar as it confines the latter within the narrow horizon of a transcendental subjectivism. But Husserl himself cherished the ambition to return to the world. The second part emphasizes that reduction is an act that operates in the practical world in order to introduce a new type of action. According to the author, the phenomenon of ritual can be considered a sort of action in abeyance, i.e. action free from the burden of natural life. Thus the notion of “relief” could prove the most appropriate for introducing a phenomenological theory of rituals as rules without meanings. The third part deals with the relation between Husserl and the Japanese journal “Kaizō,” which asked him for some contributions. The upshot of this proposal was a certain misunderstanding between the Husserlian emphasis upon the idea of new and the perspective of Japanese culture, that tends to overcome the opposition between innovation and repetition through the juxtaposition of the new and the old.

1. Epoché without Reduction

The Italian philosopher Gianbattista Vico in his masterpiece The New Science (La Scienza nuova, 1744) distinguishes two different attitudes towards philosophy, the monastic one and the political one. There is no doubt that Husserl’s thought, especially in the first phase of his work, reflects the former type of attitude. It is needless to repeat here that mathematical knowledge remained a very influential model for Husserl until the last period of his life. Nevertheless, he attributes to his method “the task of also making phenomenologically understandable the mental life of the community”\(^1\) and he often cherishes

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\(^1\) I quote the article written by Edmund Husserl for the Encyclopedia Britannica, in the complete version translated into English by Richard E. Palmer and published in the Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 2 (1971) 2, pp. 77-90.
the ambition that phenomenological enquiries could permit us to return to the world. The world must certainly be considered here in a very different way from the manner in which it regarded in the natural attitude as well as in the scientific one. His commitment to moral issues in his later work is well known to everyone, but it is still difficult to overcome the impression that his ideas of moral conduct are molded in accordance with the ideal of the theoretical attitude. For instance, in *The Vienna Lecture* (1935) he writes: “philosophical knowledge of the world creates not only those particular sorts of [theoretical] results, but also a human posture which immediately intervenes in the whole remainder of practical life with all its demands and ends.”

Consequently, the title of my article, *The Expanded Epoché*, might sound rather suspicious as soon as one recalls that one of Husserl’s pivotal concepts is just the contrary of expansion, i.e. that of *reduction*. So I confess that I am in a somewhat delicate position that becomes even more complicated when I concede that Husserl uses *epoché* and *reduction* almost as synonymous terms. If this is so, the idea of an *expanded epoché* is an oxymoron, an expression that combines incongruous and contradictory meanings. If *epoché* and *reduction* represent the same intellectual procedure, it is clearly impossible to expand the *epoché*. And I do not deny my embarrassment for upsetting phenomenological orthodoxy simply for rhetoric effect.

But are *epoché* and *reduction* really synonyms? Does Husserl use them in an interchangeable way, or may they be considered as two distinct procedures? In truth, some uncertainty actually hangs over this question. But it is not a new question. In fact, this is an issue that was debated very widely in the *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* during the early seventies. Many scholars participated in this discussion, but the issue was dealt with in two opposite ways, represented respectively by Herbert Spiegelberg and Philip J. Bossert.

The starting point of this discussion was provided by Spiegelberg’s essay, with its very provocative title, *Is the Reduction Necessary for Phenomenology?*, here Spiegelberg draws a parallel between the different approaches to phenomenology that were adopted by Husserl himself and another German philosopher, far less well known than Husserl, Alexander Pfänder. Pfänder was very sympathetic to the Husserlian project and was also principal co-editor of the phenomenological yearbook until about 1925. The aim of Spiegelberg’s essay is to prove that *reduction*, never mentioned in Pfänder’s work, is not actually indispensable for phenomenology and can even prove to be source

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of misunderstandings and unnecessary complications. The phenomenological method can rigorously be pursued through *epoché* alone without any recourse to reduction, which is — according to Spiegelberg — an additional, superfluous and misleading notion in Husserl’s work as well. The ancient Greek word, *epoché*, that can be translated as the suspension, bracketing, putting out of action, or disconnecting of belief in the existence of the natural world, does not need to be burdened with the notion of reduction. Whereas Husserl never succeeded in clarifying the relation between *epoché* and *reduction*, Pfänder simply abandoned *reduction* as a lost cause and emphasized the *epoché*, a term which he used interchangeably with German expressions such as *Urteilsenhaltung* (abstention from judgment) or *Glaubensenthaltung* (abstention from belief). For Pfänder, *epoché* is abstention from judgment as a “leaving in abeyance” (*dahingestellt sein lassen*) of what we believe in four areas: reality in its various domains; the truth of specific fields of knowledge; the knowledge of one’s own body; the existence of one’s own soul. What I think is particularly striking about Spiegelberg’s text is his final perspective, which tends to emphasize the practical dimension of the *epoché*: on his reading, the detachment from our natural, everyday attitude, that is implicit in the *epoché*, must already be considered as a form of commitment in the world. Thus the gist of phenomenology lies in the epistemological perspective of taking absolutely nothing for granted; in Spiegelberg’s interpretation this perspective cannot remain purely theoretical, but must be expanded (this word is mine) into an ethical or existential plea. Social good fortune, health, and intellectual gifts are not a matter of course: we stand under the moral obligation of never taking for granted “the privilege of knowledge;” in other words, one must bracket the suspension too, i.e. one must question the conditions of the possibility of the *epoché*. The doubt is not as monastic as the usual presentation of phenomenology suggests. Thus Spiegelberg makes a breakthrough with respect to Husserl: the real issue at stake is not only the idea that the theoretical disposition can automatically shift into a moral one (as in Husserl), but that we can inaugurate up a critical enquiry into the relation between the theoretical suspension and the practical one.

Philip J. Bossert’s essay challenges Spiegelberg’s thesis from an orthodox Husserlian point of view. This essay is a careful examination of Husserl’s statements on the notions of *epoché* and *reduction* during the different phases of his thought, including the posthumous papers published in the edition of the *Husserliana*. According to Bossert, *epoché* and *reduction* in Husserl are not two separate concepts, but two aspects — distinct but inseparable — of

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the same operation, which means that Spiegelberg’s thesis is untenable. The primary sense of *epoché* is “withholding of judgment” (*Urteilsenthaltung*) or “suspension of belief.” Needless to say, this is a theoretical disposition, an exercise of the mind. The primary sense of “reduction” is a “change in attitude” (*Einstellungsänderung*) or “shift of standpoint.” Change is an abstract relation that can be related to theoretical disposition as well as to action. In Husserl, there is no possibility of distinguishing between theoretical and practical attitude because his thought is always exclusively focused on the mind, even when he is concerned with moral issues. In this sense it seems to me that the general direction of his thought continues to be monastic, and not political. Bossert’s scrupulously philological and extremely accurate essay is a demonstration of Husserl’s theoretical attitude: the terms *epoché* and reduction are interchangeable for Husserl, and even when it is possible to distinguish between them, they are always ascribed to the realm of the mind.

One interesting issue discussed by Bossert is the relation between phenomenological reduction and other types of reduction. In fact, the notion of reduction is not a unique or specific feature of the phenomenological approach: mathematics and all empirical sciences all carry out their own reductions. Every science involves an *epoché*, a suspension of judgment with regard to certain aspects of everyday experience. But phenomenology is quite different from all other sciences. The reduction that is carried out by empirical sciences takes something back to its less complex elements: so the upshot is a certain simplification, an impoverishment, and a restriction of the field of everyday experience. Phenomenological reduction, by contrast, is “an expansion of this field to include the transcendental dimension which remains ‘anonymous’ and ignored in the natural and naturalistic attitudes.” I am relieved to find that the word *expansion* is connected with epochistic reduction! But in Husserl’s thought, the *epoché* does not need to be expanded, because it is in itself already an expansion. But an expansion towards what? For Husserl, there is no doubt that the reduction opens to the realm of pure transcendental subjectivity, “to the realm, never before entered, of the mothers of knowledge.” This is a path that neither Spiegelberg nor I are inclined to take.

Philip Pettit made another interesting contribution to this discussion regarding the *epoché*. According to him, if we stay within the phenomenological project, it is impossible to separate *epoché* from reduction. *Epoché*

5 Ibid., p. 249.
taken on its own would involve no more than a quite general methodological commitment to the critical attitude: “this attitude has won the praise not just of phenomenologists, but of philosophers in every tradition.”

And one cannot of course forget that the principal feature of the phenomenological method is the idea of intentionality, i.e. that no single mental disposition can exist without a noema (something thought), independently of the natural existence of an object related to it. In fact, the concept of intentionality – as is generally recognized – is the trump-card that allows phenomenology to overcome both realism and idealism at the same time. But the most amusing criticism advanced by Pettit regards his own personal inability to withdraw his natural faith in the reality of things in order to attain the epoché: according to him the phenomenological theories are “as arbitrary as the ravings of a psychotic.” If we think of the importance of psychosis in Lacan’s thought and in the general culture at the end of the twentieth century, the connection between phenomenological method and psychosis actually deserves serious consideration.

In his reply to his critics Spiegelberg throws additional light on the issues that we have been discussing. The epoché must not be considered as a sort of generic critical attitude. For it is at once both less and more than a critical perspective: less, because it is a retreat from the natural world that does not imply a criterion for identifying possible defects or mistakes; and more, because it implies a radical disposition to separate or to break away from the natural attitude that distinguishes between reality and non-reality. The epoché is a shift of the glance (Blickwendung) “that cannot immediately have such positive results as revealing the achievements of transcendental consciousness.” In this reply we can clearly understand the general strategy of Spiegelberg’s approach: namely to find a phenomenological alternative to the transcendental subjectivism in which Husserl himself got caught up. This subjectivism was the impasse to which the final stage of Husserl’s reduction led. He cannot take for granted that all phenomena originate in transcendental subjectivity: “why could the phenomena not have their origin equally well in ‘objectivity,’ or in combination of both, or even have no origin at all?”

8 Ibid., p. 18.
9 Wolf Mays underlines that the first aspect of phenomenology is the idea of intentionality in “An Interview with the Editor,” in Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 32 (2001) 1, pp. 24-35.
11 Ibid., p. 258.
12 Ibid., p. 261.
2. Epoché as “Relief”

The very interesting discussion that was pursued in the *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* in the early seventies has been helpful in introducing my work and explaining the general drift of my books that have recently been translated into English.\(^{13}\) In fact, the background of my studies is closely related to phenomenology, particularly to its fundamental watchword *Zu den Sächen selbst* (“To the things themselves”) and to the notion of the epoché. However, I have always been dissatisfied with the far too contemplative approach adopted by phenomenology, with its wholly theoretical attitude and the subjective transcendentalism associated with it. I was also deeply suspicious of French existentialism and its attempt to turn phenomenology towards practical issues, an approach that was often bound up with particular ideological commitments and generated problematic idealist consequences. In other words, the general drift of my own research suggested expanding the notion of epoché to cover the activity of everyday life. So it was a great relief for me to find in Spiegelberg’s writings the same dissatisfaction with Husserl’s subjective transcendentalism (or, Vico’s idiom, with a “monastic” philosophy). It is well known that Husserl was reluctant to relinquish or obliterate the notion of world; yet at the same time, it does not seem easy to translate phenomenology into a theory of action.

The first step in this direction may be the extension of the attitude of the “disinterested observer” in everyday life, or, in other words, the idea of freeing oneself from any functional engagement in order to attain a professional level of observation. This is what occurs in scientific psychology. As Husserl writes: “Its epoché applies to all souls and thus also to the psychologist’s own: this involves refraining – *qua* psychologist – from the concurrent performance of his own validities as exercised in the manner of natural everyday life in relation to real things in the objective world. The psychologist establishes in himself the ‘disinterested spectator’ and investigator of himself as well as of all others.”\(^{14}\)

The phenomenological attitude also has affinity with aesthetic experience which is characterized by disinterestedness: the idea, common to almost every thinker of the eighteenth century, that the judgment of taste is independent of any cognitive and practical interest. As Kant states: all such interest destroys a judgment of taste and deprives it of its impartiality.\(^{15}\) Much closer to my pro-

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\(^{14}\) Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, § 69, p. 239.

ject of expanding the *epoché* is the work of the English psychologist Edward Bullough, a contemporary of Husserl who described the aesthetic attitude in terms of “psychical distance.”¹⁶ According to Bullough, the working of distance has a negative, inhibitory effect, insofar as it cancels the practical aspect of things and our own practical attitude to them, but at the same time it also has a positive side: the elaboration of experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of distance. Bullough introduces an interesting expression to describe aesthetic distance that is better than the *epoché*. He says that the demands of persons and incidents in the context of normal experience, which would usually affect us in a directly personal manner, is here held in abeyance. This is a forensic term – in a case of lapse of succession, for example, one speaks of an “estate in abeyance.” But the etymological origin is really surprising, for it is closely connection with an archaic meaning of the Italian word badare, which signifies to delay, to restrain, and more specifically, to gape, to stare with an open mouth. Moreover, for Bullough, such “distance” is an essential aspect not only of aesthetic experience but also of artistic activity. He states: “distance is a factor in all art.” Thus he accomplishes a very important shift from the attitude of the “disinterested spectator” (according to Husserl’s watchword) to the “creative act” involved in artistic production. Artistic distance is already a sort of *epoché*, which is expanded from the theoretical and speculative field to the active and practical working of the artist. It is well worth highlighting the connection between contemplation and artistic activity: in fact, according to Hannah Arendt, the artistic production of the *homo faber* retains a certain continuity with the contemplative life that in antiquity was regarded as the highest condition of human existence.¹⁷ Actually the production of the *homo faber* was governed by the vision of an original ideal model.

In addition to the scientific-professional method and the role of artistic distance, we can also consider a third type of expanded *epoché*, and one which is rooted in religious and spiritual experience. In this case, difficult questions arise as soon as we turn from the tranquility of the private and individual soul to the social commitment also involved in the spiritual practices. What is the difference between a type of charity governed only by a functional humanitarian attitude and another type of charity derived from a profound detachment from all liking and disliking, from considerations which are rooted in the concern for gain or loss? How can such detachment activate a practical engagement in worldly issues without losing its spiritual features? How can the Heideggerian notion of *Gelassenheit* (letting-be), the origin of which is religious, be expanded


in relation to practical issues? How can we take the plunge from a monastic kind of “letting-be” to a political commitment based on a phenomenological \textit{epoché}? We can find plausible answers to these questions in the history of Eastern spirituality (for instance in the application of Zen to martial arts or to sexual behavior), as well as in Western spirituality (for instance, in the extension of the Loyola’s idea of \textit{indifferentia} to our mundane dealings).

Professional disinterestedness, artistic distance and religious detachment are all examples of an \textit{epoché} expanded with regard to practical issues. But from Husserl’s standpoint, these versions of \textit{epoché} are not executed in a sufficiently radical way. And from our standpoint too, they seem more like an extension of a theoretical and speculative dimension to practical issues than a truly radical grasp of the essence of action which is acknowledged in its autonomy. We said that the \textit{epoché} is neither an impoverishment nor a weakening of knowledge, but an entrance into “an essentially new field of experience.”\textsuperscript{18} In the late period of his life in particular Husserl was longing to reach the mental life not only of individuals but also of the community in a genuinely phenomenological way. However this task must be performed without any concession to ideological or empirical contingencies. So the crucial question is: how can we move from a pure and radical approach to the mind to a pure and radical approach to the realm of action?

In my opinion, this switch, on which the possibility of a political phenomenology essentially depends, needs to direct its attention once again to the idea of \textit{reduction}. In other words, Spiegelberg’s appeal to commitment cannot be developed without scrutinizing the notion of \textit{reduction} more carefully. In fact, whereas \textit{epoché} is a mental disposition, a conceptual principle, reduction is an \textit{act}, as Juha Himanka has emphasized.\textsuperscript{19} Now we can understand the kind of puzzle in which Spiegelberg got caught up: as long as we remain in an epistemological context, reduction is only a gateway to transcendental subjectivity. For this reason, Spiegelberg suggests dispensing with the reduction and thus presents his phenomenology under the label “\textit{Epoché without Reduction}.” But if reduction is interpreted in a very different manner, namely as an act that relates to the practical world in order to introduce us into a new type of action, then Spiegelberg no longer has any reason for concern.

So we should ask: what is reduction specifically as an act? What is an action submitted to the same process that characterizes the \textit{epoché}? At this point my


interpretation leads away from Husserl’s and Spiegelberg’s positions, and I can
no longer hide behind quotations from Husserl himself. Nonetheless, I shall
try to follow, with regard to action, the same procedure adopted by Husserl
in his eidetic method. For Husserl the goal of phenomenological knowledge
is the intuition of the essential forms that he calls eide (the plural of eidos, idea).
What are the essential forms of actions? My answer is: the essential forms of
the action are rituals. In the practical domain only rituals can have the “endur-
ing invariant in variation” that Husserl searches for in the eide. 20

In my book Ritual Thinking I was not interested in the empirical study of
rituals, but in the elucidation of the a priori conditions of the ritual attitude.
In adopting this approach, I embarked upon a path that seems quite contrary
to the search of origins. The majority of Husserl’s interpreters place special
emphasis on the concept of origin, of beginning and of genetic production, 21
or consider phenomenological reduction as a return to the experiences of
childhood. 22 I understand the point of this approach very well and I think that
it is quite plausible as long as we remain within the frame of a transcendental
psychology. If we move towards a transcendental theory of action, the focus
must be centered on the ideas of repetition, habit, and ritual. It is hard to deny
Husserl’s emphatic quest for what is immediately given. 23 However, at the
same time Husserl stresses the formal character of eide.

Certain recent studies of ritual have provided a useful contribution for
elucidating this difficult issue. Some pivotal research on this subject has been
carried out by the indologist Frits Staal, according to whom ritual is a form
of pure activity, without any meaning, goal or aim. 24 It does not follow that
such activity has no value: it has an intrinsic value that is in contrast with the
applied activities of our ordinary everyday life. In fact, in ritual activity, it is
the rules that count, not the result. If ritual is useless, this does not imply that
it may not have a useful side effect; but such side effects cannot explain its
essence. On the basis of very careful inquiries, Staal emphasizes the meaning-
lessness of ritual, and here there is a certain affinity with the presupposition-
lessness of Husserl’s phenomenology. What is striking is that Staal overcomes
the opposition between origin and repetition, and also that between natural

20 Husserl, Article for the Encyclopedia Britannica, p. 81.
21 For instance Christopher Macann in his essay “Genetic Production and the Transcendental
23 This aspect is underlined by Jaakko Hintikka, “The Phenomenological Dimension,” in Barry
Smith and David Woodruff Smith (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Husserl, Cambridge:
24 Frits Staal, Rules without Meanings. Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences, New York: Peter
Lang, 1990.
science and the humanities, because for him animal behavior already offers many interesting examples of ritual without meaning. Even the original form of human speaking is meaningless: religious mantras are the preservation of this particular use of language.

And Caroline Bell, a specialist in Chinese religions, has also defended the same thesis. Ritual activity is independent of ideology, belief, or theoretical presuppositions, as well as independent of practical functions or calculated projects: “Ritualized activities do not promote belief or conviction. On the contrary, ritualized activities afford a great diversity of interpretation in exchange of little more than consent to the form of activities.” The essential purpose of reutilization is nothing more than the production of ritualized agents, i.e. persons who have embedded ritual schemes in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their general attitude towards the world. In addition, my researches on ancient Roman religion and on Catholicism have brought me to the same conclusions. Similarly, my approach to sexuality also leads towards the analysis of a sort of sexual activity that is independent of desire and pleasure: to the idea, as it were, of sexuality in abeyance.

There is no contradiction between epoché and activity: the epochistic experience can be expanded to the field of action without forfeiting its essential features. At the same time, it is true that the epoché alone is not sufficient, for it runs the risk of imprisoning phenomenology within an entirely “monastic” perspective. Spiegelberg’s watchword “epoché without reduction” cannot really satisfy Spiegelberg’s own desire to overcome subjectivism. Moreover, I wonder if it might be a good idea to replace the word “reduction” with another one that is still close to it precisely in order to avoid misunderstandings in this regard. And here I would suggest the word relief (that is a possible English translation of the German term Entlastung). In fact, ritual actions are “relieved” or suspended actions. The domain of practical life does not simply disappear here, but “becomes fully free, above all free of the strongest and most universal and at the same time most hidden, internal bond, namely, of the pregivenness of the world.” Although rituals are generally perceived as something coercive and authoritarian, I would argue, on the contrary, that they relieve us of the burden of prejudices, believes, ideologies, functional orientations, and over-familiar and routine sensations. They involve a sort of...
exoneration from the onus of a naive approach to world that is erroneously regarded as self-evident. In fact Entlastung is translated into Italian with esonero. Ritual without meanings is Cartesian doubt transferred to the context of practical life. It is not only the philosopher, but anyone at all who can broach the phenomenological path of the epoché with relief; the philosopher ceases to be the sacrificial lamb of solipsistic experiments without thereby simply falling into a vulgar empirical or ideological attitude.

3. Renewal and Relief

A political approach to the issue of the epoché cannot avoid addressing the problem of the new. This question now seems a particularly awkward one since the special stress we placed on the idea of ritual seems to imply repetition, i.e. the very opposite of innovation.

We cannot conceal the fact that the emphasis placed on the new is an important aspect of Husserl’s philosophical strategy. Husserl presents his thought as a new kind of descriptive method, and one which marked a breakthrough in philosophy between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In fact, however, phenomenology is connected in many ways with the earlier tradition of philosophy. And it should really be seen as the fulfillment of a feature that always belonged to philosophy, the progress of which is characterized by what we might call three essential turning points.

The first occurred in ancient Greece in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. As Husserl puts it: “Here arises a new sort of attitude of individuals towards their surrounding world. And its consequence is the breakthrough of a completely new sort of spiritual structure, rapidly growing into a systematically self-enclosed cultural form; the Greeks called it philosophy.” Thus Husserl lays great emphasis on the relation between the birth of philosophy and the opening of new horizons. In this sense Husserl shares the interpretation of ancient philosophy that was often given in the modern age. But a more rigorous approach to ancient thought reveals that classical philosophy did not focus on the idea of new. In Aristotle, for instance, the use of the term new (νέος, καινός) is merely occasional. On the other hand, the idea of the new certainly played an important role in Judaism and obviously in Christianity. In fact, there is a strange connection between the biblical idea of the new and the great success of this term in scientific modernity.

30 Husserl, The Vienna Lecture, p. 276.
The second pivotal turn in the history of philosophy, according to Husserl, is the new formulation of the idea of philosophy in the Renaissance. Here European humanity brings about a revolutionary change that is related to Galileo’s mathematization of nature and to the Cartesian cogito.\textsuperscript{32} Husserl highlights the immense change precipitated by the introduction of a “style, which that was \textit{new in principle}, unknown to the ancients.”\textsuperscript{33} As Hannah Arendt pointed out, the idea of a radical novelty, i.e. of revolution, first sprang up in the context of scientific language and was only really transferred to political and social discourses at the time of the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{34} She probably underestimated the importance of artistic and economic development in the shaping of the notion of the new, something that had already begun during the Middle Ages in Italy (especially in Florence). But is difficult to challenge the idea that it was only with Hegel’s philosophy of history that the different streams of cultural change were brought together in terms of a real theology of progress.

For Husserl, the third momentous turning point in philosophy is phenomenology itself: it radicalizes the Cartesian doubt with the \textit{epoché}, a procedure that “arises from a general reversal of that ‘natural attitude’ in which everyday life as a whole as well as the positive sciences operate.”\textsuperscript{35} Certainly Husserl recognized his debt to Brentano, who discovered the remarkable character of intentionality in human experience, but he also stresses the decisively \textit{new} aspect of his own approach in his early \textit{Logical investigations}.

Husserl found an opportunity for focusing specifically upon the problem of the new when in 1921 the Japanese journal \textit{Kaizō} invited him to write some articles on the crisis of civilization. Husserl wrote \textit{five} essays for \textit{Kaizō},\textsuperscript{36} but only three were published in Japanese. He derived the idea for his contributions from the name of the journal \textit{Kaizō}, which means “renewal,” and he laid particular emphasis upon the notion of the new. In fact, in the titles of the first and the third essay we find the term \textit{Erneuerung}. More specifically, the subject of these essays is the desire for a renewal of Europe, in contrast to the cultural notion of the decline of the West, which was very widespread in his time. For Husserl, the decay of Western civilization depends on many political, social and economic factors (for instance the destruction wrought by the Great War and the ensuing post-war chaos), but the real root of the distress must be identified in the meaninglessness of Western existence, a condition from which empirical sciences could not deliver us. Nevertheless,
the crisis of Western civilization need not lead us to a rejection of reason, but can encourage to a new development of a rational method, the model of which is given by phenomenology. In these extremely interesting essays Husserl presents a number of arguments that will be developed much further in *The Crisis of European Sciences*. Unfortunately, however, the concept of *Erneuerung* is not thoroughly investigated here and remains rather peripheral and incidental. I do not know if the Japanese editor was really disappointed with Husserl’s contributions, but I suspect that this Japanese opportunity for an encounter between Western and Eastern thought did not turn out well. In fact, the Japanese cultural and historical experience of *renewal* is very different from the Western one: what is peculiar to the Japanese outlook is the lack of a strong opposition between the *new* and the *old*. So the great emphasis that Westerners typically place upon the ideas of reform and revolution, considered as ways in which the *new* erupts into the historical process, is alien to the Japanese mentality. But what is striking is that the contrary ideas of conservation and restoration are equally alien here. In other words, the dispute between the partisans of the *old* and the partisans of the *new* (*Querelle des anciens et des modernes*) that has constituted the axis of modern discursive space for the West in all the domains (in the artistic as well as the religious, economic, scientific, social, and political spheres) does not apply to the Japanese perspective. The paramount notion of *ishin*, which provided the basis for the construction of Japanese modernity in 1868, cannot be translated either by revolution (*kakumei*) or by restoration (*fukko*), and thus constitutes a sort of enigma for the Western mind. A more appropriate translation might be *renewal* (*Erneuerung*).  

Regarding the term *kaizō*, this is perhaps the exact translation of renewal (for instance, *kaizō* is used when we are talking about an old house being rebuilt). In order to capture out this essential feature of the Japanese mind, Western scholars have invented expressions such as “Japan’s quiet transformation,” or “Innovation through conservatism.” But since Husserl regards himself as the heir to the intellectual culture of the West, phenomenology for him is a kind of reformed version of the crucial Greek *logos*, as well as an extension of the scientific modern revolution. Thus it is no wonder that the distance between the Japanese and the Western intellectual outlooks was not bridged on that

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38 I wish to thank Mr. Sabae Hideki, who supplied me with this information.


occasion! A few years later, however, fortune did smile on Heidegger in relation to Japanese scholarship. 41

However, *epochistic relief* (the expression with which I would like to replace *epochistic reduction*) is precisely an experience that overcomes the opposition between the old and the new, without thereby betraying the spirit of the phenomenological method. And in fact it allows us to “bracket” the whole ideological construction on which Western modernity has been built. The specific character of ritual thinking is the relief from the burden of opinions, beliefs and prejudices. The dispute between progressivism and conservatism is the blind alley of a decayed Western perspective. The same matter can be presented both as old and new: both are rhetorical devices from which the phenomenological method can set us free. Japanese culture and society can be described in an equally persuasive way as the most conservative 42 or as the most innovative in the world. 43

Secondly, ritual without meaning is a practical attitude, not a mere contemplative state. Suspended action concerns the domain of political philosophy (in the sense of Vico’s distinction that we mentioned at the beginning). In my essays on ritual I have tried to show that Roman civilization was built up through a process of radical demythologization: the ancient Roman mind, in contrast with the Greek one, puts in abeyance all sorts of mythical beliefs, but is extremely careful in the observance of ceremonies and formal habits. 44 We can find the same attitude in the Japanese mind that is firmly grounded in practice and manages without any appeal to transcendental principles.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the pivotal idea of phenomenology, i.e. the *epoché*, does reveal unexpected possibilities, if it is expanded to embrace practical issues as opposed to standard and conventional problems. Once we undertake such an extension of the *epoché*, then cultures that have been considered marginal or eccentric in relation to the mainstream of Western philosophy may well come to play an important role.

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44 Perniola, *Ritual Thinking*. 