The world as “the genuine matter of phenomenology”—to cite a contemporary author, Klaus Held (Held 1992, 130)—is linked with one of Edmund Husserl’s most important philosophical inceptions, one still living today even if in its contemporary form it is associated, as usual, with revisions, reversals, and heresies. Thus Martin Heidegger, Eugen Fink, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and other philosophers who have critically contested Husserl’s transcendental-philosophical point of departure in considerable detail have taken the problem of the world in new directions, at times amounting to a kind of cosmological turn. But the productive engagement with such challenges—challenges that persist to this day, as in, for example, the work of Renaud Barbaras—has also certainly led to attempts to renew Husserl’s phenomenological approach to the world, and thereby to reinstate the world as a phenomenological problem.

38.1 Husserl

For Husserl, the access to the problem of the world is linked with a very central concept—that of the horizon. As he tells us in his later work, “to systematically explicate the constitution of the pregiven world is to systematically explicate its horizontal structure” (Hua XXXIX, 125).

But with this, other equally central motifs are indicated. The first is the character of pregivenness, which is essentially suited for the phenomenological concept of the world as described on the basis of the horizon-structure of experience. And the second concerns the way in which we are to go about elucidating the sense of this world in its pregivenness: what is at stake is a systematic explication of the constitution of this sense, which points to the transcendental-phenomenological method that relates any sense—even the “pregiven” sense of the world, which is not itself an object, but encompasses all objects—to its correlative sense-institutions and sense-formations in consciousness.

Let us briefly sketch Husserl’s concept of the horizon, which he actually discovered quite early in his analyses of perception and time-consciousness, then first systematically presented in Ideas I. His analyses showed, among other things, that no consciousness of something can be experienced as isolated, for it always already points to two distinguishable nexuses of sense. One concerns the currently given object itself (the so-called inner horizon of its further determinations), and the other concerns the object’s situatedness in relation to other objects as its outer horizon (for example, its spatial surroundings). Horizons are, moreover, implied both on the
side of the noesis (the act of consciousness itself) and on the side of the noema (the objectivity meant). All these inner and outer, noetic and noematic nexuses and references in their reciprocal, interlocking connections can be grasped as horizons and can be brought to light in principle in the analysis.

A determination of the world can already be phenomenologically demonstrated in terms of these analyses; namely, the world can be addressed as the horizon of all horizons standing in correlation with the acts of consciousness of individual (although always already communalized) subjectivities. Yet this is merely one essential determination of experience: what we are actually conscious of constantly stands out against the background of implicit nexuses of sense, and since these are always co-given, they can be explicaded as potentialities for actual consciousness. Here we can already speak in a certain sense of a “pregivenness” of the horizons encompassing individual experiences.

In connection with the theme of the epoché and transcendental reduction, which Husserl first publicly presented in Ideas I, an essential determination of the world itself is also revealed: namely, the function of a general thesis through which the world is always already co-posted and presupposed along with positings of individual objects. Since all “naive” beliefs held in the natural attitude about the being of objects to be known are now to be bracketed or set out of play as a whole, what the epoché that is to accomplish this comes up against is a more fundamental, unthematic, and general certainty of belief in a whole: the world as basis and ground. (It is above all within the framework of the later genetic transcendental phenomenology emerging since the mid-1920s that this function of the world is further investigated and interpreted.)

In this way the pregivenness of the world becomes visible in its unmodalizability; although any individual experience can be modalized if, for instance, it turns out in the course of experience that the object is an illusion, world-experience as such is “not modalizable” (Hua XXXIX, 246). What comes to light here is the irreducibility of the “general thesis” of the world (indeed, of the primal facticity of having a world), since it is not a specific act “explicitly performed at some time or other”; instead, the “primal fact” that from the start and “quite as a matter of course” we live in a world functions as “the foundation for all such specific acts” (Landgrebe 1963, 44/127).

This characterization of the pregivenness of the world as a primal fact indicates that even in the genetic analysis, this world-positing—like the horizons concretely co-comprising our currently lived surrounding worlds—is not derived from individual experiences with objects (leading, for example, to an acquired habituality), for “all habitualities, whether inborn or acquired in the course of life, are habitualities of a human being who already stands on the ground of world-belief and knows him/herself as an entity among other entities” (Landgrebe 1963, 45/127).

However, while it is the case that this belief is distinguished from the formation of horizons per se (although it is through the latter that every experience is experience in-the-world), where does the world-belief come from in lived experiencing? As the primal fact of world-relatedness, this very belief is also a lived experience; the question of the genesis or origin of world-belief must accordingly be posed here as well.

Thus as Husserl writes in his last work, the Crisis,

From the beginning, the phenomenologist lives in the paradox of having to look upon the obvious as questionable, as enigmatic, and of henceforth being unable to have any other scientific theme than that of transforming the universal obviousness [Selbstverständlichkeit] of the being of the world—for him the greatest of all enigmas—into something intelligible [eine Verständlichkeit].

(Hua VI, 184/180)
That this is not an isolated formulation can be seen from another passage that likewise casts the “taken-for-grantedness” or obviousness of the world as the “enigma of all enigmas” (Hua VI, 208/204). Similarly, in his 1933 Kant-Studien article, Eugen Fink speaks of the “mystery” of our constant world-acceptance, or our fundamental and all-pervasive belief in its being (Fink 1966, 115ff.). And in “The Philosopher and his Shadow,” Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers to “the mystery of a world-positing prior to all positing” (Merleau-Ponty 1960, 207/163). But for Husserl, when the pregivenness of the world is described and interpreted within a transcendental-philosophical framework, such a “mystery” is no obstacle. Instead, the analysis inquires back into ever more original strata of the genesis of the experience in order to elucidate the origin of our having a world in terms of a genetic clarification of world-apperception as it is concordantly articulated, on the basis of affection, in the processes of sense-formation and sense-institution. And as already mentioned, these clarifications proceed from the description of our natural possession of the world.

This, then, is the transcendental-genetic interpretation of the pregivenness of the world that can be understood as Husserl’s answer to the question of the origin of the world: the world is (pre-)constituted as a “formation” of transcendental subjectivity. And this subjectivity is so closely linked with the world that, without the world, subjectivity would have no content (Inhalt) at all, and without subjectivity, the world would have no ongoing sense-content (Bestand). The world is the correlate of a universal world-apperception that has its source in the life of transcendental subjectivity. And Husserlian phenomenology does not go beyond this correlation—the correlation is its absolute. As Fink indicates, both “world” and “transcendental subjectivity” are moments within this absolute; “just as the world only is what it is in terms of its ‘origin,’ so this origin itself is what it is only with reference to the world” (Fink 1966, 106/99f.). Husserl describes this notion of “with reference to the world” in much the same way as he usually describes any consciousness’s intentional “being-directed-toward-an-object”—namely, with the concept of apperception: “The world is there for us as pregiven insofar as a world-apperception already constantly runs through our life prior to thematizing this or that object, or even the world as universe” (Hua XXXIX, 42). It is only due to the way in which the passively flowing “total apperception” ongoingly unifies individual apperceptions that things constantly appear “whether we are paying attention to them or not” (Hua XXXIX, 42). Thus it is through this “total apperception” that the world is horizonally pregiven to us, and as soon as we bring reflection into play, we become experientially aware that the pregiven world “continually has its subjective milieu—and without this, we can never be conscious of it” (Hua XXXIX, 43).

### 38.2. The cosmological turn

In the introduction to Experience and Judgment, we read, “The world we are conscious of horizontally has in its constant ontic acceptance the subjective character of familiarity in general” (Husserl 1939, 33/37). Seen critically, this description displays a tendency toward what Fink initially saw as the prejudice of the pregivenness of the world, later reproaching Husserl for a kind of metaphysical “cloistering”—namely, the tendency to interpret world-apperception as if any experienceable thing or reality whatsoever is given a priori through a “preacquaintance” with it in its typicality, all the way to a “totality of typification” pertaining to the “world-horizon as a whole in its infinity” that suffuses every individual entity from the start and co-determines it in advance (Husserl 1939, 32f./36). Thus in the course of this tendency toward totalization, the essential familiarity of the world winds up meaning that “unfamiliarity is always simultaneously a mode of familiarity” (Husserl 1939, 34/37) formed in the course of object-constitution and spreading across the entire universe, making it a securely sealed realm determined in advance.
For critical voices within the phenomenological movement, this seems to preclude the very openness of the world and above all of what appears, which leads, on the one hand, to taking an ever clearer distance from, or even turning away from, such an a priori world-framework. From Emmanuel Levinas to Michel Henry or Jean-Luc Marion, and for Marc Richir as well, the world is not the ground of what appears; what appears is not linked to a passively flowing, continually unifying world-apperception, as Husserl would have it. On the other hand, however, this break from Husserl's approach was preceded by a certain cosmological turn for which what appears does indeed have its ground in the world. What both trends have in common is that they want to preserve the appearing from being dissolved into a universal world-apperception and ultimately being seen as a mere correlate of intentional consciousness. And one way to do this would seem to involve recovering a more original pregivenness of the world and establishing the priority of the world as the framework that makes all phenomenal correlations—hence the appearing as such—possible in the first place.

In conjunction with Heidegger's critique of phenomenology, Eugen Fink follows this impulse to think the world in another way—indeed, to initiate a cosmological turn beyond phenomenology. While functioning as Husserl's close co-worker, Fink accompanied the latter's later trains of thoughts and projects, but took other paths in his own philosophy. Here a central role is played by the claim that the human's world-relation should not first be thought of in terms of intentional consciousness and its horizons; instead, one must think in terms of the framework that always already embraces such a consciousness and its horizons. Thus, the claim is that it is possible to retrieve dimensions that are missing not only in Husserl's phenomenology, but also in Heidegger, insofar as their approach to the world-framework is limited to taking it in terms of nexuses of sense.

To pursue our sketch of the phenomenological problematic of the world—and the way in which the pregivenness of the world and the interpretation of this pregivenness are related to one another—we may turn to Klaus Held's essay on world and finitude for an insight that marks an important step on the path toward a phenomenological cosmology. While recognizing the decisive step Heidegger takes in *Being and Time*, Held also offers an answer to the difficulties arising with a transcendental-phenomenological clarification of our having a world. According to this answer, the world is originally pre-intentionally pregiven on the basis of our readiness “to be affected in one or another way,” which determines the how of the appearing that takes place “in the [consciousness–appearing object] correlation” (Held 1992, 141). And Held's aim in this essay is to show that “it is the finitude of the world in Heidegger's sense that makes its infinity in Husserl's sense possible” (Held 1992, 131).

Here it is important that this readiness is not that of the “I-can” available to intentional consciousness, since in the first place, this I-can is limited in its freedom and depends on something that is not at its disposal—hence we speak of the finitude of the original, pre-intentional pregivenness of the world. In addition, the intentional I-can, and its ability to penetrate ever further into an endless world, is itself first awakened and made, possibly by this very readiness to be affected. Held accordingly tells us that such readiness to be affected is nothing other than the manner in which a pre-intentional world-openness that is “not a relation” comes about (Held 1992, 141). With Heidegger, he characterizes this openness as Befindlichkeit, as an originally felt/attuned world-openness that is essentially linked with the world's withdrawal and finitude: “The withdrawal that allows the world to be finite overcomes us in the mood—we sense with astonishment that we are not master of the openness of the world,” that it can “withdraw into the abyss of nothingness” (Held 1992, 143).

Yet even in Heidegger's presentation of the finitude of the world, which is to make possible its infinity in Husserl's sense (its endlessly intersecting horizons), the world remains a horizon,
a nexus of sense, even if the pre-intentional pregivenness of the world is not an apperception, which for Husserl ultimately remains the exclusive model for givenness. It is Eugen Fink who tackles and plumbs the depths of world-withdrawal in a different way from Heidegger.

After his time as Husserl’s assistant—thus in his later, independent attempts to work out a cosmology from such a phenomenological perspective—Fink chooses an even more negative point of departure in his 1949 lecture course on “World and Finitude”:

world is the paradoxical intentional phenomenon of an empty horizon that burst forth ahead of all experiencing and transforms it as a whole. World for Husserl is not in itself any more than it is for Kant; if for Kant it is a sheer “idea,” for Husserl it is sheerly “horizon.”

(Fink 1990, 149)

But even if the “worldliness of the world” is manifested in horizonality, world cannot be equated with the phenomenon of the horizon, for the latter “is grounded in world-openness, but is not the genuinely worldly way of being open” (Fink 1990, 29).

In order to detach himself from Husserl’s model of levels of horizons concentrically arrayed over against a subject, Fink turns to the metaphor of Rückschein: whereas in his dissertation he had appealed to a notion we might render as Durchscheinen in order to refer to the non-horizontal co-presence of the material stratum “through” which an image appears (Nielsen-Sepp 2011, 11),10 we might think of Rückschein not in terms of something “appearing before” consciousness, but in terms of world as continually and invisibly “shining back,” permeating and presupposed by both act-intentionality and horizon-intentionality.11 Thus he can start out with horizons, but read them, so to speak, in the opposite direction from Husserl. For Fink, then, experiential horizons are no longer to be taken “as the relations constituted within the immanence of a subjectivity to what is outside this subjectivity itself, but rather as an announcement—one that occurs within the immanence of the circumference of a life—of that which exceeds this circumference” (Nielsen-Sepp 2011, 11; cf. Bruzina 2004, 428f.). (Alternatively, we might suggest the metaphor of the voice of the world singing itself back into the innerworldly.) And with this, the sense of the horizon itself is surpassed, since it proves unsatisfactory “to tie the sense of the world to the relation to a horizon” (Nielsen-Sepp 2011, 11).

What is to be reached through this reversal is an interpretation of the pregivenness of the world that differs from Husserl’s characterization of the world as the concordant total horizon of all experience. Guided by the notion of Rückschein, the world is no longer grasped in terms of a system of nested concordant horizons extending “outside of” the experiencing subject. Instead, with the reversal, the world is shining back “into” the subjectively lived system (Nielsen-Sepp 2011, 11; cf. Bruzina 2004, 428f.). (Alternatively, we might suggest the metaphor of the voice of the world singing itself back into the innerworldly.) And with this, the sense of the horizon itself is surpassed, since it proves unsatisfactory “to tie the sense of the world to the relation to a horizon” (Nielsen-Sepp 2011, 11).

What is thereby emphasized in Fink’s repeated attempts to leave behind the horizontal world-apperception of intentional consciousness and forge a way toward another mode of thinking, as in the 1949 lecture course on “World and Finitude,” is the “cosmological difference,” (Fink 1990, 19) and accordingly the need not only to reject the model of “world” as encompassing in contrast to entities that are encompassed, but also to respect the invisible, non-present “presence” of the world that shines into but does not itself appear within the innerworldly. And this very “inaccessibility” of the world is precisely the fundamental way in which it escapes the grip of any metaphysical thinking that takes entities “within” the world as its point of departure (Fink 1990, 20f). Thus, even though Fink does follow Heidegger’s repudiation of metaphysics up to a point, he is still critical of Heidegger for beginning from being-in-the-world as the locus of the felt withdrawal of the world.12
38.3 Back to the world as the “thing itself” of Husserlian phenomenology

We have pointed out above that according to Held, *Befindlichkeit*—our felt attunement to finitude—can provide the basis for the infinity of the concrete world-horizon that first of all makes an openness for appearing possible. In contrast, what László Tengelyi defends in his posthumously published last book (Tengelyi 2014) is the open infinity of the world. He interprets the pregivenness of the world in terms of an extension of phenomenology, incorporating the method of transcendental phenomenology on the one hand (Tengelyi 2014, 200) and the recognition of undervivable primal facts on the other (Tengelyi 2014, 14). Here he sees a certain phenomenological metaphysics of contingent facticity already at work in Husserl, insofar as any eidetic variation—and thus any eidetic transcendental phenomenology—is based on such primal facts. Tengelyi initially finds four such primal facts in Husserl’s writings, then adds two more. The first four are: 1) the current I in each case; 2) this I’s having a world; 3) the intentional intertwining between I and others; and 4) the teleology of history (Tengelyi 2014, 184). In addition, there is, most noticeably, the event of appearing itself (Tengelyi 2014, 190). And—more inconspicuously or subliminally—embodiment as a primal fact. And what is decisive is that in their facticity and plurality, these primal facts persist even though we cannot derive these facts themselves from primal causes. They don’t amount to some kind of onto-theological ground, yet they are not simply empirical facts among others.13

With regard both to the primal fact of having a world and to its infinity, Tengelyi introduces a “diacritical distinction,” namely, the “fundamental difference between totality and infinity” (Tengelyi 2014, 184). This is related to the problem of the Husserlian scheme whereby the world would be nothing but the correlate of an intentional consciousness determining it, a priori, in advance, thereby forestalling its openness and undermining its alterity or withdrawal. For Tengelyi, the world’s infinity is not, for instance, the totality of the world as a “self-contained whole”; instead, it is a matter of the “openness of the world for the infinite” in such a way that the world is a totality that is open for infinity, so that the distinction between “totality” and “infinity” does not imply that they are antithetical, but is quite precisely “only a distinction” (Tengelyi 2014, 299). The “diacritical distinction” is nevertheless decisive, for it gives us a chance to escape the danger of the world being swallowed up in consciousness as its correlate.

Here, Tengelyi’s turn to the diacritical (in contrast to a distant third-person perspective) was inspired by Merleau-Ponty (Tengelyi 2014, 301). Yet he remains close to Husserl’s phenomenological idea of the structure of a thing within an infinite world-horizon, which is here taken as a “differential system of possible experiences”; thus Tengelyi’s task is to take Husserl further by linking the “structure” of the thing with the thing as a “reality.”

And the classic problem according to which in the end, the world is nothing but—or nothing beyond—a mere correlate of consciousness is now renewed in the form of a challenge: how can we think with Husserl, yet without turning the world into a mere correlate of consciousness? What stands in the way of this? For Tengelyi, what we have to give up is the idea of the thing as a completely determined reality. The “diacritical task” requires us to break free from the idea of “an infinite system of possible experiences” of the ontic totality of the thing and the total (determinate) reality of the world. Rather than simply turning away from Husserl, however, Tengelyi finds a way out in Husserl’s own notion of the “contingency” of our knowledge of the world, which is not based on exuberant speculative metaphysics trying to trace primal facts back to first causes or grounds, but emerges through phenomenological reflection on, and description of, the experiential givenness of the world (Tengelyi 2014, 324). This seems to be directed against Fink’s speculative thesis concerning the necessity of the world, replacing it with the Husserlian thesis of the necessary fact of having a world. According to the diacritical method, then, it is possible...
that infinity—as the infinity of what appears—does not first arrive in the world through the subjectivity for whom the appearing appears; this infinity of the world is made possible by the openness of world-reality itself. The diacritical method even claims that the latter is manifested through the unavailability that is linked with world-experience and that is able, as an event, to disturb the concordant world-apperception comprising an infinite system of possible experiences. Instead, the openness brings an element of alterity into play—one that is indeed taken up into experience, and is experienced as the contingency of experience, but is never fully absorbed or dissolved in horizontal anticipations of experiential coherence. For Tengelyi, then, the very openness of the world includes the alterity that is lived as the contingency of experience; thus this openness can still be phenomenologically demonstrated through experience without requiring any speculative references to what lies beyond phenomenology.

38.4 Conclusion

It is the accent on the facticity of the pregivenness of the world (the emphasis found in Husserl, Landgrebe, and Tengelyi), in contrast to the tendency to include or even to dissolve this (as well as other primal facts) in the “ultimate facticity” of a necessary relation to the absolute, understood as the movement of the world itself (as happens with authors following the cosmological turn), that comprises the project of a path back to the world as the matter of phenomenology. Here Tengelyi’s final book opens further vistas. And we can also find aspects of this path in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jan Patočka, and Klaus Held, as well as in other authors we have not mentioned. Thus despite maintaining some critical distance from Husserl, their work is linked with the Husserlian approach to the problem of the world that we began with, while at the same time their innovative re-readings of a phenomenology of the world can engage with attempts at a cosmological turn, here discussed above all in terms of Fink’s contribution.14

Notes

1 Cf. an essay by Ludwig Landgrebe from the late 1930s that first appeared in English: “The World as a Phenomenological Problem.” We shall cite the revised German text that appeared in his Der Weg der Phänomenologie. Das Problem einer ursprünglichen Erfahrung (the published translation in English has sometimes been modified). Landgrebe wrote this essay while working on Erfahrung und Urteil and preparing some of Husserl’s other manuscripts on the theme of “world-experience and the problem of the horizon” for a publication planned for Prague—see Hua XXXIX, lvii.

2 Cf. Jan Patočka, who not only refers to the “mystery” whereby we tacitly take the world for granted as a “prior whole” through which human life moves, but points to the “dizzying” recognition of the fact of a “non-sensuous presence” of the world through which everything sensuous becomes accessible to us and in which we ourselves live (Patočka 1965, 2).

3 Cf. Fink 1966, 119/113, where Fink identifies the transcendental problem of the world as “the basic problem of phenomenology.”


5 In a late research manuscript, Husserl formulates this as follows: “As the universe of ongoingly concordant experience, the world is actually constituted, we can say, for each normal mature human being precisely as a developed capability for being able to experience ever further—this is the ‘world-concept’ of natural human life. The everyday sense ‘world’ is drawn from the shifting ‘worldview’ or experiential intuition of the world arising in the actualization of this process of ‘again and again, and so on’” (Hua-Mat VIII, 186 n.2).

6 “The basic question of phenomenology … can be formulated as the question concerning the origin of the world” (Fink 1966, 101/95).

7 As Husserl programatically puts it in the Crisis, the aim of the transcendental-genetic question of the origin of the world is “learning to understand that the world constantly existing for us in the streaming play of modes of givenness is a universal mental acquisition that has developed, and at the same time is
ongoingly developing, as a unity of a mental configuration, as a sense-formation—the formation of a universal, ultimately functioning subjectivity” (Hua VI, 115/113).

8 Thus as Fink points out in a 1949 lecture course, taking the intentional relation to the thing as a model for the ontological region where all objects are encountered continually expands the “nearness” of the already familiar and makes this very region “something derived” (Fink 1990, 148).

9 See, e.g., Barbaras 2014 for some recent work in line with this cosmological trend.

10 Cf. Fink 1966, 76f., on the “transparency” (Durchsichtigkeit) of the physical medium through which the image is given.

11 On the world as “shining back” (relucent), see Fink 1960, 123; cf. Bruzina 2004, 369, and see also Chapter 4 on the development of Fink’s notion of world.

12 Here it is not possible to pursue Fink’s discussion of Heidegger’s later thinking on earth and physis (cf. the latter’s 1935/36 lecture on “The Origin of the Work of Art”). See, however, Nielsen 2011; cf. Dastur 1998.


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