Enzo Paci was born in Monterado, Ancona, on September 18, 1911. He taught philosophy at the University of Pavia from 1951 until 1958 and later on at the University of Milan from 1958 until his passing in Milan on July 21, 1976.

52.1. The Platonic background and the interpretation of the “Parmenides”.

After attending high school in Cuneo, Piemonte, where his father Corrado Paci moved with the family because of his job, Paci enrolled in philosophy at the University of Pavia. There he was a student of Adolfo Levi, a famous scholar in ancient philosophy. At the very beginning of his philosophical career, Paci focused his studies on ancient philosophy: this was the origin of his Platonic background.

After two years of course work, Enzo Paci moved to the University of Milan to study with Antonio Banfi, who became his mentor. With Banfi as his supervisor, Paci earned his master’s degree in November 1934 after defending a thesis dedicated to Plato’s “Parmenides”. This text became his first book, published in 1938 with the title *Il significato del “Parmenide” nella filosofia di Platone* (*The meaning of “Parmenides” in Plato’s philosophy*).

In this work, Paci analyzed the concept of “existence” as it is reflected in Plato. In the process, it took up many of the great philosophical issues in Plato’s writings, such as the relationship of being and becoming to the concept of existence. Especially in the “Parmenides”, Paci sees the core of a contemporary philosophical problem: the alternation of the two concepts of “Time” and “Relation”. Paci’s master’s degree thesis, as published in 1938, is not confined to the “Parmenides”, despite its title, but is an analysis of Plato’s speculative thought as it appears in twenty-three of his dialogues. Excluded from this analysis, among his major writings, are only the “Apology”, “Seventh Letter”, and “Laws”. Paci’s intention in this analysis is to examine how Plato sees being and becoming, doxa and epistemology, and to look at how Plato’s understanding of the relationship between these terms gives theoretical significance to the concrete contradictions of life by elevating them conceptually to an abstract level. To understand being and becoming involves looking at the issue of the gap between forms and appearance – the problem of the chorismos – the issue of the effect of time on being and becoming, and the issue of the dialectical relationship between being and non-being. Paci considered that the most important
two dialogues to deal with the latter two issues are the “Parmenides” (for its reflections on time) and the “Sophist” (for its reflections on relationship).

In his analysis, Paci is concerned with detecting the coherence and importance of the one–many theme in metaphysics and epistemology. This theme, in fact, also underlies all the hypotheses of the “Parmenides” interpreted in the light of the transcendental correlation between being and non-being. In the “Preface” to the first edition of this book, Paci states that going back to Plato’s thought means to find the eternal foundation of the European spirit, the primordial essence of Europeanism. He adds that both the synthesis of opposites and the positive solution of all the antinomies is European (Paci 1938, 6). This point is made clear in Paci’s attempt to connect Platonism with Husserl’s thought, in light of the fact that a couple of years before, in 1936, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology was published for the first time.1 Paci states that he believes in the Platonic antinomy of being, even when it is brought beyond the Platonic horizon of thought: the basis of a true Idealism; an Idealism that intends Life as opposition, as creatrices fight. Paci believes that historically and idealistically Plato’s thought can be the basis of contemporary philosophical reflection. Wherever in this “Preface” Paci writes that non-being is destroying every aspect of life and of European thought, he refers to Husserl’s “Crisis”. He is convinced that this crisis of European culture may be resolved. He states that thanks to Plato’s “Parmenides”, with its invitation to accept every experience, live in all the oppositions, follow all the senses of being that reason indicates to us, we can resolve the crisis. For Paci, the “Parmenides” dialogue is not the breaking of Logic, as the philosophy of existence recalls—here Paci refers to Karl Jaspers’s “Philosophie”—but, properly, this dialogue champions the oppositions that create the life of thought, the dialectic mood of the living world. Paci elaborates on the foundation of a “meditatio vitae”, basing it on the same themes elaborated by Existentialism to arrive at the “meditatio mortis” (Ibid., 7). Already in this work are defined the roots of Paci’s thought: Plato, existence, time and relation, Husserl.

Later, Paci’s 1957 essay entitled On the Meaning of “Platonism” in Husserl (Sul significato del “platonismo” di Husserl) (Paci 1957b) analyzes the issue of relationship between being and non-being by comparing Platonic philosophy with Husserl’s phenomenology. The core of Paci’s analysis is the Platonic side of Husserlian thought. This time, he focuses on the problem of the relationship between time and truth, and on the third hypothesis of the “Parmenides”, to demonstrate that Plato’s philosophy is totally congruent with Husserl’s phenomenology. This analysis shows the great ongoing influence of the “Parmenides” on Paci’s thought.

52.2. Encountering Existentialism: the problem of nothingness

It was in Milan – and thanks to his mentor Antonio Banfi – that Enzo Paci encountered the philosophy of Husserl, in addition to that of Simmel, Nietzsche, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Wahl. Paci’s interest during the 1940s was mainly in Existentialism. For this reason, he gave to Existentialism – a philosophy which arose in France and Germany during the late 1930s – a personal re-elaboration according to which Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Wahl took precedence over Martin Heidegger. In Paci’s “positive Existentialism”, existence is intended as a pure possibility; consequently, it is freedom in opposition to any determinism and to any nihilism. As Paci developed his interpretation of Existentialism, he met another Italian existentialist, Nicola Abbagnano, and, by following Abbagnano, he became a promoter of Existentialism in Italy. In 1940, Paci published the book entitled Pensiero, esistenza e valore (Thought, existence and value), in which his first analysis of Existentialism appeared. Here, Paci explains that value is the key of transcendence, a mediation between the absolute of thought and the finiteness of existence. In Paci’s existential perspective, when existence becomes value, the person rises to dignity as a
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person. In 1943, in the journal “Primato. Lettere e arti d’Italia”, together with Abbagnano, Paci started an inquiry dedicated to Existentialism that was destined to become a milestone in the history of twentieth-century Italian philosophy.

During World War II, Paci as a soldier was a prisoner in the camp of Beniaminow and later imprisoned in Wietzendorf, where he met Paul Ricoeur. Here, Paci gave prison soldiers lessons dedicated to the philosophy of literature in Thomas Mann, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Valéry, and Marcel Proust, that he then recollected in a volume published in 1947, entitled Esistenza e immagine (Existence and Image). Later books – Ingens sylva. Saggio sulla filosofia di G. B. Vico (Ingens sylva. Essay on the Philosophy of G. B. Vico) (Paci 1949), and Il nulla e il problema dell’uomo (Nothingness and the Problem of Man) (Paci 1950b), and Esistenzialismo e historicismo (Existentialism and Historicism), both published in 1950 – show the saturation of existential analysis in Paci’s thought and its comparison with Italian historicism. In 1951 Paci founded and became the first director of the magazine aut aut. Rivista di filosofia e di cultura, named after Kierkegaard’s work.2

Paci argues that his Existentialism is based on the denial of being “Parmenides”, combined with the tools of Nietzschean thought. He poses his analysis between Heidegger’s and Jaspers’s in recognizing that all existence is revealed as precarious, by forcing the thinker to abandon illusions of omnipotence or absolutization of “self” as mere solipsistic temptations. This is the context of defense on the philosophy of existence. For Paci, the worldview promoted by Existentialism revolves around the fundamental idea of an internal process, that men are going to be their true unity and substantiality. Speaking of destiny and the capability of thinking of nothingness, anguish, and sense in its alternation with the non-sense of mortality and finitude of existence, Paci says that Existentialism has turned what was an attitude into a philosophical problem. Existence is revealed as a philosophical problem. The anguish in front of nothingness – the feeling that accompanies the existentialist – does not really exist, it is not fear of anything, it is consciousness – not anguish, a deep and original sense of one’s being. It is the discovery of the seriousness in life, the responsibility of being in the world. Paci addresses the problem of nothingness by linking it to the moral problem of the possibility in being through the forms to the issues of the Existentialism of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Heidegger. The problem of morality for Paci is that the first principle is not the “being”, but the “possibility” of being: what counts is one’s decision, the will of each individual. The world and the story I have not given before are extremely dependent on my decision, my choice.

In Paci’s reflection on Existentialism, the antinomy between “being” (reason) and “non-being” (the negative possibility, limitations of existence) is mediated and resolved by the value that is the regulative idea of existence; for this reason, Paci wrote that this antinomy is dominated by the problem of relationship.

52.3. Encountering phenomenology: rime and relation

Paci’s initial Existentialism was influenced by Banfi’s critical rationalism, not the tendencies of nihilism, which Paci harshly criticized from the beginning. Unsatisfied with Existentialism, Paci replaced the centrality of the concept of existence with the emphasis given to the concept on the relationality of experience: through this, during the early 1950s, he moved into a relationistic perspective. Paci states that experience itself is primarily a process and interaction. He argues that existence is finite, bounded by birth and death, and that the existence is a moment of temporality, not only unstoppable but also irreversible. As a matter of fact, for Paci, every event takes place in a process, as it is always in relation to other events. No event is self-sufficient or a substance: the non-substantiality of the event therefore implies a principle of relation between
the events, the principle of universal interrelation. This theorization led to a definition of Paci’s Existentialism as purely “relationistic”. Existence is therefore an event and not a substance; and if it is not a substance, existence is nothing.

This explains the natural direction of man to someone, to something, a direction that means the possibility of “being”. Each “being” is characterized by reciprocal relations with other beings; such relations form the framework of reality and of the human world, and since this framework is dynamic, the characteristic of real life is temporality.

For this reason, the category of “relation” is closely related to the conception of experience as temporality and history, and hence the category of possibility. Since the basis of Paci’s Existentialism – positive, intensely dynamic, and strongly permeated with ethics – is therefore the concept of “relation”, his theorization has led him to a form of relationalism that can be defined as ethical relationalism. The relation is first and foremost an existential condition in the sense that all events are manifested by a relationship of mutual interaction. An event is all that happens or is in the world; also, the “ego”, the “self”, which is known as ending, and empirical existence in relation to other existences. The concept of relation thus passes from the existential field to the field of knowledge and becomes a condition of being and of knowing. The relation, irreversible and necessary for information, is the law of knowledge and thought.

In this phase, Paci published the book *Tempo e Relazione* (*Time and Relation*) (Paci 1954), and the book *Dall’esistenzialismo al relazionismo* (*From Existentialism to Relationism*) (Paci 1957a). With a clear debt to Alfred North Whitehead’s organicism, Paci wanted to go beyond the analysis of man offered by Existentialism by developing a vision of man in relation to Philosophy, in addition to culture, the arts, life in a whole sense, and by opening man to the concrete sense of history. Paci added to this original relationistic view an interpretation of Kant’s “transcendental schematism” as syntheses between the empirical and the conceptual. With these additions, around the mid-1950s, Paci was ready to graft Husserlian phenomenology onto Relationalism. In the late 1950s, Paci shifted his focus mainly to Husserlian phenomenology, and so it was until his death. He outlined a phenomenology based on the concepts of time and of relationship that underlined the concreteness of man’s relationship with the world of practice.

### 52.4. Phenomenology and relationalism

Paci became a major leader of the *Husserl-Renaissance* in Europe with the books he published in the 1960s: *Omaggio a Husserl* (*Homage to Husserl*) published in 1960, and *Tempo e verità nella fenomenologia di Husserl* (*Time and Truth in the Phenomenology of Husserl*) published in 1961. In his efforts, Paci was assisted by his connection with Father Hermann Leo Van Breda. During that time, Paci’s work was an event in Italian philosophy. In his interpretation, Husserlian Phenomenology is a teleology, a horizon of an intentional and intersubjective relationship, in which the first person or person as the presence “in the flesh”, as eros and need, at the same time regains a practical-historical sense; and through the *epoché*, Phenomenology is an exercise in asceticism.

The interpretation and development of Husserl’s phenomenology by Paci are related to the following linked three core themes: (1) *epoché*, (2) intentionality, precategorial, Lebenswelt; and (3) time, subject, person, intersubjectivity, history.

The *epoché* or phenomenological reduction – more than the bracketing – to Paci is the suspension of any prior judgment. It is the refusal to accept a counterfeit, inauthentic world; the denial of inheritance without benefit of inventory; the rejection or abandonment of mundane attitudes, of habitual or bad daily life. In other words, it is the rejection of objectifying a “scientistic-positivistic” worldview. It is an “exercise” (in Greek, “asceticism”) and is “back to
the same things”. After this *epoché* is the phenomenon – it is a living presence, and thus evidence; searching for the meaning of life, the movement toward the transcendence of new horizons. The *epoché* has concrete total experience – it is not just a cognitive formula for Paci. The *epoché* refers back to ego (which is the transcendental ego), and is therefore pure “intentionality”. In the interpretation of Paci, the *epoché* reads and interprets phenomenology as exercise and now asceticism – as a continuous operation, a “lifestyle”.

The second thematic core comprises the intentionality themes, the precategorial, the Lebenswelt. Intention is indicated by Paci as “overcoming”, and returning to the definition given by Sartre, Paci showed intentionality as “explosion toward” (*s’éclater vers*). From the “phenomenology of the essences” proposed in Husserl’s *Ideas I*, Paci developed the foundation of knowledge in subjective and intersubjective operations. Paci is also concerned with the problems of transcendental constitution. Phenomenology is defined, therefore, in terms of its antirelativism as well as in terms of its antipsychologism. Transcendental or intentional consciousness is presented in conjunction with the other, between instincts and needs, the body and its kinesthesia, feeling love and affection; Paci defines consciousness as “concrete monads”, as “I inescapable”.

In his interpretation, Paci passes from intentionality to consciousness to “Life original acting”, which is Lebenswelt. He believes that Lebenswelt is simply the existence of Existentialism, that life precedes the life sciences. Life is prior to methodologies, language analysis, technical languages, symbolism, formalism. Consciousness is constituted in the body and in becoming; this is “life original acting” that operates in time in an inter-relationship. Paci indicated that the objective of Husserl’s phenomenology would have to be to get to a junction of the meaning of the word “life” with that of the word “truth”.

The third thematic unit includes the themes of time and history, the subject, person, intersubjectivity, crisis, and the telos. Regarding these issues, Paci’s philosophy is based on Husserl’s “Lectures on Internal Time-Consciousness”, of spring/summer 1928. Paci interprets the “time” of Husserl’s phenomenology as the flow of the original perceptions (“inferior”), as the “feeling alive”, the “present” that believes the past is to be contained in itself. Paci defines “time” as a retention, an expected anticipation. Paci follows the famous tripartite division with which Husserl provides a first – though not final – accommodation of the problem of time. Time is “principium individuationis”; it is growing as a person, understood as a responsibility in history. Paci’s phenomenological perspective is influenced by the texts of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur. Notwithstanding this, in the title of his book *Time and Truth in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, the words “Time and Truth” appear as the exact contrary to the words of Heidegger’s work “Being and Time”.

Paci interprets the concept of “telos” as the final form that the intentional consciousness wants to realize, expressing how humanity wants to be realized in an authentic life, in a rational life. We must be aware of the link between personal and social behavior, and ethics and history; violence is indicated by Husserl as “barbaric” and by Paci as “ingens sylva” – referencing to Giambattista Vico. In his interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenology, Paci does not stop at naturalism, nor organicism, he goes further to get to teleology.

### 52.5. Building bridges between phenomenology, science, and literature: relations and significations

Paci’s work entitled *Relazioni e significati* (*Relations and Meanings*) (Paci 1965–1966), published in three volumes between 1965 and 1966, is dedicated to an interpretation of science, culture, and the arts in relation with his relationalistic Phenomenology. The essays published in these volumes were chosen by Paci among his writings elaborated between 1946 and 1965.3
The essays analyze themes related to contemporary philosophy, literature, anthropology, and aesthetics – of music in particular – to the interrelation between aesthetics and ethics, and then also to poetry, architecture, and the dialogue between philosophy and architecture. This work shows Paci’s willing to give to his public a relationistic vision of culture, analyzed with the means given by philosophy, and especially by Phenomenology.

52.6. Husserl meets Marx: a new interpretation of the life-world

In the early 1960s, Paci combined his understanding of Husserl’s phenomenology with his personal reinterpretation of Marxism via his reading of Labriola and Gramsci to emphasize anti-reification, anti-objectification, anti-fetishization, and thus, in macro-transposition, anti-capitalism and anti-bureaucratism. For Paci, the “crisis” of European Sciences is not a rejection of science as a cause of or contributing factor to barbarism. Two figures are at the origin of the theory of the crisis, Galileo and Descartes, and the crisis is understood by Paci as a critique of science. Paci indicates the remedy to the crisis in the foundation of the rational and human value of science through a search for truth on the precategorial foundation of science, the Lebenswelt, and the original experience that precedes every scientific category of transactions that subjects perform over time. Following Husserl, philosophers are “servants of humanity” and the philosophy is “strenge Wissenschaft,” science that is strict, radical, goes to the roots, brings all truth; and transcendental ego.

Paci’s book Funzione delle scienze e significato dell’uomo (Function of Science and the Meaning of Man) is already a manifesto of his phenomenological perspective accompanied by Marxism. Published in 1963 in Italy, this book became well known in Europe and in the United States of America. His former student, Stefano Zecchi, perfectly recalls the core of this theme in what follows:

It is interesting to note that in the third section of Funzione delle scienze e significato dell’uomo, the one devoted to the relationship between Phenomenology and Marxism, Paci especially highlighted Merleau-Ponty’s statement that Marxism is neither a philosophy of subjectivity, nor objectivity, but a philosophy of history. History, in Paci’s thought, is recovered more and more in the framework of a philosophy of history.

(2002, 479)

In this way one can capture the sense of the central thesis of this book,

where it is argued that philosophy constitutively tends towards a teleological intentional meaning because the world is not interesting for what it is, but for the meaning it can have. Behind the overcoming of Husserl, the criticism of his thought, is the attempt to provide a historical-materialistic basis to phenomenology.

(Ibid., 479–480)

His last works were devoted to the project of a phenomenological encyclopedia (Idee per una enciclopedia fenomenologica / Ideas for an phenomenological encyclopedia), published in 1973, and, again, to a comparative analysis of Husserlian Phenomenology and Marxism, carried out in his posthumously published (1981) book, Il filosofo e la città: Platone, Whitehead, Husserl, Marx (Philosophy and the City: Plato, Whitehead, Husserl, Marx). In this work, Paci proposed a solution to what for him was the unsolved problem of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology: the objectification of man conceived as its reduction to an abstract category – objectivification that then approached the Marxist concept of “alienation”.
With the book “Ideas for a phenomenological encyclopedia”, Paci prepared the project for a phenomenological encyclopedia of knowledge. Paci saw in phenomenology a “new science”: the term “new science” is deliberately taken from Vico. Phenomenology as a new science is the dynamic synthesis of human activities. Paci said that the fight against the categorical, and the return to the subject for the foundation of science and philosophy, is the struggle against capitalism. Paci also indicates that the philosophy that continually goes from the actual presence (and thus turns and transforms the world) is the only philosophy, the “perennial philosophy”, the first philosophy that returns to the sciences their function and to man the meaning of truth.

Notes
1 Hua VI. It is thanks to Paci that in 1961 there appeared the first Italian translation of this Husserl text (translation by Enrico Filippini).
3 Relazioni e significati I (Filosofia e fenomenologia della cultura); II – Fenomenologia della vita e ragione in Banfi; III – II significato di Whitehead; IV – Logica e filosofia in Whitehead; V – Empirismo e relazioni in Whitehead; VI – Whitehead e Husserl; VII – Nota su Bertrand Russell; VIII – Neopositivismo, fenomenologia e letteratura; IX – Caduta della intenzionalità e linguaggio; X – Follia e verità in Santayana; XI – Scienza e umanesimo italiano; XII – Fenomenologia e letteratura; XIII – Fenomenologia e narrativa; XIV – Fenomenologia, psichiatria e romanzo; XV – Robbe-Grillet, Butor e la fenomenologia; XVI – Problematiche di antropologia; XVII – Struttura e lavoro vivente; XVIII – Sul concetto di struttura.
Relazioni e significati II (Kierkegaard e Th. Mann), Part 1. I – Ironia, demoniaco ed eros; II – Estetica ed etica; III – La dialettica della fede; IV – Ripetizione e ripresa: il teatro e la sua funzione catartica; V – Storia ed apocalisse; VI – La psicologia e il problema dell’angoscia; VII – Angoscia e relazione; VIII – Angoscia e fenomenologia dello eros; IX – L’intenzionalità e l’amore; X – Kierkegaard e il significato della storia. Part 2. I – Musica mito e psicologia in Th. Mann; II – Th. Mann e la filosofia; III – Due momenti fondamentali nell’opera di Mann; IV – L’ironia di Mann; V – Su «Altezza reale»; VI – Ricordo e presenza dei «Buddenbrook».
Relazioni e significati III (Critica e dialettica), Part 1. I – Sulla poesia di Rilke; II – Sul senso della poesia di T. S. Eliot; III – L’uomo di Proust; IV – Valéry o della costruzione; V – Sulla musica contemporanea; VI – Per una fenomenologia della musica; VII – Interpretazione del teatro; VIII – Teatro, funzione delle scienze e riflessione; IX – Sull’architettura contemporanea; X – L’architettura e il mondo della vita; XI – Il metodo industriale, l’edilizia e il problema estetico; XII – Fenomenologia e architettura contemporanea; XIII – Wright e «lo spazio vissuto». Part 2. I – Il significato della dialettica platonica; II – Diadattica, fenomenologia e antropologia in Hegel; III – Tre paragrafi per una fenomenologia del linguaggio; IV – Ancora sulla fenomenologia del linguaggio; V – Dialettica e intenzionalità nella critica e nella poesia; VI – A cominciare dal presente; VII – I rapporto intenzionale; VIII – L’alienazione delle parole.
4 Cf. Ferri 2013.

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Michela Beatrice Ferri
