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Husserl's Understanding of Myth and His Universalism(s)

Abstract:

This paper examines Husserl's largely overlooked reflections on myth and their implications for his conception(s) of universalism. While Husserl's "Vienna Lecture" portrays myth as the opposite of the theoretical attitude that defines European rationality, his unpublished manuscripts reveal a more nuanced perspective: myth functions not only as a concealment of truth but also as the cultural matrix enabling the emergence of rationality. On this basis, three forms of universalism can be distinguished in Husserl's thought: an exclusivist European universalism, a naturalistic intercultural universalism, and a universalism of self-critical openness and hope. I argue that only the third form coheres with Husserl's broader phenomenology, especially his account of myth as a prefiguration of reason and the regulative role of the idea of God. Universalism thus emerges less as an achieved possession than as a dialogical and teleological task grounded in intercultural exchange, self-critique, and peaceful interaction.

Keywords:

Husserl, myth, universalism, European rationality, intercultural dialogue

1. Introduction

My article will focus on Husserl's understanding of myth, and, in connection with this, his conception of universalism. Unlike Paul Ricœur, Hans Blumenberg, Horkheimer, and Adorno, Husserl's perspective on myth has received comparatively little attention and is at times overlooked in existing research on topics such as "myth," "mythology," or "narrativity." Some studies that do touch on this topic fail to analyze it thoroughly and comprehensively, and therefore do not offer a systematic view of Husserl's theory of myth. As I will show later, certain interpretations of Husserl's theory of myth – and, by extension, of universalism – overlook its complexity and internal tensions. For the same reason, some critiques of Husserl are based on a one-sided reading and analysis, and some leading to a hasty and premature rejection of his position.¹

In my article, I will first address the different ways in which myth is understood in Husserl's theory. Although these approaches exhibit a certain continuity, they reflect varying emphases in Husserl's conception of myth. In contrast to Husserl's "Vienna Lecture," which is most frequently cited in relevant research, and in which myth is positioned in opposition to the human being's rational pursuit of ideal and universal knowledge, we can identify a more comprehensive view of his description of the role and localization of myth – where myth is not merely a concealment of ideal and universal truth, but rather a meaningful background and cultural matrix within the lifeworld for the emergence of rationality and the pursuit of universality. Accordingly, these different understandings of myth also lead to different ways of defining or describing a Husserlian universalism. In the fourth section of my article, based on an analysis of the complexity of Husserl's understanding of myth, I will show that we can identify three different forms of universalism in his descriptions, although Husserl does not explicitly acknowledge that universalism should be understood in these various forms.² I will not merely list these three universalisms, but also argue that only one of them is consistent with his overall view of myth and, correspond-

1) See Ferrer, *The Transformation of Reason*, 201–208; Steinbach, *Gelebte Geschichte, narrative Identität*, 111–23; Sternad, "The Reasons of Europe"; Hart, "From 'Mythos' to 'Logos' to Utopian Poetics"; Brand, "Horizont, Welt, Geschichte"; and so forth.

2) The complexity and inner tension of Husserl's understanding of myth and universalism – according to my reading – can already be observed, at the latest, in his "Kaizo articles" (See Hua 27, 3–20, 62–67, 76–94).

ingly, of the nature of human reason. Therefore, the main aim of this research is, on the one hand, to present a more comprehensive account of myth in Husserl through a reading of a wide range of his texts, especially his research manuscripts; on the other hand, to elucidate the plural implications of universalism based on this discussion of myth, implications that Husserl himself does not fully acknowledge. Moreover, we will observe the crucial role that the idea of God – understood as a teleological concept in Husserl’s phenomenology – plays in the pursuit of universalism.

Through this research, a latent possibility for comparative studies between Husserl and other phenomenologists and cultural philosophers can be revealed. The key issue concerns a Husserlian program regarding this question: how, on the one hand, to acknowledge the underlying relativity and imperfection of culture and human reason while remaining vigilant against any form of cultural chauvinism or hubris, and on the other hand, to avoid descending into radical relativism and pessimism about universalism.

2. Myth and Science-Philosophy in Husserl’s “Vienna Lecture”

When researchers seek to analyze Husserl’s concept of “myth,” the most frequently cited source is his narrative in the “Vienna Lecture” on the European crisis of humanity. In this lecture, Husserl characterizes the unique nature of European culture, while myth is portrayed as a marker of non-European cultures.

As is commonly known, for Husserl, “European” is a cultural rather than a geographical concept, reflecting a unique spiritual *Gestalt*³ (Hua 6, 319). In his lecture, Husserl initially defines the uniqueness of European culture through an immanent teleology. According to him, the spiritual life of Europeans is guided by a pursuit of universal ideality, which is rooted in the classical Husserlian distinction between the ideal and the real. This ideality manifests itself as ideas and knowledge that transcend specific geographical, racial, and traditional limitations, and thus possess universal

3) Husserl’s use of *Gestalt* within this cultural context is highly flexible: it is not limited to describing the character of European culture, but is also employed to designate different phases and categories of culture, such as the *Gestalt* of religion, science, and philosophy, as well as normal and abnormal *Gestalten*. When used to indicate different cultural types of a specific territory or nation, as will be shown below, it can be equated with Husserl’s notion of cultural *Typik*.

validity for all human beings (Hua 6, 333, 335). However, this validity is not the aim of every human culture (Hua 6, 324). More precisely, for Husserl, only European culture sets this universal validity as its goal, and only European life is born into a tendency and guided by an *entelechy* – that is, a universal ideality to be reached or realized (Hua 6, 320). Thus, this pursuit of ideality initially presents itself as an endless process of striving. Although this ideality has not yet been achieved or realized, it has been posited as a distant pole – a teleological endpoint that guides the development of European culture (Hua 6, 321). Consequently, European spiritual life is oriented toward the temporal dimension of the future. In this context, the future is not merely a formal phase of time that anticipates what is to come in the style of the past (Hua 11, 186); it is also imbued with a normative implication: the future progress of humanity ought to be an approach toward universal ideality (Hua 6, 333; cf. Hua 27, 12). Thus, the teleological pursuit of European spiritual life is accompanied by a “normalization” (*Normierung*) of life. This means not only that human beings should live a life guided by ideal truth, but – more importantly – that they should be guided by the motivation to affirm and realize ultimate ideality (Hua 6, 322; cf. Hua 27, 8–10). In this context, we may conclude that love for the idea is the fundamental “attunement” of European culture, and that the pursuit of ultimate ideality expresses the unified volitional aim of the European spirit (Hua 6, 322).

As a cultural *Gestalt*, this pursuit of ultimate ideality was born in Greece during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., where and when Greek philosophers first began to pose questions about the totality of beings and the world in a systematic way (Hua 6, 321; cf. Hua 27, 73). In Husserl's lecture, the birth of the European spiritual pursuit is equated with the birth of science (*Wissenschaft*) and philosophy (Hua 6, 322). Thus, the European cultural *Gestalt* can be regarded as both scientific and philosophical. And because, for Husserl, no other culture within the historical horizon has set this pursuit of universal ideality as its own spiritual task, cultures other than the European can be seen as pre-scientific, pre-philosophical, and, consequently, pre-European (Hua 6, 323–25).

In order to respond to a possible critique – namely, that philosophy and science also exist outside Europe, such as in Chinese and Indian traditions – Husserl emphasizes the distinction between European and non-European cultures. This cultural difference can primarily be understood as a difference in attitudes (*Einstellungen*): the practical and

the theoretical.⁴ The former corresponds to non-European cultures, while the latter is associated with European culture (Hua 6, 325–30). The practical attitude is also identified with the “mythical-religious attitude,”⁵ which shapes the understanding of myth in this lecture. For Husserl, the European spiritual pursuit of ideality is only possible on the basis of the theoretical attitude. The theoretical attitude is a critical one: the subject suspends tradition through an *Epoché*, becomes a “disinterested spectator” (*unbeteiligter Zuschauer*), and places tradition under the scrutiny of the criterion of “truth itself” (Hua 6, 331–32; cf. Hua 27, 78). Therefore, the theoretical attitude must break through traditional prejudices, and tradition holds legitimacy only insofar as it is consistent with truth (Hua 6, 333). In contrast to the theoretical attitude, the characteristics of the mythical-religious attitude can be summarized as follows: 1) The mythical-religious attitude is also a practical attitude, focusing on the mundane happiness of human beings and the pragmatic value of things. For example, religious rituals are prayers for the well-being of certain people, rather than scientific activities aimed at investigating truth itself. 2) The mythical-religious attitude implies an uncritical stance toward tradition – a superstition in the power of tradition. This tradition becomes sedimented in the language of a nation and is transmitted across generations within that nation (Hua 6, 330–31). Therefore, in contrast to the theoretical attitude, which seeks universal truth through critical theoretical activity, the mythical attitude persists in false or one-sided knowledge of the world and entails a concealment of universal truth.

4) The distinction between the theoretical and practical attitude, along with the corresponding discussions, constitutes a recurring theme in Husserl’s phenomenology, addressed by him in various contexts (See Hua 4, 2–3, 16–17, 355; Hua 33, 386–88). As Husserl’s teacher and the one who guided him into a philosophical career, Brentano had already drawn this distinction between theoretical and practical interests and endowed it with historical significance: at the beginning of a historical period in philosophy, philosophy is healthy and natural, motivated by a purely theoretical interest; later, however, the intrusion of practical interests leads to its decline (Brentano, “Die Vier Phasen Der Philosophie,” 199–226). We can observe that Husserl inherited the positive and negative connotations of these terms from Brentano. Yet, unlike Brentano’s pessimistic narrative, according to which the history of philosophy is at the same time a history of decline, Husserl exhibits an optimistic tendency: as he has showed in his “Kaizo articles,” human culture – at least European culture – can be understood and described as a continuous process of renewal and rationalization.

5) In his “Vienna Lecture,” Husserl does not explicitly distinguish between myth and religion. However, in other texts he treats religion as a higher stage in the development of human culture, one that is nevertheless grounded in an earlier mythical phase (see Hua 27, 59–72). The present study – especially in the third section – therefore places particular emphasis on this foundational role of myth.

However, we can raise the question of the motivation behind the transition from the mythical-religious attitude to the theoretical attitude, or of the origin of science and philosophy, according to Husserl. Husserl holds that all kinds of attitudes presuppose the “natural attitude” as their background or primordial form, and any attitude other than the natural attitude involves a conversion (*Umstellung*) that can be traced back to the natural attitude (Hua 6, 326–27). All natural attitudes are rooted in the natural life of particular people and correspond to their natural culture within a certain *Umwelt* (Hua 6, 327). As Husserl himself has argued, all theoretical attitudes and sciences have their own *Umwelten*, which should not be understood in a naturalistic sense, but rather as meaningful and valid horizons – a common ground for all actions and observations. From this perspective, the natural culture is difficult to distinguish from a culture based on a practical or mythical-religious attitude. Here Husserl refers to the Greek people: mythical figures, gods, and devils also belong to the Greeks’ *Umwelt* as part of their natural environment (Hua 6, 317). However, the birth of philosophy implies a breakthrough from this limited *Umwelt* and the mythical understanding of the world. But how is this possible? Since the starting point of Greek culture was also the mythical-religious attitude, how did the Greeks accomplish the transition to the theoretical attitude? Regarding this conversion, Husserl mentioned the “astonishment” of philosophers (Hua 6, 332), but is not this sudden astonishment itself mythical and indicative of a rupture between the theoretical attitude and the lifeworld? If the theoretical attitude entails a radical break from the lifeworld, then how can Husserl, from his standpoint, criticize ideal and exact science for forgetting its origin in the lifeworld (Hua 6, 342–43)? And if we admit that there is an essential continuity between (Greek) myth and *theoria*, then why should we insist that only Greek culture attained the attitude of universalism? Is not Greek culture also dominated by its own myth?

We cannot resolve this dilemma solely within the scope of Husserl’s lecture. However, according to Husserl’s description, besides serving as a concealment of universal truth, myth also provides a hint of the essential connection with the *Umwelt* of daily life (*Lebenswelt*): myth and the mythical attitude define the cultural context of a “primitive” *Umwelt* – that is, a historical pre-phase of European philosophy.⁶ In his

6) See Hua 6, 340. Although Husserl believes that the theoretical – and thus scientific-philosophical – attitude was born in ancient Greece, as we have seen in his discussion of *Umwelt*, the ancient Greeks also lived in a mythical world, at least at the beginning of their cultural development.

other manuscripts, Husserl offers further descriptions of this role of myth, and based on a corresponding analysis, we can develop a new understanding of what myth means for philosophy and universalism.

3. Myth as Cultural Matrix in Husserl's Manuscripts

All human beings are born into an *Umwelt* or lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*).⁷ However, this lifeworld does not only encompass a familiar area of actions and observations, because every familiar horizon implies, at or beyond its edge, an unfamiliar area as its “outer horizon” (Hua 15, 430). Therefore, as a whole structure, the lifeworld includes not only a “home-world” but also an “alien-world.”⁸ As a human being grows, the range of the home-world expands; nevertheless, there will always remain an alien-world alongside the home-world that cannot be fully encompassed by the expansion of the home-world. This structure of the lifeworld marks not only geographical areas but also cultural distinctions – the difference between home-world and alien-world is mainly defined by cultural difference. In one manuscript, Husserl regards this difference as a difference between cultural *Typik*⁹ (Hua 39, 159). A home-world has its own

7) In many texts, Husserl's use of *Umwelt* (surrounding world) can be treated as equivalent to that of *Lebenswelt*, insofar as both concepts can be traced back to his analyses of horizontal consciousness. However, *Lebenswelt* presents itself as the more precise term, since it carries a stronger connotation of origin – as is well known from his *Krisis* – whereas *Umwelt* is at times employed to denote a merely spatial surrounding. In the present study, in order to remain consistent with Husserl's terminology in the cited texts, *Umwelt* is used as a synonym for the lifeworld.

8) In Luhmann's critique of the phenomenological understanding of the lifeworld – initially targeting Husserl – he begins with a metaphorical paradox: in phenomenological terms, the lifeworld is defined both as a “ground” (*Boden*), the familiar environment of subjects, and as a “horizon.” However, ground and horizon are adjacent and therefore mutually exclusive. When Luhmann proceeds to describe the lifeworld from his sociological perspective, he rejects the metaphor of the ground and retains that of the horizon. For Luhmann, the lifeworld represents an operation or attempt to divide the familiar from the unfamiliar. The familiar area will always be accompanied by the unfamiliar, and this operation initially manifests in cultural form as myth (See Luhmann, “Die Lebenswelt,” 176–83). Although we will not undertake a comparative analysis of the concept of myth in Husserl and Luhmann here, it must be noted that Luhmann's critique stems from a misunderstanding or one-sided reading of Husserl. As a complete structure, the lifeworld always implies an unfamiliar, alien world as its outer horizon. Thus, in fact, the supposed metaphorical paradox does not actually hold.

9) The German concepts *Typik* – and *Typus* later – are highly multivocal in Husserl's writings. Accordingly, their use in this article is limited to specific contextual meanings. However, similar or related uses can be found throughout many of Husserl's texts (Cf. Hua 4, 271; Hua 27, 18–19; Hua 42, 524).

cultural *Typik*, which defines what is normal and familiar, and simultaneously what is abnormal and strange. Thus, every home-world can be considered a cultural type. This cultural *Typik* also shapes modes of objective apprehension. Just as all objects can appear within their horizon, the meaning of objects can only be comprehended within a cultural *Typik*, a cultural horizon. In this context, the meaning of objects defined by a certain cultural *Typik* is called the *Typus* of objects by Husserl (Hua 39, 160). In contrast to his earlier discussion on apprehension and apprehensional sense, the concept of *Typus* emphasizes cultural particularity: objects are apprehended according to a familiar style, namely, according to the determinations derived from the cultural *Typik* of a certain home-world. The cultural *Typik* of a home-world also has a systematic character: it has its own interests and an organized system of cultural aims (Hua 39, 164). Therefore, the cultural *Typik* is a network of meanings within which objects and their value gain their location and orientation.

However, according to Husserl, from a historical perspective, the starting point of a cultural *Typik* is myth (Hua 15, 431). Every lifeworld has a generative form, and its culture develops and is transmitted from generation to generation. This chain of generations can be traced back to a relatively “primitive” phase of the culture of a homeland, when nature or *Umwelt* is apprehended in a mythical way: objects and human fate within the home-world are governed by mythical powers; these powers grant luck or misfortune and determine whether the aims or ideals of the home-world can be achieved; every object has its meaning within this mythical system (Hua 29, 39). Every home-world has its own myth, and this myth should not be regarded as merely one among many cultural domains, as if there were an area of myth alongside the scientific, political, literary, and so on. On the contrary, myth represents a fundamental level underlying all other cultural domains (Hua 29, 44; Hua 27, 188). The entire *Umwelt* of a home-world is apprehended in a certain mythical way, and the apprehension of objects and of human beings themselves – that is, the *Typus* within a cultural *Typik* – is dominated by this mythical apprehension.¹⁰ Furthermore, in this context, we cannot distinguish a “pure nature” separate from myth, as if in an animist apprehension of the world, people first find a myth-free nature and then “place” gods,

10) Especially when we consider that – according to Husserl – the “naturally grown religion” initially set the norm for culture and for human life as a whole (See Hua 27, 62).

monsters, and devils into it (Hua 29, 45). In the mythical apprehension of the world, the *Umwelt* is from the very beginning wholly mythical.¹¹

However, what is the relation between myth and culture at a “higher stage,” given that the mythical is an apprehensional mode in the primitive cultural phase? In one manuscript, Husserl distinguishes between culture and myth, however, he also points out that the latter “goes into” the former (Hua 15, 433; cf. Hua 27, 62–63). The mythical understanding of the world is transmitted from generation to generation and shapes the concrete cultural achievements of a nation. In another manuscript, Husserl emphasizes that mythical constitution is a habitual acquisition that certainly transcends the individual consciousness of subjects, spreads intergenerationally, and, prior to higher stages of culture such as science and philosophy, determines individual and collective understanding and belief about the world (Hua 29, 224). From this perspective, myth presents itself as the background or matrix for any further cultural development, which leads Husserl to a more radical standpoint in discussing mythical reason and truth. For Husserl, philosophical and rational truth can initially be foreshadowed and staged in a mythical form, where rational truth is expressed metaphorically (Hua 29, 223–24).¹² In fact, if we acknowledge that human reason requires a developmental process to mature, and that the final, ideal, myth-free phase is a later stage in the development of reason, then we must also accept that mythical expression is an inevitable aspect of the development of human reason. From another perspective, this view assigns myth a posi-

11) On the relationship between objective apprehension and the horizontal structure of this apprehension, and the role of myth in this context: cf. Brand, *Welt, Geschichte, Mythos und Politik*, 142–46. Furthermore, in a 1977 article, he already attempted to regard myth as the anonymous background, upon which the apprehension of meaning for intentional objects becomes possible, and stated: “We are faced with the task of the phenomenological interpretation of myth. The interpretation of the world and the interpretation of myth belong together as the interpretation of the life-world” (Brand, “Horizont, Welt, Geschichte,” 87, my translation). However, although he sought to reveal the implications of myth or to grant myth/mythology an important phenomenological status – and we may add, from a Husserlian standpoint – he never directly cited or mentioned the concept of “myth” in Husserl’s texts (Cf. Brand, “Horizont, Welt, Geschichte,” 81–89).

12) We can find similar ideas in Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as in Paul Ricœur. However, this Husserlian account of the kinship between myth and reason has been largely overlooked in much of the relevant research. As a result, many critiques of Husserl from these perspectives appear incomplete and one-sided when considered in light of the broader scope of Husserl’s thought. Cf. Pugliese, “Subjektive und intersubjektive Genesis der Handlung,” 192–93; Steinbach, *Gelebte Geschichte, narrative Identität*, 117–20; Ferrer, *The Transformation of Reason*, 203–207.

tion within the system of truth: myth is the prefiguration of truth, and philosophy, as a later phase based on myth, takes on the retrospective task of explaining, purifying, and crystallizing mythical truth.¹³ To deny that there is truth in myth, according to Husserl, is merely a product of “superficial Enlightenment reason” (Hua 29, 225).¹⁴

Before we move on to the discussion of universalism, we can first observe an intercultural dimension in myth. As we have discussed, different home-worlds correspond to different cultural *Typik*, and myth represents the matrix for the development of a particular cultural *Typik*. Therefore, mythical difference reveals a fundamental difference between cultural *Typiks*: according to Husserl, mythical foreignness is the genuine foreignness (Hua 15, 432). Accordingly, understanding another home-world (i.e., an alien-world) means understanding another myth. Myth provides a genuine foundation for intercultural understanding: when I, as a Chinese person, simply translate the Japanese word “fox” into my mother language, I understand it only in a Chinese way – as a cunning figure rather than as a divine being in Japanese culture. I can truly understand the Japanese word “fox” only within its own cultural context, and that cultural context is based on its own myth, distinct from the Chinese one.¹⁵

4. Various Faces of Universalism in Husserl

We can now return to the question raised in the second section – namely, how (European) universalism is possible. Based on the demonstration of the complexity of Husserl's

13) Cf. Marosan, “The Mythical Mind and Its World,” 158–60. In this study, the author touches upon the complexity of Husserl's understanding of myth; however, this complexity is not treated as an immanent tension within Husserl's thought itself and thus gives rise to certain difficulties when one considers the pursuit of universality in Husserl's philosophy.

14) This point is not only stated explicitly by Husserl, but can also be discerned in his phenomenological reading of Plato's creation myth in the *Timaeus*, understood as a myth grounded in Plato's discovery of the a priori domain and in the teleological orientation of his philosophy: “for Plato, the myth is the λόγος of the domain of what ‘never is and always becomes,’ for Husserl, it is a prophecy of a science yet to come, one the proper objective domain of which still awaits to be disclosed at the time he is writing” (Trizio, “Husserl's *Timaeus*,” 88). Here we can also observe a kinship between Husserl and Horkheimer and Adorno, if we recall that Horkheimer and Adorno regarded the mythical figure of Odysseus as the “proto-image” (*Urbild*) of the modern idea of the bourgeois individual (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 50; this similarity has already been noted by Alice Pugliese, see Pugliese, “Subjektive und intersubjektive Genesis der Handlung,” 193).

15) On myth as a medium of intercultural understanding, see Held, “Heimwelt, Fremdwelt, die eine Welt,” 322–23.

understanding of myth and his discussion of dialogue between myths, we can identify three kinds of universalism in Husserl's thought. However, I will argue that these forms are not equally justified, even within Husserl's own broader framework.

First, universalism can be seen as the exclusive property of European culture. As demonstrated in the second section, according to Husserl, only European culture achieved the theoretical attitude necessary to pursue universal truth – truth that transcends the limitations of practical interests within a concrete *Umwelt*. In this context, myth stands in opposition to the theoretical attitude, and the theoretical attitude is identified with a “demythologizing” (*entmythisierend*) approach (Hua 6, 340). However, as I have argued, this understanding leads to a dilemma: if we accept that universalism, in this sense, radically severs its connection to myth, then it will be susceptible, because it will be subject to the charge of “forgetting the meaning of the lifeworld.” On the other hand, if we accept that European universalism is based on European myth, then this universalism becomes subject to cultural relativism, and Husserl would have no solid ground to claim that European culture is superior to other civilizations.¹⁶

Husserl is, in fact, always aware of the challenge that cultural relativism poses to his justification of universalism. At times, he softens his own position and emphasizes the importance of intercultural dialogue (Hua 39, 170–71). If the reality is that, for example, the Chinese have their own logic,¹⁷ science, and philosophy, just as

16) This tension between the locality and universality of reason is well illustrated in Filip Gołaszewski's comparative study of Hegel and Husserl, particularly in their affirmation of the priority of European rationality and the universal character of reason: “Since both philosophers identify the teleological goal of history with the fulfilment of universal reason that was born in a European locality, there is no possibility left for any other trajectory of history than one which favors a western type of thinking” (Gołaszewski, “Reason as a Cultural Locality,” 121–22).

17) In the context of the “Kaizo articles,” logic and mathematics – which originated in ancient Greece – occupy a special status within the theoretical pursuit of universal truth. This is not only because, for Husserl, they transcend cultural relativity, but also because logic serves as the methodological precondition, the criterion of verification, and the normative guide for the pursuit of universal knowledge, while mathematics functions as the model (*Vorbild*) of such knowledge (See Hua 27, 81–83, 92). However, as Husserl himself hints here, and as contemporary research in ethnomathematics and non-classical logic has shown, logic and mathematics have not entirely escaped the influence of cultural context, and Greek logic or mathematics do not possess an absolute priority over non-Greek traditions. (Cf. Ambrosio, “Ethnomathematics and Its Place in the History”; Priest, “The Logic of the Catuskoti.”)

Europeans do, then a dialogue between cultures can help us discover each other's forms of rationality. This, in turn, can lead to a more universal truth – one that is valid across cultures.¹⁸ In such a process, we come to recognize that previous views were merely relative *Typik* within a particular homeland (Hua 29, 41). In this narrative, then, universal truth is achieved through intercultural dialogue.¹⁹ We can find numerous discussions about the significance of intercultural exchange in Husserl's manuscripts, and based on these we can articulate universalism in both the second and third senses.²⁰ Moreover, we can find that the relevance of myth consistently remains present in this context.

The universalism in the *second* sense in Husserl, although grounded in intercultural dialogue, exhibits a clear naturalistic tendency. As discussed in the third section, nature is apprehended differently by different nations in their own mythical ways. However, Husserl believes that in the process of intercultural – or more precisely, inter-mythical – dialogue, a common core (*Kern*) will emerge. We will eventually understand that, despite mythical differences, we share a common natural world. The sun, moon, and earth are apprehended differently in various myths, but through inter-mythical dialogue, we will come to see that the sun, moon, and earth *in themselves* are identical (Hua 27, 77, 189; Hua 29, 43–44). Ultimately, a common, myth-free world will be found between different home-worlds, and universalism will thus be achieved. However, this view is highly questionable, for the following reasons: First, this form of universalism appears too preliminary or incomplete, as it is based on a naturalistic attitude and fails to address the question of universal

18) In his “Kaizo articles,” Husserl already asserts that we can gradually uncover the intuitive evidence and rationality within religion through a critical process that eliminates its irrational elements (See Hua 27, 65). However, what is missing here is an intercultural context, and Husserl does not fully address the motivation behind this kind of self-critique.

19) In Husserl's narrative, the Greeks are consistently regarded as the founders of science and philosophy; conversely, little attention is given to Greek myth and its role in the development of Greek culture. However, according to some passages, he does take the encounter between the Greeks and other cultures as a background that motivates the Greeks to overcome their own prejudices and to pursue universal validity; within this framework, the lifeworld prior to this awakening is characterized as a mythical world (see Hua 27, 187–89).

20) As we have mentioned, for Husserl, the pursuit of universal truth is possible only within the theoretical attitude. However, he also sometimes asserts that this attitude is accompanied by an interest in the alien landscape, alien people, and alien cultures (See Hua 27, 79).

values from a personalistic perspective;²¹ second, it seems to fall into a physicalistic and objectivistic position – that is, the assumption that rational knowledge can only be found in the physical world or in a world that can be physically reduced, yet this very standpoint is criticized by Husserl himself from his transcendental perspective (Hua 6, 342; Hua 29, 222); third, the possibility of a radical elimination of myth is also problematic: If, as Husserl claims, mythical apprehension does not involve starting with an objective world and then adding mythical powers to it, then how can this objective world later be so easily “discovered”? And even if people come to distinguish a common objective world, why must the mythical level be discarded entirely? Why can it not persist – albeit in a transformed or reinterpreted form? In fact, the possibility of a completely myth-free world is something Husserl himself questions at times. In some places, he also states that, even in a god-free world, things are still not purely physical (Hua 29, 44).²²

However, despite the questionable aspects of this naturalistic tendency, the importance of intercultural dialogue should still be affirmed, and it can lead us in another direction – namely, to universalism in the *third* sense: universalism as a cultural motivation and a hopeful vision. At the beginning of intercultural interaction, we tend to understand another culture from the perspective of our own home-world, and in doing so, the other myth may appear ridiculous or bizarre (Hua 29, 42; Hua 39, 162–63). However, according to Husserl, in the course of sustained and peaceful interaction, the rationality of the other culture and the commonalities between cultures begin to emerge. These commonalities are not limited to the “natural realm”: the morality or the mode of thinking embedded in another myth can, in some cases, be justified – or even admired – by those from a different mythic background (Hua 29, 42–43). In this context, a radical universalism as already achieved knowledge is not assumed; space remains for cultural disagreements. What is essential here is a self-critical motivation and a hope for eventual intercultural consensus.

21) On the distinction between the personalistic and naturalistic attitudes, and their relation to objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) and value, see Hua 4, §§49–53. It is clear that, for Husserl, values, ethical, and moral matters fall within the scope of the discussion on possible universalism (See Hua 29, 42–43).

22) Cf. Hart, “From ‘Mythos’ to ‘Logos’ to Utopian Poetics,” 152–53, where the author points out that the identification of the same object across different myths is a process of eliminating differences, which means that the notion of “identity” or “sameness” across cultures is itself a description that admits of degrees.

According to Husserl, intercultural interaction “devalues” the relative truths of the home-world and allows the cultural relativity of one’s own position to become more clearly visible (Hua 29, 45, 386–87). Thus, intercultural dialogue also initiates a process of retrospective reflection and self-critique regarding one’s own culture (Hua 29, 41). In conclusion, although universal truth is not yet achieved, intercultural dialogue fosters the awareness that our own culture is grounded in one myth among others. Nevertheless, as Husserl argues, myth can serve as a prefiguration of rationality. Therefore, we may always hope to reach universal rational truth through self-critique and intercultural dialogue.²³

Universalism in the third sense is less dogmatic, yet it may seem overly optimistic. It is less dogmatic because it clearly acknowledges the one-sidedness inherent in the development of reason. As Husserl argues in his “Vienna Lecture,” one-sidedness is an essential fate of human reason (Hua 6, 338). Reason can only begin from a particular, one-sided standpoint, and this one-sidedness may hinder its progress toward higher stages. In this context, we may speak of an “alienation” of human reason: since reason can only start from a limited perspective, there is a tendency to mistake that perspective for the final and universal truth.²⁴ This alienation can be overcome through self-critical motivation and dialogue with other paradigms. However, this view also seems overly optimistic because it would imply the following: first, that common ground can always be found through dialogue; second, that such commonalities are expressions of a universal human reason; and third, that they can dissolve fundamental cultural disagreement.

23) In his “Kaizo articles,” Husserl also emphasizes the pursuit of universal rationalization as a distinctive feature of European culture and situates this pursuit within a continuous historical process of renewal. When addressing the methodology of such renewal, he reiterates his conception of eidetic reduction: through free phantasy and a series of imaginative variations, we can find the universal essence of things. Husserl maintains that this method is applicable not only to the eidetic investigation of natural objects, but also to cultural objects and cultural values (Hua 27, 13–20). However, as Klaus Held has argued – especially with regard to culture and value – the eidetic reduction or imaginative variation tends to reveal not a universal essence beyond culture, but rather the pregivenness of cultural habituality (See Held, “Horizont und Gewohnheit,” 19–23).

24) In his comparative study of Husserl and Horkheimer and Adorno – and from the standpoint of the latter – Diogo Ferrer criticizes Husserl on two main points: first, that he ignores myth and the kinship between myth and rationality; and second, that he locates the one-sidedness and alienation of reason in modern age rather than in the very origin and essence of reason itself. However, based on our discussion, this represents a one-sided reading and misunderstanding of Husserl’s thought. Cf. Ferrer, *The Transformation of Reason*, 203–207.

These assumptions are questionable. First, to what extent can we presuppose a universal human reason that has functioned continuously across different human cultures despite cultural relativity? Is this presupposition of universal human reason itself not also a kind of myth?²⁵ Second, the common points discovered between two or more cultures may in fact be only peripheral elements within each respective culture; thus, the resulting consensus may not overcome deeper cultural contradictions.

Nevertheless, these concerns do not invalidate or negate universalism as a hope. The hope or the universalism as a cultural motivation signifies an expectation of the “one” within the communication of the “many,” whose very possibility and presuppositional context lies precisely in cultural diversity or the plurality of lifeworlds. Thus, this universalist hope or motivation is characterized by its twofold nature: first, from a historical and factual perspective, the pursuit of universalism is aroused through the awareness of the plurality of the world and through the achievement of consensus within communicative exchange; second, since the pursuit of ultimate universality is never fully realized, this hope, awakened within the plurality of dialogue, points toward a future temporal dimension and, in turn, imparts a teleological character to present cultural practice.

From this teleological perspective, the religious elements do not – according to certain readings of Husserl, as well as comparative research on the differences between Husserl and other thinkers (e.g., Patočka) – play merely a derivative role with regard to universal reason,²⁶ but may also be constitutive and regulative. As Husserl emphasizes, the idea of a monotheistic God – unlike polytheism or other mythical ideas – has a special significance for rational philosophy, insofar as it can serve as an embodiment of the ideal of universal truth, of the *Logos* (Hua 6, 335; Hua 39, 165).²⁷ The concept of

25) In fact, in a manuscript in Hua 29, Husserl distinguishes two kinds of human reason. The first is the reason understood as the regulative tradition within a particular home-world; the second is universal reason, which breaks through the traditional and religious relativity (Hua 29, 40–41). However, if this second form of reason is only made possible through critical reflection and transformation (*Umbildung*) of tradition, and through intercultural interaction, then we must perhaps accept that reason in the first sense is the precondition and operative platform for the emergence of reason in the second sense.

26) Sternad, “The Reasons of Europe,” 875.

27) It is worth noting that the idea of a monotheistic God, and its cultural status as the embodiment of the identity of universal truth, is not the exclusive achievement of European culture, but rather the result of a cultural dialogue between Greek and other cultures.

“God” in Husserl’s writings exhibits both manifold polysemy and a trajectory of development.²⁸ As a positive reference, God takes on an explicitly teleological meaning. It manifests itself not only as an ideal pole indicating the ultimate realization of truth, but also as the guarantor of the fulfillment of the ultimate aim (Cf. Hua 42, 242, 429). However, the figure of a singular God serves to guide us; it is not something we have achieved, nor a destination we have already reached: “God exists only as a guiding and ‘animating’ principle of perfection” (Hua 42, 337; cf. Hua 42, 424). Thus, on the one hand, the distance between God and empirical reality calls for a humble attitude in the pursuit of universal truth; on the other hand, God, as the idea of a guarantor, provides hope and encouragement to continue this pursuit.²⁹ This positive reference to God would call for a discussion of a Husserlian philosophy – or even an ontology – of the divine dimension beyond purely epistemological concerns and the pursuit of wisdom; such a discussion, however, lies beyond the scope of the present study.

5. Conclusion

Let us return to Husserl’s discussion of Europe as a spiritual Gestalt. In his lecture, Husserl claims that the difference between European and other cultures lies in the distinction between the theoretical attitude and the mythical-religious attitude. However, a more comprehensive review of his reflections on myth allows us to identify two different roles that myth plays in his theory: on the one hand, myth – as a primitive and traditional mode of understanding the world within a concrete home-world – acts as a concealment of universal rational truth; on the other hand, myth appears as the cultural matrix through which meaningful cultural constitution becomes possible. This dual role of myth reveals an inevitable fate of human reason: its entanglement with one-sided beginnings. This insight leads us to a dialogical form of universalism,

28) On this topic, see Lo, *Die Gottesauffassung in Husserls Phänomenologie*, especially 62–71, 78–85.

29) In this regard, one of the most inspiring studies is Klaus Held’s “*Gott in Husserls Phänomenologie*,” in which Held analyzes Husserl’s concept of “God” in its teleological dimension. According to Held, in contrast to polytheistic myth, the monotheistic God – who cannot be directly experienced but is conceived in an ideal manner – is particularly suited to represent universal truth, valid across all cultural horizons and home-worlds. Moreover, this God manifests both as an ideal pole and as a process of approaching this pole. Hence, Held points out an implicit intellectual connection between Husserl’s idea and “process theology.”

wherein the realization of universalism becomes a motivation and a hope grounded in intercultural conversation, rather than the exclusive possession of any one particular cultural *Typik*.³⁰

Based on our discussion, we can distinguish universalism as a hopeful and self-critical attitude from universalism as an already achieved universal knowledge. If we accept the former as the true cultural character of European culture instead of the latter, then we must also revise the cultural or spiritual localization of “Europe”: it signifies, fundamentally, an open attitude – one that engages in self-critique and participates in intercultural dialogue.³¹ However, if Europe becomes complacent with its own cultural achievements and ceases to pursue this openness, it thereby ceases to be “Europe” in the spiritual sense and turns into a non-European standpoint.

Moreover, we can see how the idea of the singular God functions as a regulative and constitutive principle in Husserl’s program of universalism. Here we can also observe a wide resonance between Husserl and other thinkers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For instance, Franz Brentano finds in Christian religion an optimistic impetus for the pursuit of reliable philosophical knowledge.³² Similarly, Rudolf Bultmann, who raises a project of demythologization in evangelical theology, interprets life grounded in belief in God as a liberation from mundane practical interests and their relative validity – essentially, as a process of demythologization. However, according to Bultmann, demythologization is simultaneously a task demanded by the essence of myth and an ongoing, situation-dependent process.³³ Therefore, Bultmann, like Husserl, suggests that myth and the concrete situation of human existence themselves constitute the very precondition for the process of demythologization. In both thinkers, demythologization does not denote a concrete historical phase, such as secu-

30) Through this research on the role of myth in the lifeworld and its relevance to the pursuit of universalism, an inherent tension within Husserl’s phenomenological program is revealed: on the one hand, grounded in his insight into the lifeworld, Husserl articulates a general horizon of meaning within which subjectivity is always already embedded; on the other hand, his commitment to “philosophy as a rigorous science” drives him to seek a path toward a radically horizonless and thus universal truth. In light of this dilemma, this study reveals the complexity of the pursuit of universalism itself – at least within Husserl’s phenomenology.

31) This point has already been emphasized by Klaus Held, see Held and Kirkland, “The Origin of Europe,” 100.

32) Brentano, “Die Vier Phasen Der Philosophie,” 224–25.

33) Bultmann, “Neues Testament und Mythologie, 1941,” 178–79, 183–84.

larization, but rather a movement grounded in the intrinsic development or immanent striving of human thought and culture.

Finally, our discussion leads us toward an ethical and political dimension. When Husserl turns to intercultural interaction as a precondition for mutual understanding and the realization of universalism, he additionally emphasizes that such interaction should be in peace (Hua 27, 188; Hua 29, 42–43, 45). If we endorse universalism as a dialogical process – one that should not take the form of war, conquest, or the elimination of different perspectives – then we must also accept it in a normative way: what is more universal than what is universal, is we all have *the right to express* what is universal.

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