IGNORANCE AND THE LIMITATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I utilize a variety of sources from philosophy, history, and theology with the plan of demonstrating an ever widening phenomenon of ignorance. This thesis will deploy a phenomenological methodology after Husserl, and phenomenology will also serve as a significant philosophical component, due to its notions of transcendence. We will not favor a meaning of ignorance as simply to not know something. We will seek to go beyond this definition. This helps to see a central claim that ignorance is essentially transcendental. Transcendence helps to disclose intentionality, a central component of phenomenology. Intentionality is represented by the three structures of: presence and absence, parts and wholes, and identity in a manifold. These structures serve as a way to phenomenologically reexamine each thinker’s ideas. Socrates wanted to prove that ignorance and wisdom are bound together, and that we should not fear the unknowns of death. Foucault wants to show that knowledge brought about by Plato and Socrates supplanted oracular truth. Ignorance expands beyond privation with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius also opens up ignorance beyond privation into ignorance+, a pivotal discovery made in this thesis. Kant called into check the problems of pure reason. His notion of freedom represents a limitation of reason while it is also unlimited potential. Kant’s legendary difficulty also becomes an illustration of transcendence and reason’s limitations. Du Bois-Reymond and Proctor demonstrate ways in which the identity of ignorance expands into its many manifolds. Du Bois-Reymond’s negative lesson is that we do not like to be told we cannot know everything, while
Proctor affirms that our notions about ignorance are always growing. The study of ignorance is an emerging field of interdisciplinary study. Hence, the phenomenon of ignorance and ignorance+ become a promise of possibility.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved by: Mark Tanzer
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The study of ignorance is never complete. Ignorance is usually something to be avoided in the name of acquiring more knowledge. Pursuing knowledge typically overrides any concern for its omissions. When we say we have knowledge we treat knowledge as taking complete precedence over ignorance. But what is ignorance? If the study of ignorance is never complete—then there is always something new to be ignorant of. Our experience of ignorance is always growing. Ignorance can never be entirely eradicated with knowledge. Is ignorance what must be confronted before learning takes place? Is it an absence of knowledge, or is it something else residing above and beyond knowledge? The phenomenon of ignorance must include the limitations of knowledge as it includes unlimited potential. Ignorance is frequently cast off as a deficiency, a lacking, a shortcoming, a character-flaw, and something to be eradicated at all costs. With this said, we have to face the negative limitations of our own knowledge, before we can see the value of ignorance as potential. Nobody can know everything, so there is an inherent ignorance within the way we all have knowledge of things, people, and ideas. Perhaps the phenomenon of ignorance is part of the way in which we understand and conceptualize what it means to know and experience things, people, and ideas. To be sure, the humility of wisdom must include our own lack of knowledge—an admission of ignorance.

A strong, vibrant consideration of ignorance is an indispensable habit if one is to engage with wisdom—not only as we experience things, people, and ideas, but to understand the very limitations of knowledge. In this thesis I will utilize a variety of sources from philosophy,

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1 Robert N. Proctor writes, “Ignorance has many interesting surrogates and overlaps in myriad ways with—and is generated by—secrecy, stupidity, apathy, censorship, disinformation, faith, and forgetfulness, all of which are science twitched.” Proctor, Agnotology, 2.
history, and theology with the aim of demonstrating an ever widening phenomenon of ignorance that includes knowledge’s limitations as well as its relation to the periphery of knowing. This is the unexplored, dark side of knowledge. Inevitably, this research will not always look like ignorance as we commonly understand it—since the goal is to expand how we experience ignorance as extending toward knowledge’s limitations. Learning is best accompanied with the humility of not knowing, making mistakes, demarcating limitations, and so on. Knowledge of ignorance helps get us there.

As anyone would do at the onset of studying a concept, idea or word, I dust off an authoritative volume of *The Oxford English Dictionary* to look up a basic definition of *ignorance*. The first *O.E.D.* entry for the word *ignorance* reads: “The fact or condition of being ignorant; want of knowledge (general or special).” This in turn, leads to the definition of *ignorant*, and its first entry reads: “Destitute of knowledge, either in general or with respect to a particular fact or subject; unknowing, uniformed, [and] unlearned.” That the editors chose to use the word “destitute” already signals an unfavorable bias toward the concept of ignorance as something, usually someone, who does not know this or that. As we look further into the definition’s various iterations, we see that ignorance includes a sense of innocence, but it can also include someone who is ill-mannered or uncouth. Although this study will not look into the problem of how ignorance is culturally judged, or how it is looked at as a character deficit, this thesis will look into issues of ignorance that run far deeper than that. My primary definition will

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2 There is an upcoming book on ignorance, by Cornel Zwierlein, titled: *The Dark Side of Knowledge: Histories of Ignorance, 1400 to 1800.*


not favor the meaning of ignorance as simply to not know something. This thesis will wholeheartedly aim to go beyond and expand this definition.

Introducing this phenomenological analysis of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge allows me to provide a general overview of the main thinkers I will utilize and how I will work to synthesize their ideas within the methodology of phenomenology. The philosophical nuances, finer details, and specific technical terminology encountered in the introduction, will be explained within the context of each of the subsequent chapters. Please be patient—I try to address and explain as much as I can within the limited scope of this thesis. The phenomenon of ignorance is ever-expanding, and its relation to phenomenology is also one of expansion.

My work here does not close the inquiry, nor is it comprehensive. Yet, phenomenology helps us open the field of ignorance into new possibilities. In the opening chapter I want to cover the technicality of the phenomenological methodology utilized throughout the thesis. During the research, I soon decided that phenomenology should also serve as a philosophical component due to Edmund Husserl’s life-long emphasis on the notion of transcendence—paradoxically going beyond the objects of consciousness so as to better understand the objects of consciousness. Transcendence in this sense, serves as an ongoing and evolving notion that operates in the background of our conscious experience. It also serves as an underlying notion for most of the thinkers presented. We are not in the habit of reverse-engineering the structures of our thinking enough to recognize how important transcendence is. Husserl’s philosophy of phenomenology is full of thorny technical terms and ideas. Explaining and defining how all of these terms and ideas interlock with respect to this thesis presented is no easy task. We will see that transcendence is involved in recognizing the not-so-easy to understand notion of intentionality, which is central to the aims of phenomenology as much as it is central to the
structuring methodology of this thesis. Intentionality represents the transition from subjective consciousness to objective consciousness. If objectivity has to do with what is valid for all, and to find whatever is essential, phenomenology must invariably include the tools of transcendence. In short, we must go beyond what is readily apparent to disclose what is essential. This brings us to another reason why transcendence is given so much attention here. Because the objects of consciousness are never actually contained in our heads when we experience them, we must transcend those things so as to experience them, and we must necessarily abstract/transcend certain things away. This lesson is not only essential for the acquisition of knowledge, but it also proves to be essential for understanding ignorance. When we work to understand things, people, and ideas, we transcend these things, people, and ideas, and in turn, we overlook aspects of those things. As a result, we remain ignorant of all the things we overlooked. Therefore as we will discover, ignorance is essentially transcendental. Even before we jump into talk of intentionality in the thesis, we will discover that transcendence already gives us fundamental clues into the essential qualities of ignorance. The transition from subjectivity to objectivity will be made evident in the three structures of: presence and absence, parts and wholes, and identity in a manifold. These intentional structures are identified transcendentally, and they are used to divide the chapters of this thesis. These structures will serve as ways to phenomenologically understand, and reframe, each of the presented thinker’s ideas and help us unfold new connections about ignorance.

In the chapter on the intentional structure of presence and absence, I realized that an early inspiration for this work on ignorance came about with the reading of the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates as conveyed by his disciple Plato. We will look into how Socrates famously tried to prove that not-knowing and wisdom are bound together—to embrace the former allows
for the latter. This proves to be a kind of negative knowledge, which will be explored more deeply. In the context of how an essential feature of ignorance is disclosed presently and absentely with Socrates, we will see that we must be filled with the limitations of our own knowledge if our wisdom is not to be empty. Presence and absence also discloses essential features of death for Socrates, given that our own death is empty, it cannot be present, and given that death is the absence of life, it must always be absent. A life devoted to philosophy helps us to cope with the fears of death—we need not fear death, because we are ignorant of it. Socrates’ type of knowledge that owns up to its shortcomings is surely wiser than one that does not. Using the twentieth century philosopher, historian Michel Foucault will show us that the type of truth and knowledge brought about by Plato and Socrates was not the only type to be found in the ancient world, demonstrating that their type of truth and knowledge supplanted another more antiquated and oracular type of truth only made accessible in religious ritual. This will provide one way in which history exposes an essential aspect of the phenomenon of ignorance, given that certain types of knowledge cannot be present to everyone in the same place, or all of the time—knowledge is absent to those who lack a means of finding it. Phenomenology was a strong influence on the early thought of Foucault, but he would be critical of it later on in his career because as we shall see, phenomenology also loses contingent unessential things while transcending into what is essential.

In the chapters on the phenomenological structure of parts and wholes, ignorance and the limitations of knowledge continuously expand beyond basic privation in the extraordinary example of the early medieval Christian theologian Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. I want to show that the negative theology combined with the transcendence of Pseudo-Dionysius opens up the notion of ignorance beyond simple privation, to aim for the unknown potential of God. This
going beyond the privations of ignorance is what I term: ignorance+. Ignorance+ is representative of all we cannot know as pure potential. I am indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius for this discovery of mine, given that we rarely think of ignorance as representative of potential. I am not a Christian, but I am able to recognize the secular importance of the notion that the impossibility (and possibility) of knowing something always directs us to the potential to know more. This has secular significance, given that we cherish the possibility of knowing things beyond our reach. The example of Pseudo-Dionysius also provides yet another instance of how history plays a part in disclosing the value of ignorance. History has both hidden and disclosed knowledge of the true author known as Pseudo-Dionysius from us in a way that confirms the spiritual aims of his entire corpus. This also serves as a means to find another essential feature of ignorance phenomenologically. To become whole, is to ascetically let go of parts of ourselves.

This study would not be complete without the addition of the Enlightenment ideas of Immanuel Kant. Kant’s project was critical of the scope of pure reason, he wanted to delineate the borders of reason and he wanted to show where reason overstepped (transcended) into areas it did not have knowledge of. Notions of God, immortality, and freedom represent the triad of transcendent themes he wanted to show were beyond reason’s scope. We focus on freedom here, given that freedom also represents boundless potential. There cannot be a logical formula for freedom. Freedom presents an open limitation of reason—but it too is not mere privation. If freedom is a type of ignorance+, then we will never completely know the exquisite range of possibility freedom opens to us. Yet, this concept of freedom is a promise to grow and a promise to get away from the confines of immaturity and base ignorance. For Kant, we will see that freedom must be accorded to all who are rational—phenomenologically the whole of freedom cannot be essentially broken down to its rational parts. Freedom and rational thought go hand in
hand, but rational thought cannot wholly understand freedom, as it can only be understood in parts. We can only touch a part of freedom with our use of reason. Historically speaking, Kant’s was an Enlightenment project that called for the reasonable use of our potential, our freedom, as much as it was an Enlightenment project to call for the free use of reason—including Kant’s own freedom to be difficult for the sake of a rigorous, ultra-precise, and thorough critical philosophy. Kant, like Husserl, or Pseudo-Dionysius rarely make for easy reading, but within our ceaseless discomfort we find disclosed in their difficulty the precious wisdom of transcendence, conveniently coupled with the wisdom that we cannot know everything. Phenomenologically we will see how only wishing to understand parts sometimes sacrifices the whole. We want these thinkers to be broken down to easier parts so as to understand the whole, and in the process we lose things, while also admitting that this is an essential way to learn about things. Also, Kant, like Husserl, Foucault, and Emil du Bois-Reymond, will show us that the absolutions of scientific reasoning and philosophical contemplation are frequently at odds with each other. The lesson of history is that the natural and physical sciences do not, and will not, have the answer for everything—we need push ourselves to find critical answers beyond the ignorance of science.

The intentional structure of identity in a manifold will be examined in the last chapter, where we will find three essential things. On a purely phenomenological point, Husserl will show us that experience is the ever-rich and grounded immanence from where all phenomena arises. The other two points will serve to disclose the essential notion that the identity of ignorance is both limited and ever-expanding. The 19th century scientist Emil du Bois-Reymond and the 21st century historian of science Robert N. Proctor continue to demonstrate the ways in which the identity of ignorance expands into its many manifolds, its many faces. With du Bois-Reymond, the limitations of knowledge gesture to a type of quietism of ignorance—we cannot
do away with the limits of our knowledge. Like Socrates wanted to emphasize, we cannot know everything—but we always wish to transcend this limitation. We always want to go beyond our knowledge of things. Although du Bois-Reymond was hugely popular in his day, his desire to delimit our capacity to know everything was met with considerable scorn. We do not like to be told we cannot know everything. We always want to transcend our knowledge, our capacity, our freedom—it is what gives us hope.

Saving Proctor for the end was not accidental given that he enthusiastically affirms that our ignorance is always growing, recognizing that the study of ignorance is likewise an emerging field of inquiry. With Proctor, we will see that the essential range of ignorance is always expanding. He coined the term: agnotology (the study of ignorance), with respect to his interest in the ever-expanding phenomenon. He also identifies a triadic structure of ignorance that will exemplify the phenomena of identity in a manifold. This triad shows that an essential element of ignorance is that it is always growing. Ignorance is identified as something to grow out of. Ignorance is social, it depends on time and place. Lastly, ignorance is constructed to keep things secret. To hide the truth is to keep people in ignorance deliberately. There is always something new to be ignorant of. Hence the identity of ignorance is always expanding into new manifolds.

Ignorance always provides new horizons of possibility. Ignorance always has a new limitation of knowledge to overcome. Both du Bois-Reymond and Proctor (and for that matter the rest of the thinkers presented here) exemplify the notion that knowledge has its limits and at the same time this points to unlimited possibilities. The question remains: do we let these limits hinder us or are we propelled to expand into new horizons, new limits and new manifolds of ignorance?
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY / PHENOMENOLOGY

Looking into how ignorance and the limitations of knowledge appear philosophically, theologically and historically requires a methodological approach—phenomenology is well suited to this task. If phenomenology is the study of appearances, then this study utilizes phenomenology to look into how the twin protagonists of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge appear by way of the various thinkers presented here and beyond. Studying, and contemplating how things, people, and ideas appear to us experientially offers us a clue to how we understand and gain knowledge of these things—even if that knowledge is about its own limitations, its shortcomings and knowledge’s open potential beyond what can be known. The philosophy of phenomenology not only offers convenient structural cohesion, it also serves as an irrereplaceable philosophical key partly due to its emphasis on the issue, problems and inevitable habit of transcending and going beyond things, people, and ideas so as to arrive at the essence of these things. As we will see, even though transcendence is problematic, it cannot be avoided. The same follows for a lack of knowledge, it is problematic, but it too cannot be avoided.

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and the way phenomena appear intentionally as founded within the experience of our lived world. Within this study, phenomenology will help us to get a better sense of the essence of ignorance—methodologically and philosophically. Phenomenology seeks to describe the intentional experience, and it does so methodologically.\(^5\)

Phenomenology is a methodological philosophy. Phenomenology also shows us that the mind

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\(^5\) “As conceived by Husserl, phenomenology is not a theory or a body of philosophical claims—it is not a doctrine. Rather, phenomenology is a set of philosophical questions and approach towards them—it is a method.” “As we have seen, Husserl claims that the phenomenological reduction allows us to focus on phenomena, thereby enabling us to describe them in a way that is neutral with respect to the reality of the worldly objects around us.” Joel Smith, *Experiencing Phenomenology: An Introduction*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 9, 25.
and its environment are not separate. The way we subjectively think about things, people, and ideas is inseparably interlocked with how those things appear objectively to us in our day to day world. We usually do not pay close enough attention to how things appear to us phenomenologically, and as a result we become ignorant of the richness of our lived experience due to such inattentiveness. Our consciousness often separates and goes beyond the surrounding things, people, and ideas in our immediate grasp. This can be highly beneficial and is necessary to get to a better understanding of phenomena, but it has its drawbacks. We take seemingly simple things for granted—for example the way things, people, and ideas appear to us. When we take these things for granted, we potentially lose what is essential. It is within this problem, losing what is essential, where the potential for ignorance is high, because when we overlook what we assume to be unimportant, we lose sight of what gets overlooked. If what seems unimportant gets overlooked, then we could be missing valuable experiential and essential information lost in the oversight.

After explaining how phenomenology works as my methodological structure, in upcoming sections I aim to closely examine the problem and benefits of transcendence, a going beyond things, people, and ideas at hand. Looking at transcendence helps to disclose a central goal of using phenomenology: to get at what is essential. This means that what is essential for ignorance must be held up alongside the problems and benefits of transcendence. Meanwhile, let us look at how phenomenology, opening with Husserl, figures into the methodology and working philosophy of this thesis.

The philosophy of phenomenology is brought in as a structuring methodology with its emphasis on intentionality which is transcendental. Phenomenology, intentionality, and transcendence all need to be defined as we will continue to detail, but for now, intentionality is
the *aboutness* of our conscious direction toward things, phenomena, people, and ideas. The unique structure of phenomenological intentionality will be utilized as an organizing principle by which to consider the ideas and concepts of the various thinkers I have selected as representative of my approach to expand our view of ignorance and knowledge’s limitations. In other words, I will use the structure of phenomenology in my analysis to examine the intentionality of each of the presented thinker’s concepts as applicable to ignorance and the limitations of knowledge. As we shall see the combination of transcendence, phenomenology, ignorance, and each of the thinker’s positions enables us to innovate new connections.

**Edmund Husserl**

To continue opening this discussion on phenomenology, I’ll begin by introducing the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the father of phenomenology, who wanted to develop a philosophy that grounded science in a new and radical way. His development of phenomenology was the result. It is within this turn from science to the new science of phenomenology where we find limitations of knowledge brought about by the transcendent oversights of science. His philosophical concerns serve as an opening, not only to phenomenology, but also to the limitations of knowledge understood phenomenologically. Husserl received his PhD from the University of Vienna in 1883, where he wrote his dissertation on the “Contributions to the Theory of Calculus of Variations.” He was a mathematician turned philosopher turned phenomenologist. He laid down one of his first elaborations of phenomenology with his *Logical Investigations* in 1900. It was one year after this publication, in 1901 when he moved from Halle, Germany where he was a *Privatdozent* (a teacher who was not a full professor) to University of Göttingen where he taught as *Extraordinarius* professor (a

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professor without a chair). The intellectual climate of Germany and Europe at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century was overcast with a so-called “crisis of science,” which was really a fear that the overconfidence of science could not help us with everything it seemed to promise.\textsuperscript{7} The following quote is prescient of his future goal for phenomenology, as well as alluding to the subtle problems with the hard sciences. His overarching aim was to get away from strict confines of scientific empiricism and to get back to phenomenal experience,

This phenomenology, like the more inclusive pure phenomenology of experiences in general, has, as its exclusive concern, experiences intuitively sizable and analyzable in the pure generality of their essence, not experiences empirically perceived and treated as real facts, as experiences of human or animal experients in the phenomenal world that we posit empirical fact.\textsuperscript{8}

This quote outlines a central concern of Husserl’s where phenomenology is directed to a radical understanding of things in their \textit{essence}, rather than as \textit{scientifically empirical facts}. This quote also brings to the fore a central problem between the hard sciences and what Husserl wanted—a science of phenomenology, a science of essences, and a philosophy of lived experience. Even though Husserl was bringing to the fore the problems of science, he felt that his phenomenology would someday serve as a radical new basis for science. While beginning to lay down the foundations for this new science, it was in the \textit{Logical Investigations} where he initially set out to find a psychological grounding for formal logic. He was not satisfied with this

\textsuperscript{7} “In order to understand fully Husserl’s attitude toward science, it is important to take account of a development which has not struck the American consciousness as forcibly as it has the European: the so-called ‘crisis of science.’ The New World, especially as regards the spectators and cheerleaders of science, still displays a naïve faith in science as the panacea for all the ills and problems of our time, apparently unaware of the fact that this faith is no longer shared by many of the front-line scientists, who have to grapple with the mounting perplexities and moral problems posed by their astonishing findings.” Herbert Spiegelberg, \textit{The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction}, Volume 1 (Dordrecht, NA: Springer Science + Business Media, 1960), 77-78.

psychological direction and instead wanted to find a grounding for pure logic while simultaneously stepping away from the problematic determinations of psychology. By the time the book was written, phenomenology was born. Prone to depression, he always liked to refer to himself as a beginner. The birth of phenomenology was nursed by large amounts of coffee. Husserl did not shy away from hard scholarly work, and when pressed by students on this issue he would remind them “not to consider oneself too good to do foundation work.” Husserl’s secret to overcoming ignorance was doing the heavy lifting of establishing sound philosophical foundations. *Logical Investigations* was followed, over his lifetime, by various “introductions” to phenomenology, including *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, from 1913. Then there was the book that directly addressed the so-called European crisis of science of the time, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, of which he worked on till sometime near his death in 1938. He was always developing his work. As phenomenology evolved, it was rarely put forth by him in a straight-forward or a systematic way. It is from these works, along with other important Husserl writings, and other secondary sources, including Robert Sokolowski’s (1934- )


10 These two works are more commonly known as *Ideas* and *Crisis*. “The work on the theme of the Crisis seems to have begun sometime in 1934, and it continued until the summer of 1937 and the beginning of Husserl’s terminal illness, to which he succumbed on April 27, 1938.” David Carr, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by Davis Carr (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 1970), xvi.

invaluable Introduction to Phenomenology, wherefrom I have located the structural core of my methodological approach.

I should also note a caveat that Husserl throughout his writing is usually referring primarily to our relationship to objects, ideas and their surrounding phenomena, he usually does not refer to the ways in which we phenomenologically experience others. He does frequently refer to our shared intersubjectivity, i.e. that we recognize the capacity for others to understand things in similar ways, perhaps in a universal way.12 My reading of Husserl is slightly different than this. In agreement with him, I recognize that we share similar, intersubjective ways in which we experience and understand things, and ideas. Yet, I extend this to also include ways in which we experience and understand people phenomenologically. People are not mere things, so I am not comfortable referring only to things. Husserl must have recognized this, and for my lack of research supporting another view we will take it as implied that he considered the phenomenological understanding of other people as relevant to our experience of phenomena and related objects and ideas. This additionally suggests that we make an easy mistake when we reduce people to objects and ideas. I am not accusing Husserl of this oversight. Looking into the details of how this works for Husserl would be fruitful, yet for this thesis I cannot give the proper attention his ideas on intersubjectivity deserve.

Phenomenology / Intentionality

If we say that intentionality has to do with the aboutness of how conscious thought is directed, then the implicit goal of phenomenology is to describe the inexhaustible subtlety of this aboutness, as founded within experience. That is to say, this study will describe features of how

12 “But we can see (we are indeed not yet far enough advanced here to be able to give detailed grounds for the view) that what is perceivable by one Ego must in principle be conceivable by every Ego.” Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Phenomenology, translated by W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co., 1958), 150.
the *aboutness* of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge are directed within the context of the various thinkers presented. Phenomenology is, without question, the study of intentionality. While Husserl was finishing his doctoral work in Vienna he met the man who is responsible for inspiring him to turn from mathematics to philosophy, the Austrian philosopher, Franz Brentano (1838-1917). Brentano is credited with the revived modern use of the term intentionality of which he borrowed from the Scholastics, Thomas Aquinas and others.\(^\text{13}\) Brentano, in his 1874 book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, originally focused on the term intentional as a philosophically important notion to better understand human psychology. Yet, it was with Husserl’s usage and retrieval of the concept, where we find the most applicable usage extended into phenomenology.

It is tough to overemphasize the significance of intentionality for Husserl. In the later years of the *Crisis*, he ambitiously writes,

> To go back to intentional origins and unites of the formation of meaning is to proceed toward a comprehension which, once achieved (which is of course an ideal case), would leave no meaningful question unanswered.\(^\text{14}\)

The core of subjective meaning formation to objective knowledge depends on what intentionality is about. In *Ideas*, Husserl reminds us that to be conscious—is to be *conscious of something*,

\(^{\text{13}}\) In a footnote on his first mention of the intentional Brentano writes, “St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that the object which is thought intentionally in the thinking subject, the object which is loved in the person who loves, the object which is desired in the person desiring, and he uses this for theological purposes.” Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, translated by Antos C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and Linda L. McAlister (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 88. Dale Jacquette writes that intentionality is not only linked to Aquinas, but also Aristotle, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham. Dale Jacquette, “Brentano’s Concept of Intentionality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*, edited by Dale Jacquette (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 94.

\(^{\text{14}}\) Husserl, *Crisis*, 168.
The intentional experience is the consciousness of something, and is so in the form its essence prescribes: as memory, for instance, or a judgment, or as will, and so forth: and so we can ask what can be said on essential lines concerning this ‘of something.’

This something can be our engagement with all the phenomena surrounding an actual thing, an idea, another person, or even a fictional thought. For our usage this also extends to ignorance. For instance, we are examining the phenomena surrounding an object of thought known as ignorance for this thesis—hence we are directed at the aboutness of ignorance. The importance of intentionality is again underscored in the *Logical Investigations*.

We take intentional relation, understood in purely descriptive fashion as inward peculiarity of certain experiences, to be the essential feature of ‘psychical phenomena’ or ‘acts’ [...].

An act for Husserl is an achievement of thinking. An act is conscious thought that is ready and available to be disclosed and described by phenomenology.

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16 “It belongs as a general feature to the essence of every actual cogito to be a consciousness of something.” Husserl, *Ideas*, 119.


18 For Husserl thinking about things is an act, or better yet an experience, but not an act that is typically aware of itself as acting—an act describes what happens when we are conscious of things real or imagined. In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl tries to clarify what he means by acts, “In talking of ‘acts,’ on the other hand, we must steer clear of the word’s original meaning: all thought of activity must be rigidly excluded.” Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 219. Husserl adds in a footnote that he is in agreement with Paul Natorp, “we too reject the ‘mythology of activities’: we define acts as intentional experiences, not as mental activities.” n. 15, 413.

Robert Sokolowski in his *Introduction to Phenomenology* opens by looking at intentionality, and as we have pointed out, this is the *aboutness* of how thought is directed. Intentionality, as he helps us see, includes several formal structures. The herculean task of extracting these structures from the impenetrable and lithic ore of Husserl’s texts is made *slightly* easier thanks to Sokolowski’s introduction. In the spirit of Husserl, Sokolowski names these key intentional structures as: “presence and absence”, “parts and wholes,” and “identity in manifolds.” Husserl only identifies *parts and wholes* outright. The other two structures are discussed at length by Husserl, but are given these formal names by Sokolowski—not by Husserl. I make a point of this because I wanted to excavate the structures using Husserl’s texts while not wholly relying on Sokolowski’s secondary introduction and needless to say this was extremely difficult. Before looking in-depth into the nuances of these structures of intentionality (which will serve to disclose the notion of intentionality even more) it is important to get acquainted with Husserl’s multifaceted, and sometimes paradoxical, usage of transcendence.

**Phenomenology / Transcendence**

To understand the intentional structures of phenomenology we need to first know about transcendence. In this section I bring in the topic of transcendence, as it applies to Husserl’s phenomenology, and for the simple reason that the complex issues of transcendence are unavoidable and highly beneficial for this study of ignorance to help us see ignorance as a

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20 “The source of intentionality is a source of at least two sorts of confusion. First there is a temptation to confuse intentionality-with-a-t, the capacity of the mind to represent objects and states of affairs in the world, with intensionality-with-an-s, the property of certain sentences by which they fail certain sorts of tests for extensionality […]. A second sort of confusion for English speakers is to suppose mistakenly that ‘intentionality’ as a technical notion in philosophy has some special connection with ‘intending’ in the ordinary sense, in which, for example, one intends to go to the movies tonight. Intending in the ordinary sense is just one form of intentionality along with belief, desire, hope, fear, etc.” *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, s.v. “Intentionality” edited by Samuel Guttenplan (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1995), 380.
phenomenon within our lived experience. One noticeable benefit is that we have to go beyond the immediacy of things, people, and ideas so as to get to know these things better. To work toward an understanding of these things, we continuously abstract from what is immediately within grasp. This transcendent moving beyond, in turn, presents the problem that certain seemingly nonessential qualities of things, people, and ideas sometimes get lost in the abstraction. This moving beyond fosters ignorance because we get easily lost and distracted in our transcendence. Transcendence exposes problems with ignorance, and yet paradoxically, it is an essential way in which things, people, and ideas are understood.

The intentional structures: parts and wholes, presence and absence, and identity in a manifold are brought about by the contemplative, transcendental deployment of Husserl’s epoché. This term represents another way of saying that phenomenology contemplatively transcends things. In fact, this thesis is an exercise in phenomenological contemplation—pulling these intentional structures out of experience is phenomenologically transcendental. As we will examine, the epoché was designed by Husserl to bracket off, to pull away from the natural attitude so as to philosophically usher the aboutness of intentionality to the fore. The natural attitude is, generally speaking: the presumed all-knowing, all-encompassing, neutrally objective, and quantifying attitude of the hard sciences. This is the attitude that the hard sciences are exclusively where we will find the answers to most of our problems. This issue is representative

21 G.W.F. Hegel writes on the importance of transcendence in the Science of Logic from the early 1800s, “To transcend (aufheben), and that which is transcended (the ideal), are among the most important concepts of philosophy,—a fundamental determination which reappears everywhere without exception, the meaning of which must be taken definitely, and must especially be distinguished from Nothing.—What transcends itself does not thereby become Nothing. What is Nothing is immediate: what is transcended is mediated, and, though it is not, yet it has reached nonentity as a result approached from Being. It therefore retains the determinateness whence it started. To transcend (aufheben) has this double meaning, that it signifies to keep or to preserve and also to make cease, to finish.” G.W.F. Hegel, Hegel’s Science of Logic, translated by W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co., 1961), 119.
of the “crisis of science.” Stepping away from the natural attitude in order to gain access to this refinement of intentional aboutness requires phenomenological transcendence. Likewise, as we shall see, to get to the essence of things, as Husserl wanted, requires a transcendence that isolates the pure givenness of things—i.e. transcendence always extends from the immanence which is the grounding of intentional experience. Immanence is also the grounding of transcendence. All of this might still sound confusing, bracketing, the natural attitude, the epoché, etc, but, by continuing to address the complication of transcendence itself, the meaning of these technical terms will be further clarified.

Ignorance, and as of yet, the sketchy periphery of the limitations of knowledge, reside in what we encounter when we go beyond the readily apparent, the obvious. It is for this reason that the essence of ignorance has intimate ties to transcendence. This is not something Husserl observed, but we observe in the context of this research. Still, transcendence has a deep significance for understanding Husserl since most of his later iterations of phenomenology were aimed at finding the essence of things. If finding the essence of things is transcendental, we cannot help but emphasize Husserl’s legendary motto of phenomenology from the Logical Investigations, “we must go back to the ‘things themselves.’”22 That is to say, we can no longer accept how things are put forth by the naturalism of empirical science, since this type of naturalism habitually puts aside questions of ignorance, subjectivity, existence and the like. Instead, we must radically go back to how we come to intuit things, phenomena, people and ideas intentionally—phenomenologically.23

22 The full sentence reads, “Meanings inspired only by remote, confused, inauthentic intuitions—if by any intuitions at all—are not enough: we must go back to the ‘things themselves.’” Husserl, Logical Investigations, 88.

23 Husserl’s use of the term “intuition” is closely aligned with Kant’s usage, that intuition is what we would call sensation, yet sensation alone does not capture our intuition of time and space
To repeat, ultimately the philosophy of phenomenology is inextricably transcendental, but it is not easy to decipher exactly how transcendence worked for Husserl. This confusion will be addressed as we continue to unfold the phenomenological reduction: the epoché. Husserl’s phenomenology is a descriptive philosophy using the epoché, and as we are noticing, the epoché is embedded within transcendence.24 The epoché is otherwise known as a bracketing off, or the phenomenological reduction, whereby the researcher, the philosopher sharpens their focus by making use of a phenomenological reduction so as to bracket phenomena from the natural attitude which, in turn, means to isolate key structures of intentionality.25, 26 Paraphrased, with (time and space cannot be strictly known by sensation, but rather by intuition). “Husserl begins with the notion of sensuous intuition as an immediate grasping of the object as in direct perception but he expands the notion of intuition to include non-sensuous categorical intuitions.” Moran and Cohen, The Husserl Dictionary, s.v. “Intuition,” 175.

24 “The Greek term epoché [ἐποχή] is used by Husserl to mean a procedure of bracketing, excluding, cancelling, putting out of action certain belief components of our experience.” Moran and Cohen The Husserl Dictionary, s.v. “Epoché,” 106. “Epoché: Husserl’s basic method or technique for the practice of phenomenology; I bracket, or make no use of, the thesis of the existence of the world around me, and thereby I turn my regard or attention from objects in the world to consciousness of objects in the world around me; adapting the Greek word ἐποχή, meaning “to abstain;” also called bracketing.” David Woodruff Smith, Husserl, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 432.

25 On intentionality, Sokolowski writes, “The term most closely associated with phenomenology is ‘intentionality.’ The core doctrine in phenomenology is the teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially ‘conscious of’ or an ‘experience of’ something or other. All our awareness is directed toward objects.” Robert Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

26 “This method involves ‘bracketing’ or ‘suspending’ all our natural attitudes towards the objects in the world and towards our psychological acts, suspending all our theories about these matters, and leading back our attention to these pure essences of consciousness. This led Husserl to postulate a number of phenomenological and, later, transcendental reductions, according to which all our assumptions and prejudices belonging to our normal worldly consciousness (or ‘natural attitude,’ die natürliche Einstellung) need to be bracketed, put aside, suspended, or to use a term taken from the Greek skeptics, to put under an epoché (meaning a ‘cessation’ or ‘suspension’), in order to be led back to the unprejudiced sources of experience.” Dermot Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 136.
Husserl’s phenomenology, we want to deploy the *epoché* while letting go of the *natural attitude* so as to get a closer look at intentionality. The *natural attitude* can be defined as the all-knowing, all-encompassing, and quantifying attitude of the natural sciences. More specifically, the *natural attitude* can be defined as a rarified form of ignorance represented by natural science’s automatic presumption of objectivity, its reluctance to acknowledge the value of subjectivity, and its taking of phenomenal experience of the natural world’s existence as for-granted. ²⁷ In these ways the *naturalism* of natural science overlooks the objects of its inquiry, at the expense of understanding them in a more phenomenologically rich way.

On the *natural attitude* Husserl wanted to *bracket* off, he writes in his 1911 essay “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” an essay where he was trying to reground traditional science into the new “rigorous science” of phenomenology, “Naturalism is a phenomenon consequent upon the discovery of nature, which is to say, nature considered as a unity of spatiotemporal being subject to exact laws of nature.”²⁸ Within the hard sciences anything that cannot be thought of in a strictly empirical and quantifiable way is usually thought of as unscientific. While we are captured and entranced by this attitude, our experience of the world is taken as an

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²⁷ In a draft of Husserl’s *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on “Phenomenology,” Husserl summarizes his ideas on the “natural attitude,” “to the essential sense of the transcendental problem belongs to its all-inclusiveness, in which it places in question the world and all the sciences investigating it. It arises within a general reversal of that ‘natural attitude’ in which everyday life as a whole as well as the positive sciences operate. In it [the natural attitude] the world is for us the self-evidently existing universe of realities which are continuously before us in unquestioned givenness. So this is the general field of our practical and theoretical activities.” Edmund Husserl, “Phenomenology, Encyclopedia Britannica Article, Draft D,” in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger*, translated by Richard E. Palmer (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 168.

²⁸ The title of this essay, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” recalls that Husserl’s phenomenology was originally meant to serve as a fundamental grounding for science, albeit a new transcendental phenomenological science no longer based on the so-called objectivity of strict empirical inquiry, the scientific method, etc. Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, translated by Quentin Lauer (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 79.
unquestioned given. If something does not reduce to physical, biological, or chemical evidence, it is not amenable to the naturalism of science. These oversights of naturalism lead to ignorance as much as they expose limitations of knowledge. When we overlook these things, we remain ignorant of these things.

With naturalism, everything is thought to be answerable with natural law, including psychology. Husserl’s critique of psychologism shared a similar problem with naturalism as he wanted to expose, “Modern psychology no longer wants to be a science of the ‘soul’ but rather of ‘psychical phenomena.’” Along this line, Husserl writes in The Crisis of European Sciences,

Thus psychology was burdened in advance with the task of being a science parallel [to physics] and with the conception that the soul—its subject matter—was something real in a sense similar to corporeal nature, the subject matter of natural science.

The epoché, the phenomenological reduction, is a turn away from such naturalism and from its empirical psychologism. When Husserl wrote the Logical Investigations he originally wanted to find a psychological ground for logic, but he soon realized that psychology was not properly suited for this task. Behavioral science simply did not contain the necessary rigor he wanted. Psychology could not ground logic, and it could not ground phenomenology as Husserl

29 “Natural science, then, simply follows consistently the sense of what the thing so to speak pretends to be as experienced, and calls this—vaguely enough—‘elimination of secondary qualities,’” “elimination of the merely subjective in the appearance,’ while “retaining what is left, the primary qualities.” “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, translated by Quentin Lauer (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 105. Generally speaking, primary qualities are those qualities of things which can be quantified, weight, extension, mass, height, &c. i.e. the measurable or the ‘objective,’ on the other hand the secondary qualities are what is left over from the quantifiable qualities of things, taste, smell, sight, &c. i.e. the ‘subjective’ qualities of things that science avoids in the name of ‘objectivity.’


31 Husserl, The Crisis, 212.
originally wanted. From the above remarks and observations it becomes evident that naturalism and its offshoot of psychologism, presented limitations of knowledge for Husserl, which for purposes of this thesis become, in turn, types of ignorance for us. These limitations of knowledge were due to the idea that empirical science only sees the world and human psychology as only answerable to such disciplines as physics, biology and chemistry, with everything other than these perspectives to be brushed aside as merely subjective. By undergoing the research of this thesis we suddenly realize that Husserl’s phenomenology and by extension transcendence disclose limitations of knowing, by exposing the oversights, the transcendent habits of natural science—its automatic presumption of objectivity, its reluctance to acknowledge the value of subjectivity, and its taking of phenomenal experience of the natural world’s existence as for-granted.

Curiously enough, the epoché was initially inspired by Descartes (1596-1650). Husserl’s epoché is a refined Cartesian-doubt, whereby all naturalistic, physicalist, and positivist sciences are put into doubt, so as to examine the experience of intentional consciousness essentially, and similarly to Descartes, to constitute a way to ground (phenomenologically) scientific thinking—remember Husserl wanted to establish the foundation for a new “rigorous science” of phenomenology.

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32 “Scientific objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world, the physical world as well as the spiritual world, is in fact. But can the world, and human existence in it, truthfully have a meaning if the sciences recognize as true only what is objectively established in this fashion, and if history has nothing more to teach us than that all shapes of the spiritual world, all the conditions of life, ideals, norms upon which man relies, form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so, that again and again reason must turn into nonsense and well-being into misery?” Husserl, The Crisis, 7.

33 “And now we recall Cartesian doubt. Reflecting on the manifold possibilities of error and delusion, I might fall into such a state of skeptical doubt that I finally say: I am certain of nothing, for me everything is doubtful. But as soon as I say that, it becomes evident that not everything can be doubtful for me. For in making the judgment that everything is doubtful it
The philosophic ἐποχή, which we propose to adapt, should consist, when explicitly formulated, in this, that in respect of the theoretical content of all previous philosophy, we shall abstain from passing any judgment at all, and that our whole discussion shall respect the limits imposed by this abstention [Husserl’s italics].

To “abstain from passing judgment,” or to put things into doubt is another way of saying that our knowledge needs to have a self-imposed transcendental limitation put on it in order to make room for what is essential.

Going back to the definitions, transcendence, “means literally ‘to climb beyond,’ ‘to ascend beyond,’ ‘to step over,’ to step across,’ ‘to surmount,’ ‘to exceed.’” Transcendence is often contrasted with immanence. Immanence can be described as everything (more appropriately: all phenomena) in conscious experience which transcendence ‘goes beyond.’ This gloss is tricky because we might assume that Husserl’s phenomenology wants to set down an account for what is ultimately there in reality, but he was not aiming in that direction. The transcendental epoché should permit access to immanence by way of the intentional, which is closer to what is ultimately ‘given’ to conscious experience when we seek to know and understand phenomena. If we recall that our provisional meaning of intentionality concerns aboutness, how consciousness is directed, then immanence—the fundament of experienced phenomena—is what this intentionality is about. Husserl’s early formulation of phenomenology was explicitly Kantian, that is to say, he was looking for the way in which our mind constitutes


objectivity in congruence with our subjectivity. Intentionality provides the key by which the subjective transitions into the objective.

We are not making an investigation of psychological phenomena, of certain occurrences in so-called real reality (whose existence remains in question throughout), nor do we speak of them. Rather, we are investigating what exists and remains valid whether anything like objective reality exists or not, whether positing of such transcendence is justified or not.

To understand objectivity is to understand subjective intentionality. Secondly, to understand intentionality is to understand transcendence. Thirdly, to understand objectivity is to understand transcendence. In 1902-03 Husserl delivered five lectures collectively titled The Idea of Phenomenology. Here we find Husserl, for the first time, discussing transcendence and its relationship with immanence. In “Lecture II” Husserl plainly states,

All positive knowledge, prescientific and even more so scientific, is knowledge that takes its objects as transcendent; it posits objects as existing, and claims to make cognitive contact with states of affairs that are not ‘in the genuine sense given’ in it, not ‘immanent’ to it.

This is the way the natural attitude takes existence for-granted. This means that the actual objects (real or imagined phenomena) of knowledge are not contained (they are not immanent)

37 “In the LU Prolegomena [the “Prolegomena” found in Husserl’s Logical Investigations] he [Husserl] presents himself as broadening Kant’s transcendental inquiry into the conditions with make objective knowledge possible: ‘We are plainly concerned with a quite necessary generalization of the question as the ‘conditions of the possibility of experience.’ However, Husserl believes the ideal conditions of experience must be given a far stricter determination than Kant had done.” Dermot Moran, Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology (Maldeon, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 183-184.


within knowing (the *cogitatio*, cognition) itself.\(^4^1\) It is because of transcendence, thought of in this way, that scientific thinking transcends its objects of study without even knowing it. Our consciousness of things is never what those things actually are. This is one of the (*naturalistic*) senses of transcendence Husserl wanted to move away from throughout his development of phenomenology. To repeat, natural science’s automatic presumption of objectivity, its reluctance to acknowledge the value of subjectivity, and its taking of phenomenal experience of the natural world’s existence as for-granted are a few of the types of scientific transcendence he wished to overcome. These are representative of science’s transcendence.\(^4^2\)

The *suspension*, Husserl’s *epoché*, represents another sense of transcendence which aimed to move away from the transcendentalism of science as described. Nevertheless, knowledge of the conscious act of knowing, and the objects of knowledge, are also transcendent. We transcend the objects of cognition as much as we transcend cognition itself. *We go beyond__*  

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\(^4^1\) “The peculiarity of intentional experience is in its general form easily indicated; we all understand the expression “consciousness of something,” especially in the illustrations which we make for ourselves.” For Husserl, this consciousness of something is referred to as the *noema*, i.e. consciousness of something that need not necessarily be a real thing, as Husserl beautifully illustrates, “Let us suppose that we are looking with pleasure in a garden at a blossoming apple-tree, at the fresh young green of the lawn, and so forth. The perception and the pleasure that accompanies it is obviously not that which at the same time is perceived and gives pleasure. From the natural standpoint the apple-tree is something that exists in the transcendent reality of space, and the perception as well as the pleasure of a psychical state which we enjoy as real human beings. Between the one and the other real being, the real man or the real perception on the one hand, and the real apple-tree on the other, there subsist real relations. Now in such conditions of experience, and in certain cases it may be that the perception is a ‘mere hallucination,’ and that the perceived, this apple-tree that stands before us, does not exist in the ‘real’ objective world.” This is to say, phenomenology is chiefly concerned with *noetic* thought, it is not concerned with whether or not the object is real. Husserl, *Ideas*, 257-259.

\(^4^2\) David Woodruff Smith in his Husserl monograph writes about this type of transcendence, “By practicing ‘transcendental’ reflection through ‘transcendental-phenomenological-reduction,’ [the *epoché*] we suspend our concern with the natural and cultural world [the natural attitude] in which we live, and we address instead solely the ways things are given or ‘constituted’ in our experience.” David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 79.
things to know them, and we go beyond how we think of those objects, people, and ideas in order to better know those things. Objects of thought (made evident by intentionality) are never the things we’re thinking about, it is a cognition of that object, people, and ideas. These things are never actually inside our heads when we think about them. We never stop to think about how we account for objectivity as it is made conscious to us (by our own consciousness). Science takes objectivity for granted, and in doing so, it transcends what it overlooks. By means of the *epoché* Husserl wanted to get back to what science was overlooking so as to get to objectivity as constituted by our humanly collective subjectivity to be made evident phenomenologically. We are usually not in the habit of reverse-engineering our own cognition as we experiences things (phenomena). This should explain why getting into the *epoché*, doing phenomenology, and practicing philosophy in general, is so difficult to appreciate. We do not always see how our knowledge of things, people, and ideas known subjectively is limited by the very transcendence taken to understand these things objectively in the first place.

43 “In his writings from 1907 to 1913 Husserl gradually unveiled his new thinking about the nature of intentional experiences in general, seeking to identify the ‘eidetic moments’ of intentional acts and their objects. In order to get away from all psychologistic and naturalistic misconceptions, including those of descriptive psychology, he introduced a new terminology, drawing on the ancient Greek term for the ‘act of thinking,’ *noesis*, and ‘what is thought,’ *noema*, terms which carried less psychological baggage than traditional terms for the intentional structure, for example ‘act,’ ‘content,’ ‘meaning,’ and so on.” Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 155.

44 “Obviously this is true not only for me, the individual ego; rather we, in living together, have the world pregiven in this ‘together,’ as the world valid as existing for us and to which we, together, belong, the world as world for all, pregiven with this ontic meaning. Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pregiven to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together. Here we find also that particular thematic alteration in which we subjectivity, somehow constantly functioning, becomes a thematic object, […]” Husserl, *The Crisis*, 109.
All these overlapping types of transcendence are beginning to run into confusing ground. Initially, there is one type of transcendence where Husserl was concerned with critiquing naturalism. In his critique of naturalism he called its type of transcendence into question, so as to get us to see to his difficult transition from subjectivity to objective knowledge by way of intentionality.\footnote{All positive knowledge, prescientific and even more so scientific, is knowledge that takes its objects as transcendent; it posits objects as existing, and claims to make cognitive contact with states of affairs that are not ‘in the genuine sense given’ in it, not ‘immanent’ to it.” Husserl, “Lecture II,” in The Idea of Phenomenology, 27.} And as we are beginning to see, there is the type of transcendence Husserl names that is more in line with the epoché, the phenomenological reduction, “But there is another sense of transcendence, whose counterpoint is an entirely different kind of immanence, namely, absolute and clear givenness, self-givenness in the absolute sense.”\footnote{Husserl, “Lecture II,” in The Idea of Phenomenology, 27.} Self-givenness is another way of expressing immanence from a first-person account—how the world is given to us from our particular intentional vantage, rather than the neutral, so-called objective vantage of science. This means that if we wished to get away from the natural attitude, if we wished to get away from the transcendence of science’s (reflexive) objectivity, we would engage Husserl’s epoché to go beyond this former type of transcendence.

Thus, Husserl’s transcendentalist paradox looks like this: while clearing away the natural attitude from its naturalistic presuppositions, and while getting closer to immanent experience by looking into intentionality, we still have to, if we follow Husserl’s methodology, transcend things so as to get a better sense of what things are essentially, as we experience them. What things are in their essence are disclosed as they are experienced intentionally. This is another way of showing that with the phenomenological method we get to things as they are.
In short, the epoché is what the concerned phenomenologist uses to get at things eidetically. It is a kind of deliberate transcendental contemplation of phenomena in question that allows us to get to the heart-of-matters as to how things are experienced intentionally. Intentional experience reveals the essential phenomena under question—and the limits of transcendence expose limitations of knowledge.

Mind you, I have not even mentioned Husserl’s account of the “transcendental ego” onto which all of phenomenology pivots—given that our ego extends beyond itself in order to know itself and to get know the things that it is not, i.e. everything else falls beyond our the centrality and subjectivity of our ego. Incidentally, this notion of Husserl’s also owes its influence to Descartes’ cogito ergo sum.

In his indispensable essay from 2008 on phenomenological immanence and transcendence, “Immanence, Self-Experience, and Transcendence in Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, and Karl Jaspers,” the world’s leading Husserl expert Dermot Moran (1953- ), tries to elucidate the confounding, paradoxical aspects of Husserl’s transcendence. As we quickly learn, getting to a comprehensive view of Husserl’s complete sense of transcendence is difficult. Moran

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47 “The first genuine transcendence within immanence is then the intuition of the eidos [εἶδος, appearance, essence, form, &c.].” Moran, “Immanence,…,” 269.

48 “But the full concrete facticity of universal transcendental subjectivity can nevertheless be scientifically [i.e. the science of phenomenology] grasped in another good sense, precisely because, truly through an eidetic method, the great task can and must be undertaken of investigating the essential form of transcendental accomplishments, that is, the total essential form of transcendentally accomplishing subjectivity in all its social forms.” Husserl, *The Crisis*, 178.

49 “I myself as this individual essence, posited absolutely, as the open infinite field of pure phenomenological data and their inseparable unity, am the ‘transcendental Ego’ […]”. Edmund Husserl, “Author’s Preface to the English Edition [of Ideas],” in *Ideas*, 18. “Accordingly, as against the first application of the epoché, a second is required, or rather a conscious reshaping of the epoché through a reduction to the absolute ego as the ultimately unique center function in all constitution. This determines henceforth the whole method of transcendental phenomenology.” Husserl, *The Crisis*, 186.
cites a former student of Husserl, Edith Stein (1891-1942), another phenomenologist of note, who, curiously enough, was canonized as a martyred Catholic saint.\(^{50}\)

While Husserl always insisted that phenomenology proceeds in immanence, in an important essay on the relation between Thomism and phenomenology, Edith Stein points out that Husserl was seeking a region of genuine immanence in the sense of a region of immediate, inviolable self-givenness from which all doubt is excluded, but no matter how much he attempted to purify his starting point transcendentally, “traces of it showed up.”\(^{51}\)

For Stein, according to Moran, Husserl’s “philosophy of pure immanence cannot escape transcendence.”\(^{52}\) To be sure, there is not an altogether clarified version of transcendence for Husserl in general.\(^{53}\) Therefore, our knowledge of Husserl’s view of transcendence is surprisingly limited—we will remain ignorant of the full measure of what he meant with his use of the term transcendence.

Earlier, we tried to get a closer idea what Husserl wanted with his early critique of transcendence, which aimed to get away from the naïveté of scientific transcendence.\(^{54}\) We have tried to make sense of phenomenological transcendence in the description of the philosophically

\(^{50}\) Edith Stein was of Jewish ancestry, who converted to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun. She was serving in a monastery in The Netherlands, during the Nazi occupation, and was eventually sent and murdered at Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942.

\(^{51}\) Moran, “Immanence, […],” 269.

\(^{52}\) Moran, “Immanence, […],” 269.

\(^{53}\) “There are a number of concepts of transcendence at play in Husserl’s thought, and it is not clear that these different senses of transcendence ever get fully resolved in his writing.” Moran, “Immanence, […],” 269.

\(^{54}\) “All positive sciences are sciences [that function] in transcendental naïveté. Without realizing it, they do their research with a one-sided orientation in which the entire life that transcendentally constitutes the real unities of experience and knowledge remains hidden to these sciences—even though, as one can see clearly only after our reductions, all such unities, according to their own cognitional sense, are what they are only as unities of transcendentally constituting multiplicities.” Husserl, “Phenomenology, Encyclopedia Britannica Article, 98.
contemplative *epoché* searching for the essential, even if that transcendental search is paradoxically angled toward immanence by way of intentionality. To get to the essence of immanent things by way of intentionality is in itself a transcendental act. In this case, what is transcendental is closer to what is objective.\(^5\) To rephrase, if objectivity has to do with what is valid for all, and to find whatever is essential, phenomenology must invariably include the tools of transcendence. In short, we must *go beyond* what is readily apparent to disclose what is essential. This brings us to another reason why transcendence is given so much attention here. With the aim of finding out more about ignorance and the limitations of knowledge from the standpoint of this analysis, when engaged with Husserl’s *epoché* we must necessarily *bracket* certain things away. Apart from Husserl’s usage, this thesis is our own humble philosophical enactment of the *epoché*. It is hard to admit that the objects of consciousness are never contained in our consciousness as we experience them. We must always *transcend* those things so as to experience them consciously while we necessarily *abstract/transcend* other parts of those things away. From the perspective of this research I have discovered that this is essential in the way we acquire knowledge and it is essential for an understanding of ignorance. When we work to understand immanence, we *transcend* these things, people, and ideas that constitute immanence, and in turn, we overlook aspects of those things. We are then ignorant of all the things we overlooked. Thanks to Husserl, but moving *beyond* Husserl, I am confident in pointing out that ignorance is essentially transcendental. Transcendence gives us fundamental clues into the essential qualities of ignorance.

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\(^5\) “Everything we experience as transcendent has the ‘value’ written on it ‘valid for all,’ Everything I experience outwardly is in principle what someone else could experience.” Moran, “Immanence,…,” 277.
Stepping away from the seemingly inviolate assumptions of empirical *naturalism* discloses the shortcomings of science as much as it discloses what must still remain hidden to us, waiting to be uncovered. Phenomenologically speaking, objectivity is a product of subjective consciousness transcended. Natural science also wants to establish objectivity, but it does so by turning to a never-ending examination and quantification of material things (as with physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) while openly discounting the inherent value of subjectivity. Husserl’s turn to the subjectivity of intentionality was in turn, a way to fix this problem. Nevertheless, as we have continually noticed, to find what is hidden within subjectivity requires acts of transcendence, and paradoxically, transcendence also hides things and when it hides things we remain ignorant of what gets left behind.
CHAPTER III

PRESENCE & ABSENCE

To be sure, the humility of wisdom must include our own lack of knowledge—an admission of ignorance. This section and the next, represents the ancient disclosure of this notion. It should be noted now at the opening of this first intentional structure, that in any given phenomenon all of the intentional structures are interleaved together, and it often becomes difficult to tease out (to transcendentalize) an identifiable intentional structure according to a strict delineation of presence and absence, parts and wholes, and identity in a manifold. With this said, I could have applied any or all of the intentional structures to any or all of the presented thinkers, so the resulting predetermined arrangement is a matter of aesthetic style—I followed my creative instincts as to what intentional structure should be applied to each thinker respectively.

In our everyday world we come into contact with things both presently and absently. For instance, as you read this, this page of text is present to you the reader right now, while at the same time my physical personage as the author is obviously absent (if I am not in the room while you are reading). We might also think that because something is within our grasp, that it is completely understood. In turn, we can easily see that when something is absent that essential things about it might get lost in its absence, thus leading us to ignorance. On the other hand, if something is absent, like the concept of a plan not yet executed, we still have ways to think about its essential features—enough to bring a plan into fruition if our planning is accurate. Such planning might ignore contingencies not predictable in the original concept. Therein resides other questions as to the benefits and problems of transcendence as going beyond contingencies
(unplanned emergencies, unforeseen obstacles or other such impediments to the implementation of a concept).

The identification of presence and absence is original to Husserl’s phenomenology. Sokolowski notes that presence and absence correlate with “empty” and “filled” intentions—in other words, thoughts that are about things present at hand are filled intentions, and thoughts about things that are not presently at hand, are empty intentions. On the topic of intentional fulfillment, Husserl writes in the Logical Investigations, “We shall provide a phenomenological characterization of the quite general notions of significance and intuition in relation to the phenomena of fulfillment.” Phenomenologically there is a different aboutness in the way in which an intentional object, or idea, is either in front of me (fulfilled), and likewise, if that object, or idea, is absent from my immediate grasp (unfulfilled). An unfulfilled intention does not have the same aboutness as a fulfilled intention. Any abstraction from matters presently at hand results in an unfulfilled intention or state of affairs that is automatically not-within-grasp, and it is also transcendental. For this chapter I will look at the concept of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge with regard to intentional presence and absence.

Foucault / Plato / Socrates

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56 “However, the theme of presence and absence has not been worked out, in an explicit and systematic way, by earlier philosophers. This issue is original in Husserl and in phenomenology.” Sokolowski, Intro. to Phenomenology, 22.

57 Sokolowski, Intro. to Phenomenology, 33.

58 Husserl, Logical Investigations, 274.

59 This particular way of intending of so-called states of affairs, for Husserl, is otherwise known as categorical intuition, “This is the kind of intending that articulates states of affairs and propositions, the kind that functions when we predicate, relate, collect, and introduce logical operations into what we experience.” Robert Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology, 88.
As we have discovered, a problem with ignorance is transcendence itself, since to be transcendental is to go beyond things, and when going beyond things in search of essences, essential features of the way we experience things might get lost, thus leading to a pitfall of ignorance made evident by the transcendence of the natural sciences. Husserl could not get rid of transcendence, so much so that it defined the *epoché*. In this section we will see how Foucault critiqued phenomenology for its transcendence and how he differentiated ritualistic truth vs. rational dialectical truth, and how the latter superseded the older more antique form of truth in the name of knowledge, rather than the potential ignorance of truth known ritualistically. We will also look at the way that a dialectical way to the truth is aimed at dispelling the form of ignorance otherwise known as opinion, for the sake of higher well reasoned knowledge.

To be clear, Michel Foucault (1929-1984), in his later work, openly spoke out against phenomenology. He distrusted the transcendental answers of Husserl’s phenomenology, because there are contingent things potentially overlooked in the name of transcendentally searching for essences. Part of Foucault’s problem had to do with the methodology of phenomenology where it turns to a transcendence that side-steps actual experience in favor of a radical pre-reflective experience of things. “But I have certainly gone on.” As Foucault’s critique of phenomenological transcendence attests in his conclusion to *The Archaeology of*...

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61 “Although Foucault was certainly not interested in restoring the ‘I think’ of the Cartesian ego, he avoided privileging pre-reflective experience, close to the German idea of *Erlebnis* in most of its usages, as its antidote.” Jay, Songs..., 391.
Knowledge, “Not that I am either certain of victory or sure of my weapons. But it seems to me that, for the moment, the essential task was to free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence.”\textsuperscript{62} Phenomenology, in its search for essences, can also be accused of being universally reductive. Since its primary concern is with the disclosure of essences, this begs the question as to what gets left behind once the essence of something has been determined or disclosed. What about contingent truth—knowledge that is not universal or not essential? The later Foucault strongly resisted such essentialist reductions, “All my analyses, are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence.”\textsuperscript{63} Phenomenology possibly loses contingent unessential things in the name of looking for what is essential.

However, all this should not obscure the fact that early in his career Foucault embraced phenomenology, having read his share of Heidegger (1889-1976), (another phenomenologist of note) who was also a critic of scientific technology. As we have seen, Husserl believed that empirical science reduced psychology to a hard science at the expense of intentional experience. Likewise, Foucault wanted to step away from the reductive positivism of psychiatric care. His persistent critique of psychiatric power stayed with Foucault on into his later years.\textsuperscript{64} Where Husserl felt that the transcendence of naturalism and psychology placed a limitation of knowledge onto the way that we intentionally experience the world, he also could not shake off transcendence. In fact, he embraced transcendence in the name of the epoché. Likewise, as we shall see, Foucault critiques the tendency of scientific truth that supplanted oracular (ritualistic


\textsuperscript{63} Foucault quoted in May, “Foucault’s Relation…,” 306.

\textsuperscript{64} “The second, and entwined, theme that will remain in Foucault’s later thought is the critique of psychology, an in particular of the treatment of madness.” May, “Foucault’s Relation…,” 293.
and contingent truth). Both critiques sit at the edges of science’s ability to have the answers to everything. Husserl’s and Foucault’s critiques wish to demarcate limitations of knowing so as to expand knowledge of the world into wider areas of experience.

In a series of lectures, delivered in the early 1970s at the Collège de France, Foucault touches on two ways of understanding truth.65 These lectures embody Foucault’s signature critique of psychiatric/disciplinary power as well as a critique of scientific truth—as we have already noted, both themes that run close to Husserl’s main targets: naturalism and psychologism. In one lecture, delivered on January 23, 1974, Foucault centers on the truth of ritual, and the truth of the sciences. The “truth-event,” alternately referred to as “truth-thunderbolt,” relates to ritualistic traditions such as the ancient Greek Oracle of Delphi. This is a kind of antique truth found contingently and geographically, expressed and spoken through ritual utterances, and in momentary riddles. This singular type of truth is not universal, it is only accessed in a particular place, and at a particular time.66 “Truth-knowledge,” alternately referred to as “truth-sky,” on the other hand, sees truth as something waiting to be found, yet to be disclosed, and revealed as universal. If truth-knowledge posits that knowledge is everywhere, it must possess the means to extract it and this requires the right tools, and the right technology (philosophical and otherwise). Psychiatry also uses the technology to disclose the truth. This is scientific, psychiatric, and rational truth, “More precisely, this means that while there are moments for scientific knowledge when the truth is grasped more easily […] there is always the


66 This truth, with its geography, its calendars, and its messengers or privileged agents, is not universal.” Foucault, Psychiatric Power, 237.
truth, [...]” 67 Part of the reason Foucault is examining truth in this lecture is to demonstrate how psychiatric power—in a disciplinary way—utilizes truth, “...to give the psychiatrist’s power a particular stamp, to give it an additional, supplementary distinction...” 68 In this way, psychiatric discipline needs to be legitimized by universal truth to give itself credibility and it uses this type of truth as a way to wield its power over the patient’s care and well-being.

On the type of scientific/disciplinary truth—*truth-knowledge*—Foucault also extends the concept back to its historically ancient and philosophical origins, “The truth dwells in everything and anything, even Plato’s famous nail clippings.” 69 This latter type of truth is Platonic/Socratic—truth of this kind is to be discovered dialectically. Unknowingly, *truth-knowledge* is still beholden to a *truth-event*. Even though we are often bound to the democratic ideal that knowledge is there for everyone, that it’s universal and there for the taking, *truth-knowledge* still relies on privilege and rare chance. 70 We forget that *truth-knowledge* is not always open and ready to be found, and depending on the knowledge, it sometimes relies on chance to be discovered. Scientific discovery does not happen if we lack the resources and the highly specialized know-how to make the discoveries fostered by the privilege of education and other such circumstantial advantages. This sense of *truth-knowledge* sometimes presumes knowledge is there for the taking and whoever does not take of this knowledge in a predetermined way is deemed ignorant. In this sense, with Foucault’s observations tied to the


69 Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 236.

70 “So we have, of course, a universal subject of this universal truth, but it will be an abstract subject because, concretely, the universal subject able to grasp this truth is rare, since it must be a subject qualified by procedures of pedagogy and selection.” Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 247.
unique phenomenological viewpoint of this thesis, history exposes an essential aspect of the phenomenon of ignorance. Indeed, all types of knowledge cannot be present to everyone in the same time and place. Knowledge is absent to those who lack the geographical, intellectual, and financial means of acquiring it.

Stepping away from Foucault’s usage, his points on truth tie into the essential aims of this thesis on knowing and not-knowing, whereby the older, oracular form of truth becomes known in a ritualistic, geographic, and contingent way, while the other is a type of truth-knowledge that is to be drawn out through philosophical dialogue, i.e. dialectically, through Platonic/Socratic dialogue. Let us recall that the Platonic/Socratic dialectic was aimed against the unquestioned authority of common opinion (doxa, δόξα). This was brought about through the means of rigorous questioning, combined with sound logical reasoning. Common opinion was to be replaced dialectically with rational knowledge (episteme, ἐπιστήμη), which can also be read as scientific knowledge. This is made evident in the Platonic notions we will be emphasizing shortly, where in the Apology, Socrates is identified by the Oracle of Delphi as the wisest man in Athens. Socrates calls this prophesy, what we now know as Foucault’s truth-event, into question by going out into the city to question others who claim to be in the know. As his questioning persists, their limitations of knowledge become exposed dialectically by Socrates, who claims to know nothing, hence underscoring the idea that truth-knowledge, for Socrates, is somewhere out there among the people in the city of Athens waiting to be uncovered. To step into the polis to engage in dialogue with his fellow citizens is plainly a step away from the fixed authority of oracular knowledge.

How can Socrates be the wisest in Athens, if he claims to know nothing—while at the same time exposing the ignorance of others (doxa) under the auspices of their presumed
expertise? Socrates does not just take the word of the god Apollo from the mouth of the Pythia. He felt he had to find the answer from the people themselves, and to this end, Socrates does have the upper hand on wisdom, since he is the only one who will openly admit to his own limited knowledge (even after Apollo said that Socrates was the wisest), rather than carelessly overstepping into areas outside his expertise.\(^7^1\)

I will return to the question of Platonic/Socratic negative knowledge shortly, but first we return to Foucault. Even though Foucault is not making a phenomenological distinction, his points can be applied to the specific circumstance of this phenomenological research on ignorance because his examples involve *presence* and *absence*. Whereby the antique manner of acquiring and seeking truth, the *truth-event*, is only *filled* by going to a particular place like Delphi to receive oracular truth—it is known momentarily, in a specific place, and only in the presence of the oracle. The *truth-event* cannot be *filled* in the absence of the oracle—that would be an *empty* prophecy.\(^7^2\) Those who had the ability to travel and consult with the Oracle got their questions answered, but only amidst the contingent circumstances they must remain ignorant of prophesy otherwise. Let us not forget our first point that early in his career Foucault was deeply

\(^7^1\) These days this type of phenomena is known as the “Dunning-Kruger effect” whereby non-experts overestimate their own competence in disciplines they know little about. Justin Kruger, David Dunning “Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 6, (Dec 1999), 1121-1134.

\(^7^2\) The Oracle of Delphi was taken seriously, the ancient Greek historian John Pedley writes, “The oracle began operations in the course of the 8\(^{th}\) century and became the source of Delphi’s power. There were oracles elsewhere in the Greek world, but it was the one at Delphi that carried the most weight. From the first it dealt with the problems of distant Greek communities, as well as those closer to hand. It didn’t supply answers to difficulties, but lent its authority to plans already proposed for coping with an individual’s or a community’s problems. It emerged as a source of acceptable answers to crisis: those for example, instigated by challenges to a hierarchy, or population growth, or crop failure, or inequalities of wealth and poverty.” John Pedley, “Sanctuary Histories: Delphi,” in Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient Greek World (New York, NY: 2005), 136.
interested in phenomenology—later he critiqued it for its problems of transcendence—it too might overlook contingency in the name of looking for what is essential.

Our findings show that in the case of Socrates, the experts claimed to be full of knowledge without fully understanding their limitations, so their knowledge was empty when they assumed it was full. Socrates, on the other hand, admitted that his knowledge was limited ahead of time, thus revealing his wisdom—his wisdom is filled with an understanding about his own absence of knowledge. His wisdom is filled with a sense that the knowledge he possesses is limited. Socrates’ wisdom is filled with negative knowledge. His wisdom is filled with an absence of knowledge.

**Plato / Socrates**

This section represents one of the earliest and core reasons why I decided to write this thesis due to the basic exhortation that ignorance and knowledge are to be held together in the pursuit of wisdom. Plato’s (ca. 427-347 BC) *Apology* (ca. 399 BC) is one of a suite of four dialogues surrounding the trial, imprisonment, and death of Socrates (469-399 BC). The other three dialogues, the *Euthyphro*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo* (all ca. 399 BC), address themes of piety, the recognition of laws, and the question of an afterlife, respectively. The centerpiece of the four is undoubtedly the *Apology*, where Socrates (unsuccessfully) defended himself against the charges of corruption and impiety. It is also in this dialogue where we hear about Socrates’ claim that he knows nothing, even in the face of the ritualized, and antique Delphic form of truth. Socrates knew that he did not know. He knew, and openly acknowledged, that he was ignorant of some things, and was the wiser for it. Socrates was wise because he was filled with a strong sense of his not knowing. His awareness about his absence of knowledge was the base of his

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73 There is also Xenophon’s *Apology of Socrates to the Jury* (also known simply as the Apology), written around the same time (ca. 399 BC), which also covers the trial of Socrates.
wisdom. The wisdom of Socrates also extends to issues surrounding the unknowability of death and how our ignorance of it can lead to problems accepting it. For Socrates, an ultimate goal of leading a philosophical life is to prepare us for our ignorance of death and the unknowable nature of death.

The ancient Greek historian Diogenes Laertius (ca. 3rd century BC), in his *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* (ca. 3rd century CE), recounts the actual affidavit against Socrates,

This indictment and affidavit is sworn by Meletus, the son of Meletus of Pitthos, against Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus of Alopece: Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state, and of introducing other new divinities. He is also guilty of corrupting the youth. The penalty demanded is death.\(^74\)

These trumped up charges masked the real reason Socrates was tried—ultimately, he angered people because he exposed their ignorance. Diogenes Laertius recalls that, “There is, he [Socrates] said, only one good, that is, knowledge, and only one evil, that is, ignorance; wealth and good birth bring their possessor no dignity, but on the contrary evil.” More to this point, Socrates in the *Apology* states,

For my part, as I went away, I reasoned with regard to myself: “I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I am likely to be a bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know.”\(^75\)

From here, we return to the origin of Socrates’ inquiry, one of the initial reasons why he set out to question others about wisdom, returning to the famous prophesy featured in Plato’s *Apology* where, to repeat, Socrates explained that he was once identified by the Oracle of Delphi


as the wisest man in Athens, yet Socrates stubbornly claimed that he knew nothing. Attempting to verify this, Socrates talks to various upstanding Athenians who claimed to be in-the-know and he challenges the veracity of their *doxa*, the accepted opinion that they knew more. Soon their expertise is called into question via the excoriating Socratic dialectical method which was aimed at getting to *episteme*, rational knowledge of the truth. As we see in the above passage, Socrates was left to conclude that he was in fact wise, but his wisdom was negative because he accounted for his own ignorance, whereas the others did not account for their own ignorance. This ignorance-exposing method is the primary reason why Socrates is put on trial. As

76 Socrates in the *Apology* says, “I went to one of those reputed to be wise, on the ground that there, if anywhere, I would refute the divination and show the oracle [of Delphi], ‘this man is wiser than I, but you declared that I was wisest.’” So I considered him thoroughly—and when I considered him and conversed with him, men of Athens, I was affected something like this: it seemed to me that this man seemed to be wise, both to many other human beings and most of all to himself, but that he was not. And then I tried to show him that he supposed he was wise, but he was not. So from this I became hateful both to him and to many of those present.

77 There are two conceptions of dialectic concerning Plato’s dialectic and Socrates’ dialectic, for the sake of brevity I’ll focus on Socrates’, “Socrates stands in contrast to the Sophists. Unlike them, he professed to be seeking the truth. But he was not above winning the argument, and what is called *elenchus* was a major element in dialectic as practiced by him, if we are to accept as accurate the presentation of him in Plato’s earlier dialogues. The Socratic *elenchus* was perhaps a refined form of the Zenonian paradoxes, a prolonged cross-examination which refutes the opponent’s original thesis by getting him to draw from it, by means of a series of questions and answers, a consequence that contradicts it. […] Dialectic seems to have been, for Socrates, literally the art of discussion, a search for truth by question and answer […]” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. II, s.v. “Dialectic” edited by Paul Edwards (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co. & The Free Press, 1967), 386.

78 Corrupting the youth of Athens and impiety toward the Gods were the official charges. Socrates says in the *Apology*, “Now again, just as though these were other accusers, let us take up their sworn statement. It is something like this: it asserts that Socrates does injustice by corrupting the young, and by not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other *daimonia* [divinities] that are novel. The charge is of this sort.” Plato, *Apology*, 24b, in *Four Texts on Socrates*, 73.
Diogenes Laertius tells it, “Again, he was the first who discoursed on the conduct of life, and the first philosopher who was tried and put to death.”

But how is this Socratic negative knowledge compared to the enigmatic words of the Pythia? Oracular knowledge happens at once (one had to be present before the oracle to receive the god Apollo’s prophesies via the mouth of the Pythia), whereas Socratic knowledge waits to be found—to be discovered as coming from within our own thinking, which is by extension, the thinking of the polis. He goes to unnamed politicians, poets and manual artisans, of the poets to ask them about the specifics of their expertise and he concludes (similarly as with the others),

So again, also concerning the poets, I soon recognized that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired, like diviners and those who deliver oracles. For they too say many noble things, but they know nothing of what they speak.

Here we find, not only an unawareness as to the limitations of knowledge found in most of the people he questioned, but we also find further evidence that Socrates does not take oracular insight as the last word. He questions a number of people in a variety of professions only to expose their shared ignorance, their doxa, in matters they presume to have and in fact do not. Phenomenologically, the intentional aboutness of their ‘expertise’ ignores the critical boundary residing on the edge of ignorance and knowledge.

79 Diogenes Laertius, Lives…, 151.

80 The voice of the God Apollo issued from the mouth of a young woman.

81 In Book VII of the Republic Socrates touches on this notion, “But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes […] Whereas our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as if it were not possible to turn the eye from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming to that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.” Plato Republic, 518c, in The Dialogues of Plato, translated by B. Jowett (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), 380.
Socrates distrusted the Delphic prophecy and in questioning it, he questions others dialectically. Intentionally, for this phenomenological research, presence and absence play a significant role in this Platonic/Socratic “truth-knowledge” in the sense that truth is always waiting to be found, it is always present in our thinking, and in the thinking of the polis, and the way to draw it out is dialectically, with rigorous philosophical questioning. As the most famous line of the Apology affirms, “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.”\(^8^2\) That which is emptily intended knowledge must be become filled with our own capacity to reason. This does not happen of its own accord it has to be extracted with the proper technology the logical philosophical technology of the dialectic. Yet, a resolute acknowledgement of the absence of truth, negative knowledge (our ignorance of the truth, Socrates knows nothing, &c.) needs to be filled by the people to facilitate their own Socratic wisdom. We must be filled with the limitations of our own knowledge if our wisdom is not to be empty. All of this also demonstrates a sense of transcendence worth noting, whereby the Athenian experts consistently went beyond the limitations of their knowledge when pressed, and as a consequence exposed shortcomings in their wisdom. The limit of their knowledge is exposed and this limitation is exactly the limitation Socrates admonishes if one is not aware of its presence. Better yet, wisdom is gained with the acknowledgement of our limitations—and these limitations are always present.

Nothing drives this point better than Socrates’ thoughts on death. Midway in the Apology, Socrates reflects on the fear of death, due to the proximity of his own death-sentence. Death

\(^8^2\) The full sentence reads, And on the other hand, if I say that this happens to be a very great good for a human being—to make speeches everyday about virtue and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be persuaded by me still less when I say these things.” Plato, Apology, 92.
becomes an analogy for the type of intentional knowledge no one can have filled, i.e. “I do not know sufficiently about the things in Hades.” Socrates proposes that if we do not know of things after death, then why should we fear death? If we do not know whether death is the “greatest good” or the “greatest of evils,” then how can we fear death?—to fear death is not akin to wisdom (according to Socrates). Socrates shows us that it is not wise to fear the unknown, since we have no knowledge of the unknown and to fear it would be arrogant with what we do not know. However, Socrates is not being altogether fair, since we can observe and be fearful that death is a cessation of life as when we witness the death of others.

Yet once this objection is made, we are reminded of Socrates’ observations on death in the *Phaedo*, while he was waiting for his own death in a jail in Athens, where he says, “I am afraid that other people do not realize that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for death and dying (64a).” To fear the absence of life, to fear the possibility of no longer living is a reasonable and legitimate fear, whether we claim to have knowledge of what happens afterward or not. Yet, as Socrates tries to convince us, the body brings with it all manner of fears and desires, “It [the body] fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense, so that, as it is said, in truth and in fact no thought of any

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84 See Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* for an excellent phenomenological analysis of death where we can never know death, but it is always an outstanding possibility. As we ignore this sure possibility we run the risk of losing the authenticity of our being, our *Dasein. “As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something which is still outstanding, which Dasein can be & will be; but to that which is thus outstanding, the ‘end’ itself belongs. The ‘end’ of being-in-the-world is death.”* Martin Heidegger, *Being & Time*, translated by Macquarrie & Robinson (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1962), 234.


kind ever comes to us from the body (Phaedo, 66c).”87 This does account for the potential suffering one might fear leading up to death and why someone might fear the pain and anguish of our mortal suffering. Yet, as we all too painfully know, our problems confronting death are not assuaged just by ascetically removing the centrality of the body. In the 20th century phenomenology of embodiment expressed in Merleau-Ponty’s (1908-1961) 1945 landmark book *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body remains central to the problems we confront when we regard the essence of our mind, the world, and our entire lived experience thereof,

> If I find, while reflecting upon the essence of the body, that is tied to the essence of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is identical with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because ultimately, the subject that I am, understood concretely, is inseparable from this particular body and from this particular world.88

With this said, Merleau-Ponty also writes, gesturing slightly in favor of Socrates’ unknowability of death, with the observation that our birth and death are personally unknowable due to our direct lack of bodily sensation of either, “I can only grasp my birth and my death as pre-personal horizons: I know that one is born and that one dies, but I cannot know my birth or my death.”89

Another salient point on death is made by Socrates with regard to his own death and the circumstances that led up to and followed his trial. Even if he knew that he would be executed for his activity as a gadfly to the “great and well-born” horse of Athens “who is sluggish and needs to be awakened,” he would have philosophized anyway.90 This is because he courageously does not fear the unknowability of death, and, as he says after he has been condemned to death

87 Plato, Phaedo, 57.


90 Plato, Apology, 82.
by the jury, “But I suspect it is not hard, men, to escape death, but it is much harder to escape villainy. For it runs faster than death.”91 The ancient Greek historian Xenophon’s (430-354 BC) *Apology*, has Socrates more or less welcoming a verdict of death and discouraging any talk from his loyal supporters of escape from prison to avoid it. Socrates jokes, “by asking if they knew anywhere outside Attica inaccessible to death.”92 In Plato’s *Apology* Socrates’ guilty verdict is said to be akin to evil because the jury is ignorant of the man they are about to put to death who irritatingly urged them to live correctly. Death becomes a philosophical device by which Socrates is able to show that the unknowns of death do not have to be altogether bad as we might fear. Death could be viewed as undisturbed sleep, or it could be that in the afterlife we might have the opportunity to converse with historic legends such as Homer and the like.93

Phenomenologically and from the position of this thesis, our findings show that the intentionality of our own death is empty, it cannot be filled, since death is the absence of life. The unknowns of death will never be filled. Death remains something we cannot know about, but we can only know it with the observation of another’s death, and even in that case, death remains emptily intended—we only know it as a never to be filled absence. Socrates aimed for the truth, while at the same time, he humbles us to examine the very limitations of such knowledge. On a path to wisdom, the value of not knowing is worth the price of death—the death of Socrates. To not fear the unknowns of death is to be wise. Wisdom includes not fearing our ignorance of death.

91 Plato, *Apology*, 93.


CHAPTER IV

PARTS AND WHOLES

This chapter is divided in half with a discussion on the negative theology of the early medieval theologian Pseudo-Dionysius in the first part, followed in the second part of the chapter with a discussion of the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. Both thinkers are brought into this discussion because each in their unique way, generously expand the issue of transcendence and the limitations of knowledge, and because their ideas line up nicely with the phenomenological structure of parts and wholes. A basic hierarchical structure, from the one to the many, will be employed with regard to Pseudo-Dionysius’ medieval Christian theology. His hierarchical structure likewise corresponds to the intentional structure of parts and wholes which additionally plays a central part in unpacking a greater realization brought about by this research of transcendental ignorance through a close examination of the negative theology of the ever-elusive Pseudo-Dionysius. In a transcendent sense, apart from parts and wholes, we will discover a negative way of understanding God that becomes pure potential—something I name ignorance+. Likewise, Kant’s demarcation of reason’s limits shows us that we need to be aware of overextending what can be sensibly known, while at the same time establishing a sense of freedom that cannot be curtailed within reason’s boundaries—if we can only know a part of freedom, then freedom’s fullest potential is always expanding.

Let us first give a look to a brief historical-philosophical background of parts and wholes that segues into the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. The intentional structure of parts and wholes has ancient roots in Plato, as in the dialogue Parmenides (370 BC), where the character of Parmenides (who was closely modeled on the Pre-Socratic, Eleatic philosopher Parmenides (ca. 5th century BC)) argues that the ‘one’ cannot be limited,
Well, then, if it doesn’t have a part, it could have neither a beginning nor an and nor a middle, for those would in fact be parts of it—that’s right.—Furthermore, end and beginning are limits of each thing—Doubtless.—So the one is unlimited if it has neither beginning nor end.—Unlimited. (137d).  

Expanding on this idea, if something has a beginning, middle and end, then it is limited in some way and therefore not wholly one. In this sense, the early medieval Neo-Platonic philosopher Proclus (412-485 CE) comments on these lines in his vast *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* (ca. 440 CE), “The One is, then, transcendent over all these things, and one should not apply any [parts] of them to it, but as Plato instructs us, we should rest content with the negations.” As we shall see, God, also referred to as the “One” for Pseudo-Dionysius, who was deeply influenced by Proclus. The *One*, by which we mean God is still transcendent which means that God is always somehow out of our reach—any whole concept of God is simply beyond our finite knowledge—we can only know a part of God. Unlike Proclus in this example, Pseudo-Dionysius does see the whole, the *One* as integrally participating with the parts, even while it is wholly inaccessible, “For multiplicity cannot exist without some participation in the One.”

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94 Plato, *Parmenides*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Coooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 372. David J. Yount in the chapter “The One or the Good: The Source of All Things,” in his book *Plotinus the Platonist: A Comparative Account of Plato and Plotinus’ Metaphysics*, quotes A.H Armstrong’s analysis of this “First Hypothesis,” “The early history of this ‘negative theology’—the description of God by saying what he is not rather than what he is—is bound up with a particular interpretation of Plato’s most difficult dialogue, the ‘Parmenides’ which was accepted by all later Platonists and finds defenders even now. This indirect knowledge of God by negation is very far from the direct contemplation or full and clear intuition which is what Platonists mean by knowledge.” David J. Yount, “The One or the Good: The Source of All Things,” in *Plotinus the Platonist: A Comparative Account of Plato and Plotinus’ Metaphysics* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 41.


The issue of parts and wholes also gets thoroughly addressed in Aristotle’s (384-322) Physics and Metaphysics. From a phenomenological standpoint, a whole can be anything self-contained, a whole person, a whole car, a whole concept, or a whole book. Sokolowski tells us that for Husserl’s usage, there are two different kinds of parts: “pieces” and “moments.” Pieces can be detached from the whole, like the leaves of a tree. Whereas moments cannot be separated from their whole, for example, the color green cannot be extracted from its source. If non-independent parts are known as moments, these parts cannot be easily removed, as with colors, the green of the leaves, and likewise, the brown of the tree’s bark cannot be removed in the same way that a branch can be removed. In the Logical Investigations Husserl writes, “We interpret the word ‘part’ in the widest sense: we may call anything a ‘part’ that can be distinguished ‘in’ objects, or, objectively phrased, that is ‘present’ in it.” These part whole distinctions come with a caveat to be careful when we try to separate moments from their whole. This is made evident in such wide-ranging philosophical issues as the supposed separability of the body from the mind—phenomenologically, the mind is a moment of the body—the two are inseparable.

97 “There is, indeed, a difficulty about part and whole, perhaps not relevant to the present argument, yet deserving consideration on its own account—namely, whether the part and the whole are more than one, and how they can be one or many, and, if they are more than one, in what sense are they more than one.” Aristotle, Physics, 185b 15, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon (New York, NY: Random House, 1971). 221. “Since that which is compounded out of something so that the whole is one, not like a heap but like a syllable—now the syllable is not its elements, ba is not the same as b and a, nor is flesh fire and earth (for when these are separated the wholes, i.e. the flesh and the syllable, no longer exist, but the elements of the syllable exist, and so do fire and earth); the syllable, then, is something—not only its elements (the vowel and consonant) but also something else, and the flesh is not only fire and earth or the hot and the cold, but also something else […].” Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book VII, 1041b 10-20, in Basic Works, 811.

98 Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology, 22-23.

99 Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology, 23.

100 Husserl, Logical Investigations, 165.
Other problems arise when we try to consider ignorance (or not knowing) as wholly separable from knowledge, as opposed to thinking about ignorance as a part, as a moment of knowledge.

**Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite / Negative Theology**

We have to face the negative limitations of our own knowledge, before we can see that those limitations help us to recognize the value of ignorance and not knowing as pure potential. In this section, I will look at the issue of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge while examining the mix of philosophy and theology through the historical lens of early medieval Neo-Platonic Christianity of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 5th to 6th century CE, hereafter abbreviated to Ps.-Dionysius). The unusual case of negative theology will serve to expand a view of basic ignorance into a transcendental ignorance—what I will call ignorance+—this innovative type of ignorance identified by that which extends beyond understanding, expanding into what is potential and to things greater than us. This term is in contrast to a general type of ignorance, identified as merely a lack of knowledge, or not knowing. We will also give a fresh phenomenological look into how negative theology works in a whole to parts relationship, known theologically as exit and return: God’s cause exits into the world amidst its many parts, and when seeking salvation, we (if we are believers) selflessly return to the whole of God known negatively. To ascetically remove our identity in the name of getting to know God, through denial of both God and self, is a parts and whole relationship which is defined negatively—I remove myself to get closer to the wholeness of God I can only know negatively.

To get a better sense of the negative theology of Ps.-Dionysius, we will examine how negation plays a part in coming to a better understanding of God. This will lead to a view of his historical background, which will help us set up a better picture of how, his not so incidental, pseudonymity can be regarded within the context of his whole message and with respect to the
vantage of this thesis on ignorance. To get an initial taste of his *via negativa*, let us look into what is otherwise known as *apophatic* (from the Greek ἀπόφασις, *apophasis*: to deny), theology of Ps.-Dionysius which is generally defined by the desire for believers to come to know God contemplatively through negation. Within Ps.-Dionysius’ very short treatise *The Mystical Theology*, we soon find that if an initiate, or a believer, wishes to return and get closer to God, one is taken “into the Darkness of Unknowing where he renounces all apprehensions of his understanding and is enwrapped in that which is wholly intangible and invisible.”101 This negative wording demonstrates its obvious influence on the anonymously penned 14th century

101 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, translated by C.E. Rolt (Berwick, MA: Ibis Press, 2004), 194. This phrase “Darkness of Unknowing” became the title for the anonymously penned 14th century classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Fortuitously enough I found the passages where the anonymous author writes about Dionysius the Areopagite and his negative theology. Pseudo-Dionysius was then assumed to be the real, biblical Dionysius the Areopagite, otherwise confusedly known as St Denis. It should be noted that St Denis the martyr, patron saint of Paris, namesake of the Basilica of St Denis the official burial place for French kings, lived in the 3rd century CE and has been frequently confused with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. A key passage found in Chapter 70, from the *Cloud of Unknowing* states, “Our spiritual faculties, on the other hand, are equally limited in relation to the knowledge of God as he is in himself. For however much a man may know about every created spiritual thing, his intellect will never be able to comprehend the uncreated spiritual truth which is God. But there is a negative knowledge which does understand God. It proceeds by asserting everything it knows: this is not God, until finally he comes to the point where knowledge is exhausted. This is the approach of St Denis, who said, ‘The most divine knowledge of God is that which is known by not-knowing.” Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, edited by William Johnston (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 139.
Christian classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

A professor of ecclesiastical history at Princeton’s Theological Seminary, Paul Rorem (1948- ), in his commentary on the books of Ps.-Dionysius, uses *The Letters* to introduce the thought of Ps.-Dionysius. *Letter 1* opens with the Ps.-Dionysian signature *via negativa*, conveniently corresponding to the concept above from the *Mystical Theology*, where Ps.-Dionysius analogizes the vanishing darkness becoming illuminated by the light of knowledge. However, we cannot forget that the light of knowledge of God is only to be known negatively. We as mortal humans will never grasp the full knowledge of God. The best way to express this notion is through transcendence. In the illuminating opening lines from *Letter 1* Ps.-Dionysius explains that,

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Darkness vanishes in the presence of light, and more so in the presence of much light; and knowledge, and more so many kinds of knowledge, causes ignorance to vanish. Taking these things in their higher sense rather than as a privation, you will maintain more truly than truth that ignorance according to God eludes those who have real light and knowledge of beings, that His transcendent darkness is hidden by all light and eclipses all knowledge. [The last sentence of the letter reads:] Complete ignorance in a higher sense is knowledge of what is above all known things.
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Rorem underscores the notion that Ps.-Dionysius is not just talking about simple privation, therefore we can see that this is not a standard sense of ignorance. When we isolate the

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102 Again, it is tough to overlook the anonymously written 14th century book of Christian mysticism, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which also promotes negative theology. “In the lower degree of the active life a person does well to busy himself with good deeds and the works of mercy. In the higher degree of the active life (which merges with the lower degree of the contemplative life) he begins to meditate on the things of the spirit. This is when he ought to ponder with sorrow the sinfulness of man so as to enter into the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of his saints with pity and compassion. It is a time when one grows in appreciation of God’s kindness and his gifts, and begins to praise and thank him for the wonderful ways he works in all his creation. But in the higher degree of contemplation—such as we know it in this life—all is darkness and a cloud of unknowing. Here one turns to God with a burning desire for himself alone and rests in the blind awareness of his naked being.” Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, 58-59.

mysterious line, “His transcendent darkness is hidden by all light and eclipses all knowledge,” this seems to negate the idea that light causes darkness to vanish, but as Rorem states, “Unknowning may not be simply the deprivation or lack of knowledge but rather the recognition that someone or something is in fact transcendent and far beyond the limits of human knowing.”104 This finding is a pivotal notion for our analysis of ignorance and as we will see, it will have a direct application to the subsequent thinkers presented in this thesis. To paraphrase, we must see that the negative evoked in the service of devoting oneself to God as prescribed by Ps.-Dionysius is not a mere lacking. This discovery of ours is not your standard, generalized sense of ignorance (‘I simply do not know this or that’)—this is on the higher upside of the standard sense ignorance, it is a transcendent sense of un-knowing that is beyond knowing—it is what I call ignorance+. Ignorance+ is a transcendence of knowledge that is greater than knowing—it is a transcendent agnōsia (ἀγνωσία, translated from the Greek as a lack of knowledge, ignorance).105 Our refreshed view of ignorance, ignorance+ of Ps.-Dionysius is not less than knowing, because it transcends knowing into something that is more than knowing, and therefore it is greater than knowing. Because of this discovery we cannot think of ignorance in a reduced way again. Ignorance+ shines a new revived light of potentiality on everything we do not know.

**History of Ps.-Dionysius / Pseudonymity**


105 Charles M. Stang rightfully calls what I’m calling ignorance+, (agnōsia, ἀγνωσία, not knowing, ignorance). “In short, Dionysius both offers an account of what it is to be properly human in relation to God—not as unknown to ourselves as God is—and, in the very telling, performs an exercise aiming to render his own self unknown. The result of such agnōsia, however, is no mere ‘agnosticism’ but rather the indwelling of the unknown God (agnōstos theos) as Christ, on the model of Paul in Gal 2:20, wherewith the aspirant simultaneously ‘unknows’ God and self.” Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: “No Longer I,“* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.
Setting up the historical background of Ps.-Dionysius in this section enables us to see that his pseudonymity is not just an incidental sideline, given that his corpus could have remained unknown if it had not been translated into Latin in the ninth century, and that we only know of the author pseudonymously provides an unlikely insight into the significance of his theology.

Christian Neo-Platonism (i.e. Christian mysticism) during the early Middle-Ages corresponds to Socratic wisdom with the *via negativa* of Ps.-Dionysius. As we have discussed, Socrates denied that he had knowledge in order to establish his wisdom. This denial carried with it the idea that knowledge was somewhere to be found, as Socrates tried to verify that he was the wisest man in Athens, when he attempted to validate the prophesy of the Oracle, voice of the god Apollo. Compare this with the notion that Ps.-Dionysius wanted us to know God by establishing what God is not. This establishing of what God is not, is found out negatively—yet, unlike Socrates’ negative wisdom (defined as wisdom that openly acknowledges its own limitations), Ps.-Dionysius’ God cannot be found somewhere living out-there in the polis, God can only be known through negation. Yet, both strains of thought utilize the value of denial as a way to transcend the limitations of knowledge. Having said this, it should be repeated that the Christianity of Ps.-Dionysius was thoroughly Neo-Platonic, it was a new Christianized Platonism. That is to say, there are strong Platonic ties to the *Corpus Areopagitcum*, alternately known as the *Corpus Dionysiucum*. We see this in the five compact and difficult treatises which make up the entire *Corpus Dionysiucum: The Divine Names, The Mystical Theology, The

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Celestial Hierarchy, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and The Letters, which have the unmistakable imprint of the not so well known, Neo-Platonist Greek philosopher Proclus, mentioned above. For it was partially due to his brilliant use of the apostolic 1st century pseudonym and his extraordinary theological prowess, that Ps.-Dionysius was accepted as Christian orthodoxy. His pseudonymous 1st century identity became an open question as early as the 15th century, and he was finally proven to not be the actual apostolic Dionysius the Areopagite in the late 19th century identified by his overt use (and unattributed quoting) of Proclus.

Neo-Platonism as a school of thought post-dated the biblical, 1st century apostolic Dionysius the Areopagite by 300 years, with the appearance of the father of Neo-Platonism, Ammonius Saccas (ca. 3rd century CE), who was the teacher of the well-known Plotinus (ca. 204-270). It was not till later in the 5th century CE, with Proclus, where we find the strongest systematic influence on the thinking of Ps.-Dionysius. In his extensive Lectures on the History of Philosophy delivered in the 1820s and 1830s, the erudite G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) tells us

107 “It is known that Ps.-Dionysius used Proclus’ Three Short Treatises, which, however, cannot be dated. It is also known that he used the Elements of Theology. He probably used Proclus’ lost Commentary on Speech of Diotima, the Commentaries on the First Alcibiades, on the Gorgis (lost), on the Cratylus, Phaedrus (lost), and Republic, and possibly those of the Timaeus and Parmenides.” Hathaway, Hierarchy…, 53.

108 “The entire authorship question was resolved, negatively at least, only at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the scholarly world accepted the independent conclusions of Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr, published in 1895. They established that certain precise phrases were in fact taken from the writings of the fifth-century Neo-Platonist Proclus.” Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius, 17.

109 “Proclus exerted a defining influence on the form and structure of Neo-Platonic thought at the close of the fifth century, earning him the reputation of being the last great reformer of Greek philosophical tradition. As such he has been an influential factor in the Christian world’s intellectual development for more than a thousand years. His influence has long been recognized in the Dionysian corpus; indeed, some maintain that he is the true author.” Allen Armstrong, “Forward,” in Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology, translated by C.E. Rolt, Berwick, MA: Ibis Press, 2004), x.
that Proclus “is said to have had himself initiated into all the pagan mysteries.”\textsuperscript{110} His pagan religiosity serves to underscore the fact that Proclus considered the philosophy of Plato to be theological, due to its concern for the first cause and its subsequent emanation into the world—as one of his major treatises is aptly titled \textit{The Theology of Plato} (ca. 5\textsuperscript{th} Century AD). We will revisit this important Neo-Platonic theme, otherwise known as \textit{exit and return}, in the next section. Let us momentarily recall the distinction Foucault wanted to make concerning the different types of truth where Platonic/Socratic truth supplanted oracular truth. With Proclus we find a fusion of the two—the philosophy of Plato is a religious matter. This blend of quasi-mystical philosophy of the Greek tradition and its proximity to the early Christian church signifies a time where philosophy and theology were not viewed as separate disciplines, given that early medieval philosophy served as a means of spiritual discourse in the service of getting to know ourselves and getting to a better grasp on things greater than ourselves with its interwoven blend of theology and philosophic contemplation.

The Western world became best acquainted with Ps.-Dionysius when the Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Bald (823-877) asked for his father’s (Louis the Pious, 778-840) personal manuscripts of the \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum} to be translated from Greek to Latin by the precocious Irish Philosopher John Scotus Eriugena (815-877 CE). Eriugena obliged this royal request, to bring these obscure Eastern works originally written in Greek, to a Western audience by translating them into Latin, the well-worn \textit{lingua franca} of the church. It is likely only due to these authoritative translations by Eriugena that we have come to know about Ps.-Dionysius—what was previously obscure had to be made known. As a result, the difference between the way

God was viewed in the West became wedded to the apophatic tradition of the East with Eriugena due to the powerful influence of Ps.-Dionysius.  

The philosophical theology of Eriugena was, from then on, profoundly infused with the Dionysian *via negativa*, as made evident in his *magnum opus*, the *Periphyseon* (Περί φύσεων, on natures, translated from Greek to Latin as *De Divisione Naturae*, or known in English as the *Division of Nature*). For Eriugena, God is comparable to *nothing*, and this *nothingness* is directly borrowed from the negative theology of Ps.-Dionysius. Take this passage from “Book V” in the *Periphyseon*, where after a lengthy quote of Ps.-Dionysius, where it is explained that God is beyond all things knowable, therefore God transcends being, Eriugena plainly remarks, “Note how this theologian [Ps.-Dionysius] unhesitatingly alludes to the highest light, God, who illumines all intellectual and rational creation, by the name Nothing. He [Ps.-Dionysius] also added the reason for calling Him *Nothing*. ‘Because He is superessentially exalted above all things with being.’”

If God is “superessentially exalted,” then God must transcend all things, including being—therefore, God is for Eriugena, as God is for Ps-Dionysius: transcendentally *Nothing*. 

111 “As Plato taught in the Sophist, to be something is not to be something else. Infinity, then, as all-comprehensive boundlessness is a designation more apt than being. This is what leads Eriugena to follow the Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus in speaking of God as Nonbeing or Nothing.” Jean A. Potter in the “Introduction” to *John the Scot (Joannes Scotus Eriugena): Periphyseon On the Division of Nature*, translated by Myra L. Uhlfelder (Indianapolis, IA: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1976), xxi.


113 On the phenomenological significance of *nothing*, the 20th century phenomenologist Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) 1929 lecture “What is Metaphysics?” demonstrates that *nothing* brings us to the radical core of metaphysics. It is for this reason that we are made to be more aware of our life’s meaning according to Heidegger. The nothing exposes meaning as much as it helps in the disclosure of our own being. See Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” In *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (New York, NY: HarperCollins Press, 2008), 89-110.
Ps.-Dionysius was a pseudonym for an unknown author who was probably of Syrian origin, writing sometime in during the late 5th and early 6th centuries. This unnamed author claimed to be Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian convert to St Paul, mentioned in the book of Acts in the New Testament, when St Paul was on a missionary visit to Athens, sometime in the first century CE, thus giving the unknown author apostolic authority.\textsuperscript{114} Our ecclesiastical historian Rorem brings up the excellent point that the anonymous author who chose the pseudonym Dionysius theAreopagite, chose the name brilliantly, since the original 1st century Dionysius, the real convert to St Paul, is biblically connected in perpetuity to the “unknown god” of the Athenians of the Areopagus.\textsuperscript{115} We must be careful not to skim over this biblical corollary, given that St Paul’s message in the Bible was not necessarily advocating getting to know the “unknown god” of the Athenians negatively. In fact, God in St Paul’s missionary sermon, is to be found out affirmatively—the Athenians must come to know God, so that God will no longer be unknown to them (as we shall see later, St Paul does deploy a negative knowing of ourselves in relation to God in his epistle from Galatians 2:20 in the Bible). To know God affirmatively in the way St Paul (in this example) wanted the Athenians to do, is to know God \textit{cataphatically} (from the Greek word καταφατικός, \textit{kataphatikós}: affirmative), not \textit{apophatically}, that is, to

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{114} In the book of \textit{Acts} from the \textit{Bible}, St Paul preaches on the Areopagus in Athens. Part of his address to the Athenians at the Areopagus, from \textit{Acts} 17:23, is significant, “For as I went throughout the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ St Paul then goes on to exhort the Athenians to come to know God, to find God. This is not negative theology as St. Paul is not asking the Athenians to better know God by thinking or saying what God is not. Before St Paul leaves Athens some of the Athenians want to know more and join him before he left, “But some of them joined him and became believers and coverts, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:34).
\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{115} See previous footnote.
\end{footnote}
know God by way of denial (the *via negativa*) in the way Ps.-Dionysius wanted devoted Christians to do.

The Areopagus in Greece, is not only the name of a place, an outcropping of rocks in Athens, it was also the name for the high judicial counsel who assembled there, to whom St Paul’s sermon was probably addressed. Ps.-Dionysius was likely a member of this high-court, the Areopagus. As noted, we are ignorant and know little of the actual personage forever concealed behind the well-chosen, Biblical, and apostolic pseudonym, other then a few basic details: that he was Syrian, that he was schooled as a Christian Neo-Platonist, and that his brand of early medieval Christianity was decidedly apophatic.

That this unknown author is only known to history pseudonymously corresponds nicely with the idea that the best way to ultimately know God is to admit that we can never completely know God. Likewise, even if we cannot ultimately know God, when we get closer to God contemplatively, we simultaneously ascetically let go of ourselves. As mentioned, Rorem emphasizes this pseudonymous factor, and the Christian scholar Charles M. Stang (1975- ) from Harvard Divinity School, centers his entire 2012 book, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius: “No Longer I,”* on this very notion. Stang persuasively argues that the entire *Corpus Dionysiacum* circles around the notion that one must let go of the “I” in order to get closer to the unity represented by an unknowable God, otherwise known as the *agnōsia* (ἀγνωσία) of God. God is beyond understanding for Ps.-Dionysius, as much as we have to move away from our individual selves to get closer to our discovery of ignorance+ we have of God, and we will likewise remain ignorant about the historical person behind the pseudonym. Corresponding to our findings, Stang writes,

I suggest that the very practice of writing pseudonymously is itself a third path of unknowing God and self. I submit that for Dionysius the very practice of writing under a
pseudonym is no mere ploy for sub-apostolic authority and thereby a wider readership, but is in fact an ecstatic devotional practice in the service of the apophasis of the self, and thereby soliciting deifying union with the unknown God.\footnote{Stang, \textit{Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite}, 204.}

Stang’s angle positions the use of the pseudonymous name as “no mere ploy for sub-apostolic authority,” and this carries with it the symbolic value of the author’s self-obscuring move. This ascetic denial of the self is in the service of getting to know something greater than your self—hence negating the self. In the \textit{Mystical Theology}, following soon after the passage quoted above we have Ps.-Dionysius directly (and beautifully) calling our attention to this renunciation of self,

\begin{quote}
For, by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and all things, thou shalt in pureness cast all things aside and be released from all, and so shalt be led upwards to the Ray of that divine Darkness which exceedeth all existence.
\end{quote}

Perhaps we are ignorant of the actual person behind the pseudonym, not because the anonymous person desired wider recognition, but because he wanted less emphasis on himself and more emphasis on the “upward” contemplation of God. Stang calls attention to this notion of renouncing the self, what he calls “apophatic anthropology,” which means, as he explains, “that apophasis is best understood as a sort of asceticism that delivers a self that is unknown as the God with whom it seeks to suffer union.”\footnote{Stang, \textit{Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite}, 153.} This enables us to see the special significance pseudonymity has for the \textit{Corpus Dionysiacum}, and for our study of ignorance, namely that the transcendent ignorance+ of things evokes a universe greater then our individual selves. That which is greater than our individual selves is the unknown God and the unknowability of God is greater than any limited human knowledge we can have, therefore, according to Ps.-Dionysius, God is greater than any affirmative account we can give and if we look up to God then our individual selves should likewise aspire to become less individualized, more God-like. Apart from a Christian reading of this idea, in a secular context it is easy to imagine things greater than
our knowledge of them, always opening for us the potential for discovery, innovation, invention, intellectual growth and so forth.

**Exitus-et-Reditus**

The idea, from *One to the many and back again*, is another way to acknowledge a first cause that originates from God causally extending downward to our specific individuality, which (if we are on the right path, and if we are believers) aspires to then return back to undifferentiated God. This is known as the Neo-Platonic hierarchical concept of *exit and return*. This is also sometimes referred to as *procession and return*, and alternatively known in Latin as *exitus-et-reditus*. In the phenomenological context of this thesis, the concept of *exit and return* becomes the most convenient way to tie in *parts* and *wholes*. The concept also corresponds to our innovation of *ignorance* by way of parts and wholes. This hierarchical Neo-Platonic structure is said to be the governing structure of St Thomas Aquinas’ (1225-1274) 13th century cornerstone of medieval scholastic theology, the *Summa Theologiæ* (1265–1274).118 Throughout the *Summa*, St Thomas frequently quotes Dionysius (our Ps.-Dionysius), further demonstrating the scholarly authority and significant influence he was afforded in Medieval Christian theology and philosophy. Essentially this theme represents the *exit* from the *One* (God), the ultimate cause of things, emanating forth to the many individual and differentiated *parts* of the world, including mortal humans like ourselves. To *return* to God is, at least according to the *Corpus Dionysiacaum*, a contemplative and ascetic means of letting go of ourselves (becoming anonymous). To wish to know God is another way to desire to become undifferentiated, unified with something greater than ourselves.

118 "*Exitus et reditus*. The Christian Neo-Platonists are plainly the thinkers who can supply Saint Thomas with expression and support for this vast theme, and, *de facto*, the Dionysian tradition, so full of life in his day, does just this.” M.-D, Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, translated by A.-M. Landry and D, Hughes (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1964), 306.
Simplified, the notion that God is greater than ourselves, and is higher than our knowledge of God, is obviously a hierarchical concept. The word: hierarchy, in fact, is said to be first coined by Ps.-Dionysius.\(^{119}\) Rorem shows that this all important word for Ps.-Dionysius, hierarchy, combines the Greek words \textit{hieros} (ἱερός, sacred), and \textit{arche} (ἀρχή, source), together meaning \textit{sacred-source}.\(^{120}\) The opening lines from the \textit{Celestial Hierarchy} exemplify this hierarchical sense of \textit{exitus-et-reditus} for Ps.-Dionysius,

\begin{quote}
“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” But there is something more. Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in. For, as the sacred Word says, “from him and to him are all things.”\(^{121}\)
\end{quote}

This passage shows that God’s light emanating downward “stirs us by lifting us up.”

Contemplative devotion is exemplified by the desire to \textit{return} to God. The emphasis Stang places on the Ps.-Dionysian notion of letting go of the self to get to a better understanding of God that remains essentially unknowable, has the additional feature of unintentionally tapping into the phenomenologically intentional structure of \textit{parts} and \textit{wholes}. The procession from \textit{One}/God which is \textit{whole}, emanates and \textit{exits} hierarchically downward to its many differentiated \textit{parts}. Then, with the desire to get to know God better, we must lift ourselves up to God, hence

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\item \(^{119}\) “Dionysius invented the word, which later epitomized ecclesiastical arrangements so naturally that we take the word hierarchy for granted.” Rorem, \textit{Pseudo Dionysius}, 21.
\item \(^{120}\) Rorem, \textit{Pseudo Dionysius}, 21.
\item \(^{121}\) Ps.-Dionysius, \textit{The Celestial Hierarchy}, in \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works}, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), 145. Paul Rorem as provided the notes for this collection, on this paragraph he observes that “This opening paragraph bracketed the Neo-Platonic theme of procession and return with two supporting biblical quotations. The cyclical pattern of ‘remaining,’ a downward “procession,” and an upward “return” is essential to the structure of late Neo-Platonism. Proclus received this motif from his predecessors Iamblichus and Syrianus and summarized it succinctly: ‘Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it’” From Proclus, \textit{The Elements of Theology}, no. 35, n. 4., edited by E. R. Dodds (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1963).
\end{itemize}

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we return to God, and as we return, we likewise become undifferentiated and de-individualized. From our standpoint of this thesis on ignorance and the limitations of knowledge, the concept of exitus-et-reditus contains the hierarchy from the greatness of God, which ultimately cannot be known, emanating downward to individual people who have a limited vantage, so therefore we must come to terms with knowledge of things greater than ourselves. The concept of exitus-et-reditus, combined to the history of Ps.-Dionysius, serves as way in which the phenomenological structure of parts and wholes opens up another essential component of ignorance—to become whole, is to ascetically let go of parts of ourselves. When we can come to terms with things greater than ourselves we are ignorant of those things, but as we have discovered, this is ignorance+. This is transcendental ignorance as it reaches toward the potential in what we do not know as greater, opening us up to recognize that there is always something to aspire to—always a potential for growth and to know more.

Ps.-Dionysius / Plato

Even though exitus-et-reditus is known as a Neo-Platonic theme which reaches back to the philosophy of Proclus, the concept of the One to the many is certainly evident even further back to the heritage of Plato, albeit in a pre-Christian form, as in the dialogue Timaeus (360 BC),

122 Our Husserl/phenomenology expert Dermot Moran in his 1989 book, The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages, writes of the significance of exit and return for Eriugena, “One of the main features of Eriugena’s philosophy which impressed Hegel and the German idealists was his use of a sophisticated dialectic with moments of progression and recollection, which the idealists took to be identical with their own dialectical method.” The concept of exit and return has negative and affirmative qualities, whereby the West represents thinking of God affirmatively, whereas in the East (namely of the Greeks) God is viewed negatively, “He [Eriugena] therefore combined the traditional Western Latin concept of dialectic (as the discipline of logic) with Greek Neo-Platonist negative dialectics, to produce a new understanding of dialectic which indeed is comparable to the method of dialectic of the later idealists. Furthermore, he understood dialectic to represent the life, or natural activity of the mind (intellectus or nous) itself, with its outgoing and returning movements, it affirmative and negative capabilities.” Dermot Moran, The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 123-124.
where the character of Timaeus speaks on the origins of the world, “Our universe came to be as the one and only thing of its kind, is so now and will continue to be so in the future (31b).” Right before he says this in the dialogue, Timaeus makes the point that the created world is good and that “divine providence brought our world into being as a truly living thing, endowed with soul and intelligence (30c).” This could be analogized as the exit from the One, the world comes to be as one whole, and everything else, all the constituent, differentiated parts, including knowledge and the soul of the world emanate from there. The classic “Allegory of the Cave,” from book VII of the Republic (ca. 380 BC) becomes an emblematic example of the return. Leading up to the Allegory, in book VI, we are told that the prospective leaders of the city are the leaders who will lead a philosophical life while taking care of their bodies in their youth, then turning away from the body to the contemplations of philosophy in later life (498b). Similarly, the deluded, cave-like-ignorance, everyday, and personally specific life of opinion, (doxa, δόξα) is to be superseded and brought to return to a universal, good and necessary knowledge, by way of dialectic (truth-finding rational dialogue that seeks to obviate common opinion), as when in the Republic, Socrates says,

Then isn’t this at last, Glaucon, the song that dialectic sings? It is intelligible, but it is imitated by the power of sight. We said that sight tries at last to look at the animals themselves, the stars themselves, and, in the end, at the sun itself. In the same way, whenever someone tries through argument and apart from all sense perceptions to find that being itself of each thing and doesn’t give up till he grasps the good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible, just as the other reached the end of the visible (532ab).
Indeed, the edges and the end of the intelligible might be knowledge of the ideal Platonic Forms, but this kind of knowledge falls in the transcendent sense of the word unknowable. Consider the conversation between the young Socrates and the philosopher Parmenides back in Plato’s dialogue *Parmenides* (390 BC),

> Surely you would say that if in fact there is knowledge [knowledge of the Forms]—a kind itself—it is much more precise than is knowledge that belongs to us. And the same goes for beauty and all the others (Parmenides 134c).  

Thus, the ideal Platonic Forms belong to a type of knowledge that is “more precise”—it is transcendent knowledge. To summarize, we see the extension of the many parts of the world as extending and exiting from the One, which is also the source, and cause of knowledge and the good. At the same time we can become deluded into believing the cave-like illusions of this world, then with reasonable and precise dialogue (the dialectic) we can return to a more universal (impersonal) understanding of things while letting go of a narrow view of the world hindered by our personal and popular opinion of things.

*Exitus-et-reditus* is likewise expressed in a line from St Paul in his epistle *Galatians* (2:20) as it was quoted by Ps.-Dionysius in *The Divine Names*, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” This scriptural line goes hand and hand with the locus of Stang’s book (the subtitle for his book is “No Longer I”) and of course, the *Corpus Dionysicum*, whereby the believer is exhorted to return to God’s selflessness. In the closing passages of Stang’s book we find this elegant tie-in with Ps.-Dionysius’ use of this now-obvious apostolic transcendent apophasis of St Paul,

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127 Plato, *Parmenides*, 368.

In short, our pseudonymous author [with the use of St Paul’s quote] offers an account of what it is to be properly human in relation to God—namely, no longer an ‘I,’ neither yourself nor someone else, because you are now both yourself and Christ. And, in the very telling, he performs an exercise aiming to render his own self cleft open, split, doubled, and thereby deified.129

As we have noted the philosophical theology of Ps.-Dionysius relies on the hierarchical structure of exitus-et-reditus, the whole greatness of God emanates and exits downward to us humans, thus we are only a part of the greater whole. Yet when we desire to get back to God, back to that which is greater than ourselves, we ascetically become less of ourselves as individuals. We, if we are believers, remove a part of ourselves to become whole again—returning to what is greater. This corresponds to our earlier phenomenological distinction between independent and non-independent parts, for Ps.-Dionysius the parts cannot be separated from the whole. We are non-independent parts of God. In other words, we are all moments of God. The whole of God is never reducible to its parts. God is always greater than any part of God. Likewise, we can only know a part of God, we can only know moments of God, but we can never entirely know the whole of God. For Ps.-Dionysius, the fact that Eriugena helped to bring the Corpus Dionysiacum to a wider audience helped the pseudonymous author become less differentiated and more integrated into the whole of Christian theology and philosophical thought. We have also realized that the transcendence described by Ps.-Dionysius is not to be thought of within a standard definition of ignorance as a mere lacking. Transcendent ignorance is identified as ignorance+, a special type of ignorance that is greater than just a lack of knowledge—a transcendent seeking for what is beyond our limited understanding. And as we will see with Kant, a similar type of ignorance applies to freedom and other indefinable notions.

Heinrich Heine / Immanuel Kant

A concept of ignorance must include the limitations of knowledge as it includes unlimited potential. In this section the phenomenological structure of part and wholes as it relates to ignorance and the limitations of knowledge will now be examined using the Enlightenment philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), introduced by his late contemporary Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). As we shall see for Kant, reason overextends itself when it tries to take into consideration the issue of freedom and other such transcendent things. However, this delimitation of our rational access to freedom should not be viewed as a remote deficit, or a crude privation. Freedom represents unmapped potential. It too is another example of ignorance+. It is another example of what openly extends beyond knowledge. Freedom is representative of potentiality. What cannot be known about freedom is the extent of its boundless potential.

It cannot go without observing a noticeable thread from Kant to Husserl: the antagonism between empirical science and anything falling outside of the boundaries of what can be known empirically. This thread is worthy of our attention given that it is within this problem where philosophy and hard science are at odds to reconcile—hence exposing the problematic and contentious borderlines of knowledge between philosophy and physical science.

Kant’s deontological ethics, his practical philosophy, built onto his transcendental idealism, and in this sense, his ethics are an integral part of his whole philosophy, as he writes in the second Critique, The Critique of Practical Reason (1788), “The concept of freedom is the coping stone of the entire edifice of a system of pure reason, even of reason taken in the speculative sense.”130 A coping stone serves as a cap to finish off a wall, which means that Kant’s practical philosophy is meant to cap off the theoretical (as he calls it, speculative) work

laid down in the first *Critique*. Within the scope of his philosophy we find the central idea that 
"aprioristic" and transcendental reasoning is universal. From the particular standpoint of this thesis, every rational individual plays a *part* in the universal *whole* of both theoretical (speculative) and practical (ethical) reason. One of Kant’s central projects was to reexamine, critique, and call into check, mechanistic and theoretical rationalism in order to accommodate morality, otherwise known as his practical philosophy. This ethical, practical part of Kant’s philosophy is an extension of his overall delimitation of reason by means of rigorous philosophical critique. Reason overextends itself, for Kant, when it conceptualizes the seemingly contradictory problem of accounting for deterministic causality following natural law that seems to contradict the idea that human freedom does not follow natural law. Before looking into the details of Kant’s critique, let us first consider the effect of his difficult style, by way of Heine. With this said, I should note from the onset, that I will only touch on the philosophical issues surrounding Kant’s original distinction between freedom and natural law as a limitation of knowledge. This is in the effort to avoid having to explain the interworking of his practical, moral philosophy, which would take us far beyond the confines of my thesis.

**Heine / Kant’s Difficulty**

In 1835, the late Romantic German poet, journalist and historian Heinrich Heine praised Immanuel Kant’s philosophy in one of his longest essays, “Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany.” Shrewd in his praise of Kant, Heine—a student of Hegel’s and a child of seven when Kant died at the age of eighty—noted that when Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was published in 1781, it did not gain notice till 1789 because of its notoriously difficult style. Heine surmises that “The reason for the tardy recognition probably lies in the unusual form
and bad style in which the book was written.”131 There are even more colorful descriptions of Kant’s difficult writing style as described by Heine,

He wanted to separate himself superciliously from the contemporary popular philosophers, who strove for the plainest clarity, and he clothed his ideas in a courtly, frigid, bureaucratic language. In this he shows himself to be a true philistine.132

This notion that Kant’s language is “courtly, frigid, and bureaucratic” only echoes Heine’s larger point at the opening of his essay. Heine writes that the great German philosophers might look down on Heine’s work on German philosophy and religion, but that he “wrote it in pretty lettering” before he sent his work to be typeset and only wished to make their ideas accessible to a wider audience,

…while their own works are to be sure, very thorough, infinitely thorough, very profound, stupendously profound, but equally incomprehensible. Of what help to the people are the locked granaries for which they have no key?133

After Heine makes this frustrated point he speculates that perhaps the great German philosophers were afraid of the results of their own thinking, and therefore made it difficult.134 These points cannot be passed up. Heine is to be pressed for his hasty judgment. Whether “a fear of results” was an actual issue with Kant is something we will never know, unless there is some writing of his, hitherto unknown, addressing why he wrote in his notoriously difficult style, or that he was somehow afraid of the results of his thinking—which seems highly unlikely. But to this day, we


133 Heine, “Religion and Philosophy,” 275.

134 “I do not think it is a lack of talent which prevents most German scholars from discussing religion and philosophy in a manner suitable for a general public. I think it is fear of the results of their thinking, results they do not dare to impart on the people.” Heine, “Religion and Philosophy,” 275.
are accustomed to hearing the wearisome complaints that reading Kant’s philosophy is challenging and difficult. In the circumstances of this study of ignorance we might cautiously speculate that Kant felt he needed his high-minded rigor and his obsessive thoroughness to express the necessary subtlety of his thought. Or we might momentarily speculate that perhaps by making it easy, he feared critically important things would be lost. Or perhaps Kant, as Heine also speculates, feared that his work might sound like all the other unnamed German philosophers of his time who were trying to make their philosophy easier and accessible for a wider audience.

On most of these speculations we can never be sure. Lacking substantial evidence, we choose to have the upfront resolve that his work will be a tough read. With this said, within the complaint that his work is difficult, contains an implicit notion that Kant should have made it easier for his readers—yet he did not do that. Because he did not do that, we are left with a choice to do the hard work of reading Kant if we wish to no longer be ignorant of Kant. This requires strenuous thinking. We feel justified and entitled to wish for something easier. The wish for an easier way into the depths of Kant’s philosophy for the sake of alleviating ignorance, is a wish to go beyond Kant’s work to make it more accessible. The same holds for Kant as it does for Husserl and Ps.-Dionysius, and any others of whom are considered difficult reading. We wish for it to be made more understandable for a general audience. This is, in the most basic sense, a standard type of transcendence: we wish to go beyond, in a transcendent generalized way, into

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135 In a footnote in the preface to the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant does make mention of the “incomprehensibility” of his writing, but this fear is brushed aside over the larger fear of being misinterpreted. “What I am more afraid of in the present case that the incomprehensibility of which I have spoken is that occasionally certain expressions should be misinterpreted, even though I have selected them with greatest care, so that the conception to which they point should not be missed.” Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, translated by H.W. Cassirer (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1998), 10.
Kant’s work, so as to get to know Kant’s work. We want to know only a simple part of the work at the expense of the whole. Hence, we want the whole to be taken down to its simplest parts.\(^{136}\) With this said, we must admit to the possibility of overlooking certain things when we over-generalize in this way for the sake of understanding reasonably. Yes, this type of transcendence is invaluable to get us back on our philosophical feet, and we have to recognize that it too has its limits—even if it is a necessary feature of thinking. In (over) generalizing as we necessarily do, for the sake of alleviating ignorance, we must as a result, overlook parts (and risk missing other critical parts) in the attempt to get to a whole understanding.

Mining for diamonds should not stop because we find the difficult job of extracting them too difficult. To mine the precious rough stones from the earth and into our hands, ready to be cut and polished, we must break apart the ore with the knowledge of what we are looking for. Then we would ally the help of others who have better experience in extracting diamonds from the earth. Breaking tonnages of ore to reveal a rough diamond is only one step, and it cannot be done without the other necessary steps leading up to it. Diamond mining cannot be made easier no matter how much we wish it to be reducible to a few easy steps. Nevertheless, we must remain entirely open to the possibility that a few diamonds will be overlooked in the process of sifting and sorting for a few. There might also be other untapped veins to be discovered—so we dig deeper. In the case of Kant’s difficulty, we either stop and admit failure, or choose to find a

\(^{136}\) In the “Kant, Immanuel” entry in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, when the “illusions of theoretical reason” are discussed, reason reaches into areas beyond its knowledge, simply because it is always trying to take thing to their logical conclusions. “What makes such illusions inevitable is the tendency of human reason to seek the unconditioned, that is to carry a chain of ideas to its assumed completion even when that lies beyond the bounds of sense. For example, understanding may tell us that wholes consist of parts, and sensibility may allow us to find a smaller part to any given whole; but only reason suggests that decomposition into parts must come to an end in something absolutely simple, something we can never perceive by sense.” 188. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Craig, s.v. “Immanuel Kant,” by Paul Guyer, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 190.
better way, whether that way is by trying to read Kant on our own, and/or, to seek the guidance of an expert, a secondary source, or a teacher who specializes in Kant (or all of the above).

In 1784, between the time the first and second Critiques were published, Kant writes the compact and timely essay, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” This is where we get a brilliant sense of Kant’s willingness to overcome ignorance and to courageously think on his own, given that he strongly encourages others to the same.

_Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity._ Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is _self-incurred_ if its cause is not lack of understanding, but a lack of resolution and courage to use it with the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: _Sapere Aude!_ [Dare to be wise] Have the courage to use your _own_ understanding. 

Kant wanted us to have the freedom to courageously use our reason, and it is likely he wanted the same for himself—no matter how difficult or bureaucratic he sounded getting there.

Philosophical critique proved the best way for Kant to express that freedom. He took his own advice firmly to heart, given that he, among other things, devoted his life to publically critiquing reason, morality and aesthetic judgments (incidentally, the latter should have been proof enough to Heine that Kant was not a “true philistine”). Kant called on reason to check itself when it found itself overextending into areas beyond the range of experience. Yet, at the same time, he calls for an extension on freedom when asked about enlightenment. For Kant, to grow out of our passive nonage, we must work to give ourselves and others the freedom to rationally critique hitherto unquestioned public power. The Enlightenment signified a way out of immaturity into making free public use of our reason. 

In the essay Kant feels that we should be obedient in our

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occupations, while at the same time we must be allowed to freely critique problems concerning our occupations publicly. In this regard, he was vigorously present in his time, given that the historical period of the Enlightenment symbolized not only the age of reason, but also publically called into question reflexive ecclesiastical and political power. For growing out of our self imposed ignorance was not necessarily only a problem of greedily acquiring more knowledge. Kant’s enlightened message has to do more with summoning the courage, and above all, summoning the freedom to put rational knowledge to use for the betterment of all. His theoretical critique tried to hem in the excesses of reason, while at the same time a good part of his answer to the question of enlightenment calls for us to valiantly expand our uses of freedom, “For enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is freedom. And the freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all—freedom to make public use of one’s reason in all matters.”139 As we shall see, it is within Kant’s understanding of freedom where we find expansiveness toward potential, running in contrast to the restrictions he placed on reason. Freedom becomes another example of our previously identified transcendental ignorance: ignorance+

Kant’s Noumenal Freedom

Going momentarily back to Heine, he favorably observes that, “Kant proved to us that we can know nothing about things as they are in and of themselves, but that we can know something

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138 See Michel Foucault’s 1984 essay by the same name “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50. Foucault expresses the notion that the Enlightenment for Kant symbolized a “way out.” Foucault also recognizes that after Kant, throughout the course of modern philosophy we might not get to an answer the question of enlightenment. For Foucault, Kant may be answering the fullest spirit of his day as it pertained to the Enlightenment by penning his various critiques, and in that way he is a truly and exemplary modernist.

about them only in so far as they are reflected in our minds.” Heine considers the center of Kant’s project to be the difference between what we can know (phenomena, that which is experienced) with respect to what we cannot know (the-thing-in-itself, otherwise known as the noumenon, that which is beyond experience). Kant wrote of the mysterious noumenon, contrasted with phenomenon, with respect to freedom and free-will, in the Critique of Pure Reason (1781 and 1787), in the Groundwork (1785), and in the Critique of Practical Reason (1788). Looking to the Critique of Pure Reason, Heine boldly declares that “This book is the sword with which deism was executed in Germany.” In other words, it was in this book where Kant delimits reason, God and freedom. These things are considered noumena—they are things that often exceed the limitation of reason’s capacity. Noumena (or noumenon singular) are often compared to Kant’s infamous thing-in-itself. In the Critique Kant writes,

The concept of a noumenon, i.e., of a thing that is not to be thought of as an object of the senses but rather as a thing-in-itself (solely through a pure understanding), is not at all contradictory; for one cannot assert of sensibility that it is the only possible kind of intuition (A254/B310).

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140 Heine, “Religion and Philosophy,” 373.

141 “After these few words, with which I have indicated Kant’s mission, everyone will understand why I consider that section of his book [the Critique of Pure Reason] in which he deals with the so-called phenomena and noumena the most important part, the center, of his philosophy.” Heine, “Religion and Philosophy,” 374.

142 “In theoretical reason noumena may be permitted a negative use in which they are accorded the title ‘of an unknown something’ or used to mark the limits of our sensible knowledge and to leave open a space which we fill neither through possible experience nor through pure understanding. Their main negative use consist in reminding us of the limits of the categories, that they are not appropriately applied to non-sensible objects, while yet ensuring that ‘a place remains open for other and different objects, and consequently that these latter must not be absolutely denied.’ […] There is causality in its ‘empirical character’ restricted to appearances, and causality in its intelligible character—causa noumenon—of freedom: the same subject can be determined in one aspect, but free in another.” A Kant Dictionary, s.v. “Noumena,” Howard Caygill (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1995), 302.

143 Heine, “Religion and Philosophy,” 368.
For the purposes of this study, this sentence expresses Kant’s idea that the *noumenon* cannot be accessed with our senses, for it is something that is transcendent, it is a *thing-in-itself*, therefore it is that *part* of things that remain outside our cognitive grasp—it is *beyond* appearance. We can think of the *part* of things that lay *beyond* our grasp, but we cannot cognize rationally, or transcendentally, what these *parts* are. To make sense of the world around us for the sake of getting to know the *whole*, we have to look *beyond* what we cannot access with experience alone. Cognizing what this means transcendentally, means that something is cognized rationally and aprioristically under Kant’s restrictions, but to transcend things meant to *go beyond* what can be cognized rationally. After continuing to explain Kant’s *noumena* we will look into his critical, and slightly confounding, distinction between transcence vs. transcendental.

It is in his second critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason* where Kant tried to leave room for God and freedom, and as we have said these transcendent things are *noumenal*. In Kant’s preface for second *Critique* he writes, “That man was to look upon himself as noumenon, insomuch as he was the subject of freedom.”\(^{145}\) Generally speaking, the distinction between freedom and natural law, for Kant, is meant to separate his theoretical philosophy from his practical philosophy. This means, that his theoretical philosophy, which is logically determined, is to be discerned from his practical philosophy, signified by morality and free will. In short, this distinction highlights the problem of free will versus determinism, the laws of nature cannot determine the practical laws of morality.\(^{146}\) The contemporary philosopher and author of several

\(^{144}\) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 350.
\(^{145}\) Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5.
\(^{146}\) “The principles which determine what happens to the knowledge we have of nature (e.g. the principle which lays it down that, in communication of motion, action and counteraction are equal) are, at the same time, laws of nature; for in that case the employment of reason is
books on the issue of free will, Robert Kane (1938- ), writes in his 2005 book *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, “Science and reason, said Kant, can tell us only the way things *appear* to us in space and time—the world of *phenomena*. But science and reason cannot tell us about the way things are in themselves—the *noumena*.”\(^{147}\) In this case, Kane’s reference is to Kant’s individual free will as a “noumenal self.” Any individual is free to act, but we do not know wherefrom freedom arises, and yet, we can still rationally direct our freedom. The idea is like this: natural law does not determine my actions. My actions are not caused by an external, natural, or physical law, therefore, freedom must be independently, autonomously caused by the individual. The origins of such autonomously caused freedom cannot be pin-pointed by Kant, or anyone else for that matter, and are thus considered to be *noumenal*.

Opening a section from the “Transcendental Analytic” in the first *Critique*, where Kant lays down the logical and formal (theoretical) elements of cognition, he also makes the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena*,

> Appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of categories, are called *phaenomena* [phenomena]. If however I suppose there to be things that are merely objects of understanding and that, nevertheless, can be given to an intuition, although not to sensible intuition (as *coram intuiti intellectuali* [by means of intellectual intuition]), then such things would be called *noumena* (*intelligibilia*) (A249/B305).\(^{148}\)

It is safe to say that, given Kant’s parameters, *noumena* are transcendent. These are things we can think about, but we must be careful not to mistake them for things that can be thought about transcendentally with any assurance, given that they also represent things that go theoretical, being determined by the nature of the object” (Ak20). Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 19.

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\(^{148}\) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 347.
beyond sensory phenomena and sensible experience. Reason overextends itself in areas when it seeks the causes and original conditions of everything for Kant—for we often do not think of the unconditioned nature of freedom, or for the aims of this thesis how in its vastness, freedom represents a limitation of our knowledge, or how freedom represents what is potentially beyond knowledge.

**Kant’s Transcendence / Transcendental / Reason’s Limitations**

In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, (hereafter, the *Critique*) Kant draws the line on reason’s “pretensions,”

Thus I cannot even assume God, freedom and immortality for the sake of necessary practical use of my reason unless I simultaneously deprive speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience…(Bxxx). 149

In other words, Kant cannot make use of speculative (theoretical) reason to understand God, freedom and immortality. God, freedom and immortality are something else, they extend beyond actual experience. These things (because they are outside of actual experience) require reason to overextend itself, and therefore they are transcendent.

With all this said, we need to now underscore an all-important technicality regarding the distinction between *transcendence*, and the *transcendental*, in light of Kant’s aims in the *Critique* and elsewhere. This distinction should help to bring forward part of the main issue concerning reason’s limitations. It is in the opening paragraphs in the introduction to his chapter on the “Transcendental Dialectic” in the first *Critique*, where we find Kant’s distinction between transcendent and transcendental. On the transcendent he proclaims, “We will call the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience

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149 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 117.
immanent, but those that fly beyond those boundaries transcendent principles” (A296/B352). This fits into our earlier coverage of transcendence as primarily meaning to go beyond immanence, beyond things that can be sensually experienced. Yet for Kant, the term transcendence (or transcendent) is restricted to mean only that which overextends beyond experience. The meaning of transcendental, on the other hand, extends into the aprioristic, the necessary—in fact, it represents a good part of what Kant was trying to describe within his whole philosophy, his whole transcendental idealism. Where Husserl utilizes the transcendental to look into the essence of things, Kant utilizes the transcendental to look into aprioristic necessity. The transcendental goes beyond experience, but it includes the indispensible aprioristic condition of necessity for experience. On the transcendental, in the introduction to the Critique, Kant declares that, “I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general” (A12/B26). The transcendental describes the rational and necessary conditions for knowledge, but for Kant, transcendental cognition needs to restrict itself to empirical understanding—it needs to avoid the extravagances of transcendence. Thus, one of the aims of Kant’s section on the “Transcendental Dialectic” in the first Critique, is to call attention to, and to delimit the illusions (the dialectic) of transcendence.

The principles of pure understanding we presented above [in the “Transcendental Analytic” chapters of the Critique] should be only of empirical and not of transcendental use, i.e., of a use that reaches out beyond the boundaries of experience. But a principle that takes away these limits, which indeed bids us to overstep them, is called transcendent. (A296/B353).  

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150 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 385.

151 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 149.

152 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 386.
Another way of putting this would be to repeat and emphasize that transcendental necessity needs to avoid the extravagance of transcendence.

Now to address the dialectic, in Kant’s usage the term dialectic is not about resolution toward truth brought about by rigorous rational dialogue, as it was with Plato. Something that is dialectical for Kant, is something that is illusory, “Above we have called dialectic in general a logic of illusion” (A294/B350). We run into illusory, dialectical problems when we use transcendental principles to that which is transcendent. This is just another way of saying that we have the illusion that we can affix rational, aprioristic necessity to areas that run far beyond our actual experience. Variously said, we run into the bad habit of applying rational necessity to things that overextend beyond any actual experience we can have of them.

Kant’s free-will, along with his ideas on freedom are positioned in contrast to mechanistic Newtonian natural law. As we have noted, the noumenon of freedom falls outside of science—it cannot be traced empirically. In Kant’s preface the Critique of Practical Reason (hereafter the second Critique), we find Kant distinguishing natural law from the noumena of freedom. When we, according to Kant, look at ourselves as possessing freedom, we can not find any comparable phenomena in nature, “And indeed, so long as one has not found any determinate conceptions of morality or freedom.”

153 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 385.

154 For Kant, the noumenon is contrasted with phenomena—the everyday world of appearances.

155 “[…] there is this paradoxical demand : that man was to look upon himself as noumenon, insomuch as he was the subject of freedom, while at the same time looking upon himself in his own empirical consciousness as a phenomena in respect of the natural realm. And indeed, so long as one has not found any determinate conceptions of morality or freedom, there is no way of guessing what one meant the character of the noumenon to be, upon which the alleged appearance was to be founded.” Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 5.
Herein we continue to disclose a part of Kant’s unresolved problem. As we have discussed, one of the central aims of the first *Critique* was to delimit knowledge to those areas that reason has sensible access to—anything beyond that is an overextension. This overextension is an illusion, a *dialectic* of understanding. Yet, we already know that Kant makes vigorous use of *noumenal* freedom within his practical theory. Essentially Kant had to choose between two sides of an unresolved debate that persists till this day: how do we reconcile determinism vs. autonomous free will? To make a long story short, Kant’s ethical theory sides with his duty-based, deontological version of autonomous free will.

Indeed, within the context of systematically looking into how reason overextends itself in the first *Critique*, under the “Transcendental Dialectic,” Kant brings to the fore the so-called “antinomies of reason.” The third antimony, or the “antinomy of freedom,” has to do with the seeming irreconcilability of scientific and mechanistic causality of natural law, vs. the autonomy of free will, which cannot be reduced to natural law. The antinomies are positioned under the broader argument where reason overextends itself and thus falls into transcendental illusions (the “transcendental dialectic”). An antinomy is just another name Kant gives for an irresolvable contradiction. In this case it boils down to the unresolved conflict between determinism and free will. We cannot say with absolute assurance whether free will stems from the strict causality of natural law, or whether free will comes about of its own accord. Kant’s two sides of the antinomy state,

156 For Kant, this is more technically termed the “transcendental illusion.” “[…] which influences principles whose use is not ever meant for experience, since in that case we would at least have a touchstone for their correctness, but which instead, contrary to all the warnings of criticism, carries us away beyond the empirical use of the categories, and holds out to us the semblance of extending the pure understanding.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 385.
**Thesis:** Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them.

**Antithesis:** There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature (A444/B472-A447-B475).\(^{157}\)

One predominant factor in contributing to this antinomy, as with the other antinomies, is a limitation of knowledge as the result of reason’s need for conditions. In other words, in rational and scientific empirical inquiry we, through the transcendental implementation of reason, look for the causes of things—i.e. what are the causes behind this or that?—what are the reasons for this or that? In this persistent need for an answer to (a cause for) everything, reason reaches beyond experience as is the case with thinking about God, immortality and freedom, and so it overreaches into the unconditioned. Reason wants to go beyond the cause to look into the unconditioned. Kant writes in the first Critique,

> ...it is properly only the unconditioned that reason seeks in this synthesis of conditions, which proceeds serially, and indeed regressively, hence as it were the completeness in the series of premises that together presuppose no further premise (A416/B44).\(^{158}\)

What kinds of problems does this make for this thesis on the question of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge? The Kantian opposition (dialectic, antinomy) exposes an antagonism between science and ethics, as well as an antagonism between scientific knowledge and morality. Kant knew the difficulty of trying to blend ethics to conform to natural science, as his conceptualization of the *noumenon* was a means of showing that the two are not easy to mix—free-will exceeds scientific knowing and we are ignorant of ethics only when we are unable to obey Kant’s “categorical imperative,” “Act only according to that maxim whereby you

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\(^{157}\) *Kant, Critique of Pure Reason*, 484-485.

\(^{158}\) *Kant, Critique of Pure Reason*, 464.
Kant’s antinomy brings our attention to an age-old and hitherto unresolved conflict between determinism and free will. And as we have noted, it also brings in another problem with transcendence and how we account for things rationally. If Kant’s delimitation of reason holds reason in check in areas beyond sensorial experience, then reason must accede to its own limitations. What new observations can we see in light of Kant’s conditions with regard to our research on ignorance? Regardless of how limited these observations on freedom seem on the surface, we must hold close to an idea of freedom that cannot be just about a basic sense of ignorance. That is to say, because we do not know wherefrom freedom arises or the limits of its potential, it too is transcendent and not just a mystery. This type of transcendence is clearly tied to ignorance+. The ignorance+ of ignorance has to do with its potential as reaching beyond our current capacity, our current knowledge of things. We only know a part of what freedom is. We can never know the whole range of what freedom is potentially. It is within Kant’s understanding of freedom where we find expansiveness toward potential. This runs in contrast to the restrictions he placed on reason.

Phenomenologically, and in standing with the precedent of this thesis, this discussion of Kant has led us into several parts and wholes relationships that expose essential features of ignorance. Heine’s implication that Kant’s work is too difficult, served as an excellent case of wanting the whole to be reduced down to easier more understandable parts. This is an expression of Kant’s critique of reason, i.e. reason is always assuming that things can be reduced to their simplest parts. For ignorance this issue is extremely pertinent, given that we already know that such transcendent reductions lead to the possibility of missing what gets left behind. Then on the upside, such abstractions are also necessary to the primary ways in which we work

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to understand things. Yes, Kant did distinguish transcendent from transcendental, but both are going beyond. Transcendence goes beyond what can be experienced sensuously, and the transcendental for Kant goes beyond experience itself to account for what is necessary in experience. Both senses of transcendence take parts of things to understand the whole. Kant’s sense of transcendent does this unnecessarily, whereas his sense of transcendental does this necessarily.

For the explicit aims of this study, another new phenomenological parts and wholes connection can be made with Kant regarding his thoughts on the relationship between reason and freedom. As we distinguished at the opening of the chapter, parts can be either independent or non-independent, whereby non-independent parts are considered moments. Is freedom a moment of reason? Is reason a moment of freedom? Can one be separated from the other? We would have to suggest that for Kant, even if we cannot entirely access wherefrom freedom arises, other than the fact that it is based within rational beings, suggests that the two are mutually beneficial to the other, thus freedom and reason are non-independent. Freedom and reason are moments of each other. Recall one of Kant’s points in the Groundwork, “Reason must look upon itself as the author of its own principles independently of alien influences.”\textsuperscript{160} That is to say for Kant, if freedom must be accorded to all who are rational, then we must be given the freedom to act rationally and the two must not be taken as separate entities—that is the whole of freedom cannot be broken down to rational parts. We can only touch a part of freedom with our use of reason.

\textsuperscript{160} Kant, \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals}, 116.
CHAPTER V

IDENTITY IN MANIFOLDS

The study of ignorance will never be complete—there is always something new to be ignorant of. Our ignorance is always growing. Ignorance can never be completely eradicated with knowledge. In this chapter we will see how the identity of ignorance expands into various manifolds. Sokolowski offers many examples of this type of intriguing phenomenological intentionality. Take for example, experiencing a work of art, a painting: there are a wide variety of ways a painting gets experienced while still retaining its identity as a painting. Despite all the manifold, adumbrated (nuanced) ways things appear to us, identity is maintained throughout the experience. The painting can be photographed, it can be written about, it can be the subject of a lecture, it can be spoken of in another language, and so on. In each case the identity of the painting remains what it is, while at the same time it gets experienced in a manifold of ways, by ourselves and likewise or differently by others.\textsuperscript{161} For this chapter we will see that the identity of ignorance is manifold in countless ways and each manifestation of ignorance frequently exposes incomplete knowledge.

It is coincidentally beneficial that this intentional structure follow the other two, because it involves the others in fascinating ways. With this said, it should be repeated, that in any given experience all of the intentional structures are interleaved together, and it often becomes difficult to tease out the identifiable intentional relationship according to a strict delineation of presence and absence, parts and wholes, and identity in a manifold. Something can be present or absent in a manifold of ways, while at the same time, something can be partial or contained as a whole. Each isolated intentional structure is not always phenomenologically redolent apart from the

\textsuperscript{161} Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 29-30.
others. To separate phenomena is such a way is transcendent, but this transcendence is about
things people and ideas that are already immanently present within our experience. Experience
happens before we consciously separate these elements phenomenologically and philosophically.
Experience takes place before the epoché. Experience happens before we put words to it.
Experience is the immanent grounding of all that is transcended.

Finding direct mention of the structure identity in manifolds in Husserl’s translated work
is immensely difficult, and Sokolowski does not offer specific citations in reference to where he
found Husserl’s usage to make the job any easier. We do, with great effort, find references in
Husserl’s Ideas to what looks like identity in manifolds in what is referred to in the secondary
literature as adumbrations or profiles.¹⁶² These terms are translations of the formidable sounding
German word: Abschattung, translated into English as shade, nuance, outline, or perspective. We
also cannot overlook Husserl’s extremely long German word: Abschattungsmannigfaltigkeit:
translated in to English as “manifold of adumbrations.”¹⁶³ All of this is to say that within any of
the English translations of Husserl I have referenced, there is not a direct translation using the
words: adumbration, profile or identity in a manifold, these specific terms have only been
located in the secondary literature. I had to identify the structure amidst its many adumbrations. I
had to identify it amidst its manifold of shades, translations, perspectives, nuances, and profiles.

¹⁶² “The adumbration (Abschattung) or ‘profile’ is the side or ‘aspect’ through which a material
object presents itself to the perceiver.” Moran and Cohen, The Husserl Dictionary, s.v.

editors of The Husserl Dictionary the passage of Husserl’s wherefrom this word is taken is found
in a characteristically long recondite sentence from Ideas, §41, “An empirical consciousness of a
self-same thing that looks ‘all-round’ its object, and in doing is continually confirming the unity
of its own nature, essentially and necessarily possesses a manifold system of continuous patterns
of appearances and perspective variations, in and through which all objective phases of the
bodily self-given which appear in perception manifest themselves perspectivey in definite
continua.” Husserl, Ideas, 131.
In an extraordinary passage from Ideas, Husserl explains that,

A certain *inadequacy* belongs, further, to the perception of things, and that too is an essential necessity. In principle a thing can be given only ‘in one of its aspects,’ and that not only means incompletely, in some sense or other imperfectly, but precisely that which presentation through perspective prescribes.\(^{164}\)

This particular translation renders *identity in a manifold* as a “presentation through perspective.” What Husserl offers here, in no uncertain terms, positions this “inadequacy” of the perception of things as an “essential necessity.” As Husserl further pronounces, “To remain forever incomplete after this fashion is an ineradicable essential of the correlation Thing and Thing-perception.”\(^{165}\) That is to say simply, for Husserl, our perception of things, our “thing perception,” will always be limited. His emphasis is made dramatically definitive with the last lines of the paragraph, “No God can alter this in any way, any more than he deny the equation 1 + 2 = 3, or the stability of any other essential truth.”\(^{166}\) Yet, we must be careful to not overlook that in a couple of sections earlier in Ideas, Husserl says that, “An experience has no perspectives.”\(^{167}\) This indicates that Husserl wants to confine the *adumbrations* to our experience of things, but not to experience itself (and not necessarily to people and ideas, remember this is my extension). This seemingly minor distinction discloses a huge point. If our experience of things is not presented in *profiles*, then our experience is completely immanent. It is only our complete experience of things people and ideas in our environment that is always inherently *adumbrated*. This must mean that, for Husserl, we have a complete experience of *adumbrated* things. We might be tricked into assuming that if we are always experiencing *adumbrated* things,

\(^{164}\) Husserl, *Ideas*, 137.


\(^{167}\) Husserl, *Ideas*, 134.
then our experience must also be *adumbrated*, yet this is not the case for Husserl. Experiential immanence has completeness, whereas the things we experience do not. If I only experience parts of things, then our whole immanent experience reveals this. If immanence is always experientially present, and if the things in our environment are always *adumbrated*, then transcendence must be founded in experience. We invariably transcend what is immanent.

Whether we are cognizant of it or not, all of the things, people and ideas that we come into contact with are undoubtedly experiences of *adumbration*. The carry-over to our phenomenological examination of ignorance has immense philosophical implications on a couple of fronts: the *identity* of ignorance has an infinite number of *manifolds* and manifestations, and equally, because things within immanent experience are always *adumbrated*, then there are always aspects of things, people, and ideas that we will be ignorant of. *Adumbration* is a phenomenological way of identifying necessary limitations of knowledge.

To suggest that for us the appearance of things in this world is always abbreviated, inherently limited, or necessarily *adumbrated*, has an endless variety of applications, but it should not stop us from learning more. To repeat, if our knowledge of things is always limited, then the possibilities of how things can be known becomes infinite. Given that we cannot experience everything, there is always more to learn about things, *beyond* the scope of our immediate limitations.¹⁶⁸ For Husserl, we intersubjectively share this intention with others. Husserl describes this as a shared “horizon of possible experience” in the *Crisis*,

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¹⁶⁸ “In his mature publications beginning with *Ideas* I, Husserl explores a deeper sense of transcendence, as we shall see, whereby corporeal things are transcendent because their essence contains a kind of infinity that is never intuitable in a completely adequate and fulfilled way. Every thing is graspable only through a manifold of ‘adumbrations’ (*Abschattungen*) and ‘aspects’ (*Aspekte*), which can never be fully actualized by a finite cognizing mind.” Moran, “Immanence,...” 271.
He knows that he and his fellows, in their actual contact, are related to the same experienced things in such a way that each individual has different aspects, different sides, perspectives, etc., of them but that in each case these are taken from the same total system of multiplicities of which each individual is constantly conscious (in the actual experience of the same thing) as the horizon of possible experience of this thing.169

Put in everyday language: we all intersubjectively share our adumbrated experience of the world.

To distill it more: we are all ignorant of something.

**Manifolds of Ignorance / Emil du Bois-Reymond /**

**Robert N. Proctor**

The 19th century German pioneer of neuroscience, Emil du Bois-Reymond (1818-1896) was well-known in his day for the development of the field of electrophysiology among his other notable achievements. The controversial lectures he delivered were also widely discussed among scientists and the general public alike, including his lectures on the limitations of knowledge. The so-called “crisis of science” that Husserl would later give so much attention later in the 20th century to was likely due to the effect of du Bois-Reymond’s warnings about the limitations of scientific knowledge. The first was delivered in 1872 to the Congress of German Scientists and Physicians in Leipzig with the title: “The Limits of our Knowledge of Nature,” followed by its sequel which was delivered eight years later in 1880, to the Academy of Sciences at Berlin, with the title: “The Seven World-Problems.”170 Even if du Bois-Reymond was thoroughly a man of science, he was not afraid to publically call attention to science’s limits. At the end of the “Limits” lecture he summed up the spirit of his message with a single word: “Ignorabimus!”

169 Husserl, *Crisis*, 164.

170 The “Limits” lecture was translated and published in English in 1874, and the “Seven World-Problems” lecture was translated and published in English in 1882.
(Ignorabimus is translated from Latin to English as: we shall not know).\textsuperscript{171} These were the limits of what we can know scientifically, which also means that they were limits of knowledge. The “Limits” lecture of 1872 sets the scene with the goal of coming to terms with what the limitations of science actually are. If we are to know what the limits of knowledge look like, then, “Natural Science, the world conqueror of our times, resting as on a festive occasion from her labor, should strive to define the true boundaries of her immense domain.”\textsuperscript{172} To be sure, natural science in this case, meant for du Bois-Reymond, getting to a closer understanding of the “mechanics of atoms.”\textsuperscript{173} Even the venerable Kant is promptly cited with a quote from his 1786 essay the “Metaphysical Elements of Natural Science,” “In each special natural science the amount of science, properly so called, is equal to the amount of mathematics it contains.”\textsuperscript{174} Paraphrased, for Kant, science is only as good as the mathematics it uses. Du Bois-Reymond understands this to be better expressed with the notion that science is only as good as how it understands the mechanics of atoms. Du Bois-Reymond usage of Kant might have been sharper if he had cited one of the four “Antinomies,” namely the second. Recall from earlier that these were located in the chapters from the first Critique, concerning the “Transcendental Dialectic” where Kant delineates four “dialectics” or “illusions” of reason. It is with the second antinomy where we have an unresolved parts and wholes contradiction between the antinomy’s “thesis:” that everything can be reduced to its simplest parts, vs. its “antithesis:” things cannot be


reducible to their simplest parts (A434/B462). To du Bois-Reymond’s credit, he was not a fan of Kant’s, nor was he a fan of Kant’s transcendence. Although in contrast to this problem with Kant, he does plainly identify that science has a problem with its unwavering search for the ultimate causes behind things. This follows Kant’s overall message that reason needs to know when it oversteps into areas of transcendence—when it makes use of transcendental (aprioristic) reasoning to overstep (transcend) into areas beyond its reach.

Du Bois-Reymond also cites a contemporary of Kant’s, the French Enlightenment polymath Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827) from his 1825 “Philosophical Essay on Probabilities.” This is where we find an early form of the highly transcendent possibility that a mind can, at sometime in the future, figure out a mathematical formula for the universe, and thus the limits of knowledge could (ideally) be surpassed. In this idealistic view, we can know everything. Yet as du Bois-Reymond stipulates, we cannot know everything about the mechanics of atoms, therefore we cannot know everything. Quantum mechanics had not been fully developed when du Bois-Reymond delivered these lectures, enough for him to comment on how it revolutionized our understanding of the ways in which physics at the quantum level basically does not match our previous view of reality. Quantum mechanics retroactively emphasizes du Bois-Reymond’s argument that there are things at the quantum level that we cannot understand.

175 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 476-477.

176 We cannot ignore that Kant and Laplace each, on separate occasions (Kant: 1755, Laplace: 1796), developed what is known as the “nebular hypothesis,” sometimes referred to as the “Kant-Laplace nebular hypothesis.” The astronomical hypothesis was that due to the force of gravity, rotating nebular dust solidifies into rotating spheres to then become rotating planets. Generally speaking, this hypothesis is an accepted answer to the formation of our planet and the solar-system.
This point leads to the first of the two limits of scientific knowledge put forth by du Bois-Reymond: we will never know how to adequately explain the “essence of matter and force.”177 The other limit discussed in the “Limits” lecture wrangles with how we are unable to completely explain the material conditions for knowledge. This is the ever-persistent mind body problem, whereby we cannot sufficiently explain how matter becomes consciousness. Du Bois-Reymond gives mention to Descartes’ mind body dualism in this context, but he omits mention of Descartes’ correspondence with Elisabeth, the Princess of Bohemia (1618-1680) who dared to ever so politely question Descartes on this befuddling question as to exactly how a soul (thought) moves a body (matter). In a letter to Descartes from Elisabeth in 1643 she queries, “I beseech you tell me how the soul of man (since it is but a thinking substance) can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary actions?”178 Needless to say, Descartes’ answer is as perplexing for her as it is for us—he appeals to obscure “primitive notions” and their relation to physical “weight” and that these things need to be somehow better understood to account for the elusive interaction between mind and body.179 In short, Descartes cannot explain the interaction.


179 Elisabeth of Bohemia, “Correspondence with Descartes,” 12-15.
“The origins of thought and language.” 7. “The question whether man is free in his acts, or is driven by unavoidable compulsion” (i.e. the problem of free-will vs. determinism).\textsuperscript{180}

In “The Seven World-Problems,” Kant is mentioned again, but this time du Bois-Reymond chides him for perverting philosophy by taking on such an “esoteric character” and who “unlearned the language of common sense and intelligible thought.”\textsuperscript{181} As with Hein, Kant’s notorious difficulty is made into an issue and becomes an excuse for du Bois-Reymond to scorn philosophy for its difficulty. On this seemingly minor point, a professor of history at the University of Colorado, Gabriel Finkelstein (1963- ) in his 2013 biography, \textit{Emil du Bois-Reymond}, discloses that “In truth he [du Bois-Reymond] did not think much of philosophy” and even claimed he never studied Kant, and to repeat, he was not Kantian.\textsuperscript{182} Du Bois-Reymond overlooks Kant’s antinomies again, the third antimony. It would have helped make his case that his seventh problem on free-will versus determinism, was an age-old limit. This is the “antinomy of freedom,” which, as we noted earlier, had to do with the seeming irreconcilability of scientific and mechanistic causality of natural law, versus the autonomy of free will, which cannot be reduced to natural law. Du Bois missed helpful parts of Kant while seeming to know better than the whole of Kant, in turn exposing the limitations of his own knowledge in the process. Unlike

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{180} Emil du Bois-Reymond, “The Seven World-Problems,” unknown translator, in \textit{Popular Science Monthly}, 20 (1882). Please note, the lecture was delivered in 1880, whereas this translation was published in 1882.
\item\textsuperscript{181} Du Bois-Reymond, “The Seven World-Problems,” 1-2.
\item\textsuperscript{182} Finkelstein, \textit{Emil du Bois-Reymond}, 281. In the footnote for this sentence, Finkelstein writes, “He claimed that he never studied Hegel, Kant, Herbart, or Schopenhauer, even though he was familiar with their works” 353.
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Husserl and Kant, du Bois-Reymond conversely, according to Finkelstein, “believed that it [philosophy] had much more to learn from science than science had to learn from it.”

Back to du Bois-Reymond’s “Limits” lectures, Finkelstein brings to forefront the problem that although the two lectures were popular and influential, the criticism (and there was plenty of it) was generally that of disapproval. We cordially surmise that this disdain stems from the primary notion that people do not like to be told their knowledge of things is untraversably limited. In the lectures Du Bois-Reymond makes sure to attach the word transcendent to the seven problems. The type of transcendence defined by du Bois-Reymond is “insurmountable,” our ignorance of these things cannot be surmounted—transcendence in his case is just another word for an inaccessible limit. It is similar to Kant’s application where transcendence signifies going beyond that which can be experienced empirically, but it is not like Kant’s use of the term transcendental. Given that du Bois-Reymond championed scientific (Epicurean) materialism, Kant’s brand of aprioristic cognition was out of the question.

It is on this untraversable notion of transcendence that could possibly explain the reason why du Bois-Reymond’s “Limits” lectures were received so harshly. Again, the meaning of his Latin dictum Ignorabimus is that we shall not know, this definitive pronouncement implies an attitude of intellectual quietism—our knowledge is limited and we cannot do anything about it—these problems are insurmountable. These problems are transcendent in a strict sense and cannot

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184 The problem of transcendence is significant for du Bois-Reymond. In a conversation with Finkelstein, he let me know that du Bois-Reymond was actively interested in the ancient Greek materialism of Epicureanism, while wanting to wholly step away from the transcendental habits of his peers and predecessors (the transcendence of the Romantics, etc.). This Epicurean influence is made obvious with du Bois-Reymond’s insistence that science is about the mechanics of atoms, and that we should avoid transcendence of any kind in the name of doing science only with data that can be sensibly observed.
be known. Although we concede that what du Bois-Reymond describes as the limits of human knowledge will remain unresolved, the dilemma is in his presentation that the limits are insurmountable. He would have been better off presenting the limits as the seeds of potential growth. For example, the answer is probably yes, we will never know the final word on free will versus determinism, but that should never stop us from looking into the metaphysical details regarding how the two are working, or not working together. Du Bois-Reymond failed to call enough attention to the transcendental potential of our limits. He did not emphasize what we are calling the ignorance+ of his limits enough—instead he emphasized a view of ignorance as an unbridgeable demarcation. We like nothing less than being told we cannot do, or that we cannot know something, and such admonitions are usually a challenge to do otherwise. If we choose to develop a quietism of ignorance, then we miss out on the unknown potential of attempting to look forward into the impossible. If in a secular way, like Ps.-Dionysius we transcendentally see ignorance as potential rather than a crude privation, then what we identified as ignorance+ emphasizes and reframes the limits as new frontiers, new horizons for knowledge. Du Bois-Reymond needed to redefine his strict sense of transcendence to include potential, possibility, and going beyond to know more.

In du Bois-Reymond’s defense, it cannot be ignored that his position has Socratic overtones, in that he wanted to demonstrate the limits of our knowledge. Like Socrates’ negative knowledge we do not know everything and we are the wiser to embrace such demarcations. Somewhat like Socrates who had to die because people did not like to be reminded that they lacked knowledge, it is not surprising that du Bois-Reymond’s limitations were received with harsh criticism.
When we switch to consider these examples phenomenologically, within the intentional structure of identity in a manifold, the identity of ignorance is maintained throughout each manifestation, each limit. Each of du Bois-Reymond’s limits identifies a limit of knowledge. The identity of a limitation of knowledge is held throughout each one of his demarcations. The limits of knowledge are vividly identifiable in its manifolds. The limitations du Bois-Reymond outlines are what constitute the identity of adumbration. That is if we always perceive things as limited, then there is bound to be limits we cannot surpass.

The idea that ignorance has many faces (identities) of adumbration closely aligns to the main idea behind Robert N. Proctor’s (1954- ) 2008 book, Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance, of which he co-edited with his colleague Londa Schiebinger (1952- ), both authors are professors of the history of science at Stanford University. In the opening eponymously titled essay, “Agnotology: A Missing Term to Describe the Cultural Production of Ignorance (and its Study),” Proctor goes to great lengths to stress the multiple and subtle adumbrations of ignorance, for example, “Ignorance hides in the shadows of philosophy and is frowned upon in sociology, but it also pops up in a great deal of popular rhetoric: it’s no excuse, it’s what can’t hurt you, it’s bliss.”

Dutifully extending the identity of ignorance to be on equal footing with knowledge, Proctor affirms that, “There must be as many kinds of ignorance as of knowledge—perhaps more, given how scant is our knowledge compared with the vastness of our ignorance.”

It is worthwhile to mention that the study of ignorance is interdisciplinary—ignorance and the limitations of knowledge inhabit all the disciplines. The interdisciplinarity of ignorance

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identifies ignorance across all fields and all adumbrations. In his essay, and in his and Schiebinger’s selection of essays for the book, Proctor vigilantly demonstrates this interdisciplinarity by positioning ignorance within a wide variety of disciplines and frameworks.\footnote{The word “agnotology” was actually coined by Proctor, deriving from the Greek words ἄγνωσις, agnōsis, "not knowing" and -λογία, -logia, study of. Proctor, “Agnotology,” 27.} This is to show that the phenomenon of ignorance reaches far and wide. We are often ignorant of the ways in which ignorance interweaves with the way we know and do not know things.

In his essay Proctor refreshingly offers a threefold (manifold) approach to the often overlooked study of ignorance. He starts with the idea of “Ignorance as a native state,” ignorance in this case is seen as something to overcome while at the same time it is involved with the way we learn things. This type of ignorance is akin to the innocence of children. Born untouched by the knowledge of the world, children need to be adequately educated and subsequently filled with knowledge. Inserted into our earlier intentional structure of presence and absence, ignorance is in this sense an absence that needs to be filled with knowledge. We start out life as ignorant and our lives are ideally spent pulling away from such a state. We grow out of ignorance.\footnote{Proctor, “Agnotology,” 4-6.} This is the most common understanding of ignorance, which is usually thought of as something to get away from, to grow out of, or to do away with. Because it can be the impetus for growth, this type of ignorance is also considered a resource by Proctor. We always need the resource of ignorance from where to begin filling in the gaps in our knowledge. The sciences are intimately engaged with this type of ignorance, because if there was nothing more to learn we would no longer need to continue working on research, studies, hypotheses, or any other unanswered questions the sciences wish to resolve.
The second type of ignorance identified by Proctor in his essay is “Ignorance as a lost realm, or selective choice (or passive construct)” this is ignorance identified by who knows what when and where?—here ignorance is social. Some people are privy to knowledge, whereas others are not. Ignorance in this identity is about our relations to people and places. In our social relations with people and places, things get overlooked and fall to the wayside leading to problems of fairness and social injustice.\(^\text{189}\) The “selective choice” in this identity looks a lot like transcendence, but Proctor does not expressly identify it as such, “We look here rather than there; we have the predator’s fovea [visual fixation] (versus indiscriminate watchfulness of prey) and the decision to focus on this is invariably a choice to ignore that.”\(^\text{190}\) As we examined transcendence with Husserl, we observed that transcendence requires us to go beyond something so as to know its essence. This going beyond requires a selective focus that runs into the problem of seeing one thing in spite of what gets overlooked. Foucault was critical of Husserl’s transcendence for this very reason—what contingencies get overlooked when we transcend in the name of looking for essences?

By “passive construct” Proctor must be indicating the side of transcendence that gets ignored. In other words, as indicated earlier, when I transcend something to get to what it is essentially, I actively leave certain things out. I leave out what is non essential and in this respect I am selective of what to focus on—I am actively aware of what’s getting left out or not. The passive part of this in turn entails that I might not be actively aware of the importance of what is getting left out. Colonization of new lands often had the aim of claiming new territory, and resources, whereas the resulting impact on the cultural and spiritual lives of the colonized

\(^{189}\) Proctor, “Agnotology,” 6-8.  
\(^{190}\) Proctor, “Agnotology,” 7.
peoples was frequently overlooked and they were often forced to assimilate. The essence of the people gets passively overlooked in the name of focusing on the acquisition of land and resources. Passivity in this sense is a sin of omission. I cannot know you if I passively ignore who you are, while at the same time, converting you into who I want you to be.

Lastly, Proctor identifies the third manifestation of ignorance as “ignorance as a strategic ploy, or active construct.” In this adumbration of ignorance, Proctor makes good use of his term agnogenisis, basically meaning the creation or construction of ignorance. This is obviously tied to the word agnotology, the study of ignorance, the title of his book. We should remark that his specially coined term for the study of ignorance, stems from the Greek word agnōsia (ἀγνώσια, a lack of knowledge, not knowing, or ignorance). This identity of ignorance is typified as the “deliberately engineered” ignorance, the agnogenesis of American tobacco companies promulgated in the mid 20th century whereby tobacco users (and the general public) were actively and strategically kept ignorant of the health risks of smoking cigarettes. Research into this identity of ignorance, tobacco company agnogenesis, is what inspired Proctor to study ignorance on the whole.

The identity of ignorance is ever-expanding and so another angle to consider along this line is the notion of secrecy. The best way to keep a secret is to devise clever ways in which to obscure, distort, or provide misinformation about your product, idea, or endeavor. This is the

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192 Proctor tells us in the “Postscript” for the essay, that he asked the linguist Iain Boal to help him come up with a word for the study of ignorance. Hence the word Agnotology was born in 1992. Proctor, “Agnotology,” 27.

193 “One of my favorite examples of agnogenesis is the tobacco industry’s efforts to manufacture doubt about the hazards of smoking. It was primarily in this context (along with military secrecy) that I first began exploring this idea of manufactured ignorance, the question again being ‘Why don’t we know what we don’t know?’” Proctor, “Agnotology,” 11.
type of ignorance both Hein and du Bois-Reymond thought Kant (and other challenging German and non-German philosophers) were promulgating by keeping their ideas difficult to read. Hein assumed Kant was difficult because he was afraid of the results, and likewise du Bois-Reymond imagined that Kant’s difficulty fostered an overly esoteric attitude that pulls away from “common sense and intelligent thought.” The hermetic arts like alchemy are also known for holding secrets in the name of keeping outsiders away. Perhaps an argument could be made that philosophy operates in a similar fashion—only those in the know are allowed access. Yet this can be said of any specialty where outstanding ideas are cherished and their rarity is held closely by those who are qualified, and is made tacitly unavailable to those who are not in the fold.

During the 1950s and 60s American tobacco companies aggressively worked to discredit the fact that smoking causes cancer and poses other health risks, while keeping alive the mystique that smoking cigarettes, in various ways, is both glamorous and healthy. Essentially the idea must be that if the general public sufficiently knows all the health risks, they will not be as inclined to continue purchasing cigarettes. As Proctor illustrates, the tobacco companies wanted to keep their addicted public doubtful of the risks of smoking cigarettes. Keeping the secret deliberately blinds the consumer to the risks. With this said, Proctor does not articulate this, but these days there are unmistakable and dire warnings boldly printed on cigarettes and other tobacco products (“smoking kills,” “smoking causes lung cancer,” etc.). Yet despite such perilous warnings, people continue to choose to enjoy tobacco. Perhaps this variant of ignorance runs closer to an idea of self-selective and self-constructed ignorance: I know this might kill me, but it will not kill me right now, and I vow to quit before I detect any noticeable health problems—I volunteer to be ignorant.

Phenomenologically and from the standpoint of this thesis, with *identity in a manifold*, we uncovered three essential things. For Husserl, experience is not *adumbrated* like our experience of things is *adumbrated*. This is a purely phenomenological point. This showed us that experience is the rich immanence from with all phenomena arises in conscious experience. Then we noticed two different, but essential qualities of ignorance with du Bois-Reymond and Proctor. With du Bois-Reymond, the limitations of knowledge become a glaring quietism of ignorance—we have our limits, and nothing can change this. We simply do not like to be told that we cannot know it all and we yearn to transcend this limitation. Transcendence is not an unsurpassable end, it is a potential. We always want to *go beyond* our knowledge of things. With Proctor, the essential range of ignorance is always expanding. His triad of identities for ignorance underscored the notion that an essential aspect of ignorance is that it can be identified as something to grow out of. Ignorance can be singular and social, and like Foucault observed, it is contingently dependent on time and place. Lastly, ignorance can be created to keep things secret—we sometimes find the need to hide the truth—to keep people in ignorance. There is always something new to be ignorant of. Hence the *identity* of ignorance is always expanding into new *manifolds*. Ignorance always provides new horizons of possibility. Ignorance always has a new limitation of knowledge to overcome and to transcend.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

As the opening line of this thesis states: the study of ignorance is never complete. My
ambitions for this thesis were exceedingly high. Yet we have made plenty of new discoveries
about ignorance. To be sure, there have also been many wonderful suggestions (far beyond what
I have been covering here). I wanted to explore much more ground than space and time

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195 People are noticeably interested in the surprising vastness of ignorance as a subject for
research. As I have shared my master’s thesis with the kind folks who have the patience to listen,
there have been many welcome ideas, and book suggestions. Here are a few: Thinking, Fast and
Slow by Daniel Kahneman, who is urging us to slow down thinking when we are in unchartered
territories of knowledge. And speaking of unchartered territories of knowledge there is The
Invention of Nature by Andrea Wulf, the 19th century naturalist, scientist and explorer Alexander
von Humboldt, who is largely forgotten today, yet he inspired Charles Darwin to set out on the
HMS Beagle. Then there is an issue in proof theory which deals with the impossibility of
proving things. This is known as Münchhausen’s Trilemma. This is a thought experiment where
when we are asked to prove something we call on a “the circular argument,” all theories require
more proofs, “the regressive argument,” in which each proof requires more proof, and then there
is the “axiomatic argument,” which also relies on predetermined axioms by which to prove
things. Then there is Robert Smithson’s brilliant Ignorance and Uncertainty, where he wants to
manage science’s avoidance of uncertainty and the like, by looking closely at ignorance. His
background is in mathematical probability and sociology. Smithson aptly posits that ignorance is
a social construction, “Ignorance is a social creation, like knowledge. Indeed, we cannot even
talk about particular instances of ignorance without referring to the standpoint of some group or
individual. Ignorance, like knowledge, is socially constructed and negotiated.” Michael
Smithson, Ignorance and Uncertainty: Emerging Paradigms (New York, NY: Springer-Verlag,
1989), 8. Along a creative trajectory, another suggestion has been Holly Stocking’s essay “On
Drawing Attention to Ignorance,” she looks at ignorance starting with the beautiful analogy of
learning to draw a picture from life, where one is instructed to focus less on the subject and pay
closer attention to the space surrounding the object. Stocking writes, “If we focus our attention
on why this is perceived as ignorance, we will see that ignorance, like knowledge, is
multifaceted. Like the spaces around the object drawn in an art class, ignorance should vary in
amount, form, and substance depending on where one is situated—depending for example, on
one’s discipline or method if one is a scientist, or one’s political or philosophical stance if one is
a critic of science, and depending on one’s interests in and use for science if one is a citizen or
policymaker. S. Holly Stocking “On Drawing Attention to Ignorance,” Science Communication
20, no. 1 (September 1998): 165-178. Another fascinating suggestion was on the “Dunning-
Kruger effect” whereby non-experts overestimate their own competence in disciplines they know
little about. Justin Kruger, David Dunning “Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in
allowed. There is the fascinating nothingness of Martin Heidegger which brings about metaphysics. And then there is the multi-faceted stupidity studied by Avital Ronell and Robert Musil. These examples serve as a promise to know and learn more about ignorance and the limitations of knowledge. I also wanted to discuss the cultural ethics and micro-ethics of ignorance as it touches our lives in countless ways that often prove to be too confounding and painful to ignore. There was also an interest in the arcane history, cultural, and geographic significance of the Oracle of Delphi, of who only made a brief appearance when I discussed Foucault’s notion of antique truth. Additionally this would have inspired more coverage on the hermetic arts that predate modern science, and the list goes on. The subject of ignorance is vast. These junctures represent projects and venues for continued exploration—ignorance always provides more room for growth.

Yet, if philosophy, history, and theology show us that a strong consideration of ignorance is a valuable habit if one is to engage with wisdom—not only as we come to know things, but experiencing and understanding the limitations of our knowing—then we must, at the very least, be more aware of our own ignorance and that of others. We must also see that knowledge and ignorance go hand-in-hand, they cannot be extracted from each other with any ease—therefore they must not be thought of in opposition, but as working together. Problems arise when we think that wisdom is only about knowledge. There is no such thing as a completed knowledge of anything, yet we have to ask ourselves if we are really trying to know everything, or do we just want to know some things—if so then where do we overcompensate, or overdraw our knowledge into error and folly?

recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments,” in Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 77, no. 6, (Dec 1999), 1121-1134.
The phenomenon of ignorance is not restricted to one discipline or field of study—as we have noticed it is interdisciplinary. Ignorance affects everyone in all fields of expertise. The solution to this problem lies within our own fearful antagonism of it. We do not want to be perceived of as having a lack of knowledge, especially if the lacking is in our own area of expertise. It is just as well that when we swiftly deem the actions or words of others as stupid, it is usually because we do not understand or lack insight into their position. The quickness with which we judge our own lack of knowledge needs to be measured with the care we bring to the assessment of another’s supposed deficiency. We cannot do this if we have not examined ignorance as a means toward wisdom. Examining ignorance as a means toward wisdom requires that we face the unknown, the different, the unexpected and what gets left behind, overlooked and ignored. The presuppositions of ignorance do not always hold answers to knowledge, since as we have noticed there are things we will never know. Yet, we cannot rest on this general relativism. Every situation contains the possibility for an alternative vantage—coming to terms with our problems with the phenomenon of ignorance interlocks with our habits to avoid it. When we speak of the ignorance or stupidity of others, or ourselves, the goal is to learn from past errors—to avoid remaining ignorant. We cannot learn from the errors of our past mistakes if we continue to avoid the phenomenon of ignorance as it serves to expand our thinking.

As we have disclosed and discovered the phenomenon of ignorance must include the limitations of knowledge, as much as it includes unlimited potential. Ignorance is beyond a mere deficiency. The negative limitations of our own knowledge help us to recognize the value of ignorance as potential, but we have to make this notion conscious. Given that we are not accustomed to thinking about ignorance in the new and innovative ways we have demonstrated above, the art of philosophy becomes a contemplative tool by which to summon a refreshed
sense of ignorance away from clichés and hasty judgments. The basic fact that nobody can know everything represents a catalyst for growth. We still want to decry the ancient humility of wisdom in the face of increasing arrogance about what we do not know within ourselves and when we wish to understand other things, people and ideas. My primary definition did not favor the meaning of ignorance as simply to *not know something*. This thesis repeatedly proved that the meaning of ignorance always *goes beyond* this privation.

During the onset of this research, I discovered that phenomenology would serve as a philosophical pivot due the notion of transcendence—*going beyond* the objects of consciousness so as to better understand the objects of consciousness. Transcendence serves as an ongoing and evolving notion usually hidden in the background of our conscious experience. Yet we brought transcendence to the forefront in this thesis to show how it constituted an underlying notion for the thinkers selected. While unearthing new ways to consider ignorance, we work to instill the habit of recognizing how important transcendence is. Usually it sounds like an esoteric or religious word having to do with the outer reaches of consciousness. In unexpected and expansive ways, Husserl’s philosophy of phenomenology helped us get there, since it too signified a way to grapple with the limits and *naturalism* of science. Now we better understand transcendence, the structures of intentionality, the *epoché*, the contentions with *naturalism*, and of course, ignorance and the limitations of knowledge. By virtue of having done this research, phenomenology opened ignorance into new possibilities. This thesis was my version of the *epoché*. We did not turn to a quantifiable, or a formal scientific way to understand ignorance. We put science *off to the side*. We *bracketed* science away in our experience of understanding ignorance via the thinkers presented. The negative example of science’s oversights showed us the importance of transcendence as an essential feature of ignorance.
Objects of consciousness are never actually physically held in our consciousness as we experience them. We invariably *transcend* those things in order to experience them consciously. Meanwhile, we necessarily *abstract/transcend* away from other essential features of those things. This is essential in the way we gained a refreshed knowledge of ignorance. Grounded in immanence, we transcend the things, people, and ideas that constitute immanence. Yet we continuously overlook other details of those things. To say it one more time, we determined the instructive notion that ignorance is essentially transcendental.

What new linkages did we uncover when we brought together phenomenological intentionality, transcendence, and ignorance combined with our thinker’s ideas within the perspective of this thesis? Socrates famously tried to prove that not-knowing and wisdom are bound together. This great lesson cannot be overemphasized. We need to be vigilant as he was—every time we wish to recklessly delve into the unknowns of what we think we actually know. This type of negative knowledge owns ignorance only if we are wise enough to handle it. In a phenomenological *presence* and *absence* relationship, with Socrates we observed that an essential feature of wisdom included ignorance. We must be *filled* with our own ignorance if our wisdom is not to be *empty. Presence* and *absence* also disclosed essential features of death for Socrates. Our own death is an *absence* of life, it cannot be *present*. We need not fear death, because we are ignorant of it—a life of philosophy helps to prepare us for our ignorance of death.

Early in his career Foucault was deeply interested in phenomenology—later he critiqued it for its problems of transcendence—it too might overlook contingency at the expense of looking for what is essential. Foucault also wanted to show that the type of truth and knowledge brought about by Plato and Socrates was not the only type of knowledge to be found in the
ancient world. He directed us to an oracular type of truth only made accessible in religious ritual. This type of truth puts into question the idea that knowledge and truth are accessible to all people in all places. With Foucault’s analysis, history exposed an essential aspect of the phenomenon of ignorance. All knowledge cannot be present to everyone in the same time and place. Knowledge is absent to those who lack the practical, tangible means of acquiring it. Proctor also noticed this, ignorance plays out socially, and not everyone has access to knowledge.

Tied with transcendence, the theme of ignorance and the limitations of knowledge (continuously expanding beyond basic privation) were brought to the fore by our engagement with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. His negative theology opened up the notion of ignorance beyond simple privation, hence disclosing an essential element of ignorance. I would not have arrived at this revitalizing conclusion about ignorance otherwise. Ignorance+ is representative of all we cannot know as pure potential. Ignorance never looked so beautiful. The secular importance of this notion that the impossibility of knowing something directs us to the potential to know more is something we repeat every time we think of the unknown promise of the future. As we noticed with Kant, this is freedom. We ardently cherish the possibility of knowing things beyond our reach. The concept of exit and return, tied to the history of Pseudo-Dionysius, served as ways in which the phenomenological structure of parts and wholes revealed an essential component of ignorance—to become whole, is to ascetically let go of parts of ourselves (religiously and secularly).

Kant’s Enlightenment project called on us to be reasonable with our use of freedom, and it called for the free use of reason. Freedom should be accorded to all who are rational. Phenomenologically the whole of freedom cannot be essentially broken down to its rational parts. Freedom and rational thought are not mutually exclusive. Rational thought cannot wholly
understand freedom. Freedom is understood only in parts. We can only harness a part of freedom with reason. We cannot know the whole capacity of human freedom, but that is not mere ignorance. Instead, this shows that freedom represents boundless potential, meaning that freedom is another type of ignorance+. With the intentional structure of parts and wholes, we noticed how wishing to understand parts sometimes sacrifices the whole. Additionally, we discovered another essential aspect of ignorance as it is tied with knowledge. We want difficult thinkers to be presented in easier parts so as to understand the whole. As we have seen, this is transcendence, and it potentially loses information in the process. If this is an essential way to learn about things, then ignorance is essential in the way we gain knowledge of things.

Kant also represented a continued opening up of the contentions between science and philosophy. Kant, like Husserl, Foucault, and culminating with du Bois-Reymond, showed us that the absolutions of scientific reasoning and contemplative philosophy are no easy mix. Contrary to popular belief, the natural sciences do not have the answer for everything.

In the phenomenological structure of identity in a manifold, we noticed three essential things. One was purely phenomenological, whereas the other two were disclosing the notion that the identity of ignorance is both limited and ever-expanding. The purely phenomenological point was Husserl’s insistence that immanent experience is not adumbrated, whereas our experience of things is necessarily adumbrated. This showed us that experience is the ever-rich and grounded immanence from which all phenomena arises. With du Bois-Reymond, the limitations of knowledge looked like a quietism of ignorance—we cannot do anything about our limits. Even if we do not like to be told we cannot know everything, we always want to transcend this limitation. We always want to go beyond our knowledge of things. In contrast for Proctor, the essential range of ignorance is always expanding. His triad of identities for ignorance
underscored the notion that an essential aspect of ignorance is that it can be identified as something to grow out of. Ignorance is social, and like Foucault observed it is dependent on time and place. Lastly, ignorance can be created to keep things secret—we sometimes find the need to hide the truth—to keep people in ignorance.

There is always something new to be ignorant of. Hence the identity of ignorance is always expanding into new manifolds. Ignorance always provides new horizons of potential, given that we only ever get to know parts of things. There is no such thing as a whole, completed knowledge of anything. This delivers us to the wisdom that the presence of our knowledge must always be aware of its absences. The potential for ignorance always has new limitations of knowledge to overcome. Ignorance discloses infinite possibility.
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