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The relevance of Husserl's phenomenological exploration of interiority to contemporary epistemology

Biagio G. Tassone¹

ABSTRACT Phenomenology represents a detailed and systematic attempt to understand the structures of first person lived experience. This article examines the relevance of Husserl's writings and their introduction of the "phenomenological reduction" as the distinguishing characteristic of his transcendental form of phenomenology. A close examination of Husserl's writings is given to highlight the centrality of the reduction for the justification of basic beliefs. It is subsequently shown how Husserl's analyses of intentional acts have ongoing implications for the knowledge internalism versus knowledge externalism debate. This debate revolves around how knowledge is justified and how belief claims are warranted. Although the debate, in its modern form, can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century, Husserl's methods were not introduced in dealing with internalist and externalist accounts of knowledge attainment until recently. Modern externalists, who for the most part are not phenomenologists, have subsequently largely condemned Husserl's methods as promoting a strict Cartesian internalist justification of belief claims. These criticisms were met by attempts to characterize transcendental phenomenology as actually promoting something closer to externalism in epistemology. The following article attempts to show how Husserl's phenomenology actively engages with problems related to the interiority of knowledge claims but in a radically different way from non-phenomenological approaches promoting internalism. Nonetheless, it is argued that transcendental phenomenology cannot be regarded as anything approaching a mainstream or even reworked "externalist" account of securing knowledge. Highlighting what Husserl calls "the paradox of subjectivity," it is shown how his transcendental phenomenology develops a *sui generis* form of internalism. Since few modern internalists make use of Husserl's texts, and post-Husserlian phenomenology has taken something like an externalist turn (as witnessed, for example, in recent interpretations of the writings of Heidegger and Sartre), it is argued that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology should be taken more seriously by contemporary philosophers interested in knowledge internalism. These conclusions, subsequently, are relevant to promoting a better understanding of the justification of knowledge claims, both within and outside of the phenomenological program. Husserl's writings are important to contemporary issues such as the theoretical understanding of the relationship between epistemology and philosophy of science (broadly conceived), as well as the relation of phenomenology to contemporary philosophy of mind.

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Introduction

Noli foras ire, in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas.
St. Augustine De Vera Religione, XXXIX. 72

Since the time of Descartes philosophers have sought to establish what justifies true beliefs by examining the epistemic conditions immediately underlying knowledge claims. As critics of this “foundationalist” model for the justification of knowledge have pointed out, there is a strong element of subjectivism evident in making the warrant for truth hinge on a connection to so-called mental acts. In this way, so the critics of the modern epistemological tradition assert, the evidence required for declaring the truth or falsity of beliefs is gained only at the expense of inextricably connecting an internal private element to the *locus* of truth. Today, thinkers who still accept an essential role for mental factors in securing warrant for our true beliefs are called “internalists”. Those philosophers who believe that factors lying outside an individual’s mental activity ultimately justify knowledge, by contrast, are called “externalists”.¹ In this article, Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is examined as a philosophical, rather than exclusively methodological, approach for justifying truth-making conditions. Husserlian phenomenology is then interpreted as a defense of foundationalism and the internalist approach in epistemology, that is, a philosophy of the subject. It will be shown how an important contribution of Husserl’s to these matters has been largely overlooked; namely, his phenomenological conception of immediate experience as self-transcending ground for justifying true beliefs. Husserl’s analysis of the justification of knowledge claims, it is argued, can be shown to stand as a challenge to anti-foundationalist assumptions and externalist theories of knowledge attainment alike. As will be demonstrated, the task of exploring experience and internal relations is especially well-suited for treatment by Husserlian phenomenology since it developed a dynamic analysis of the importance of consciousness as allowing epistemic access to evidence. It is the detailed analysis of perception and thought undertaken by Husserl that allowed him to develop an account of how “objective” and structural features of the world are given directly to experiencing subjects.

As a consequence, and as has already been noted by various thinkers, Husserl’s writings are relevant to the ongoing externalism versus internalism debate in contemporary epistemology. Unfortunately there is, to date, no consensus on precisely *how* Husserl’s writings should be understood in the context of this debate and arguments both for and against internalism and externalism as best characterizing Husserlian phenomenology can be found. After outlining the central aspects of Husserl’s general strategy for analysing the structure of belief claims, it is argued that his phenomenology supports a necessary emphasis on epistemological internalism. This claim merits stressing since it has recently been challenged by some Husserlians. In support of this claim, it will be stressed how Husserl’s thought is an expansion of the Socratic/Cartesian project regarding the justification of truth as requiring an account of how rational belief is possible. Since Husserl sought to explain the justification of basic beliefs by reliance on the phenomenological reduction, it is shown that externalist factors, although important to Husserl, cannot ultimately warrant the justification of genuine knowledge claims. For this reason alone, rejecting the internalist aspects of his project does Husserl no favours and, worse, it robs us of some of some very strong arguments challenging the coherence of externalism as a viable basis for grounding epistemology.

Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, therefore, can demonstrate how, in maintaining an indispensable role for mental states as permitting access to evidence, internal states are a necessary condition for helping determine not only how valid beliefs are formed but also how knowledge about the world is established. In this sense, mainly due to his radical understanding of transcendence in immanence and the role played by the transcendental phenomenological reduction in resolving the “paradox of subjectivity”, Husserl’s thought can be shown to manifest a *sui generis* form of internalism.

The implications of my study will highlight how Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology should be taken more seriously by contemporary philosophers interested in knowledge internalism. These conclusions can also be viewed as relevant in helping contemporary philosophers to promote a better understanding of the justification structure of knowledge both within and outside of the phenomenological program. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is frequently cited by thinkers working in the humanities and social sciences, but if the assessment of his achievements offered here are correct, Husserl’s mature thought also has important insights to contribute to contemporary epistemological studies in analytic philosophy, including the understanding of the relationship between epistemology and philosophy of science. After providing a critical assessment of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological reduction in securing essential structures, the article concludes by highlighting the challenges posed by Husserl’s thought to naturalistic versions of externalism and causal accounts of belief formation.

Husserl’s early phenomenology as a science of subjectivity

From the very beginning of his career Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was interested in the epistemological problem of how we obtain objective knowledge.² What distinguished Husserl’s writings from those of other logicians or philosophers of the early twentieth century were his detailed explorations of how the attainment of objective knowledge was connected to essentially subjective sources. Husserl’s initial, epistemologically oriented, studies focused on assessing the *intentional* character of mental states in the attainment of knowledge.³ This focus on intentionality and the concomitant role of mental acts for presenting intentional objects was soon found to contain theoretical limitations and Husserl eventually came to radicalize his approach and expand his analyses to embrace fields such as temporality, inter-subjectivity and culture from within a “transcendental” phenomenological perspective. Through his later phenomenological studies, moreover, Husserl sought to provide a more systematic treatment of the role of subjectivity in constituting both theoretical claims (such as the origin of the laws of formal logic in pre-predicative experience), as well as the essential role played by perception in establishing how objects and meanings are given in “intuitive” acts of fulfillment.

From early on, in other words, Husserl maintained that a descriptive account of internal factors was important for understanding the structure of our knowledge claims. It can be shown that Husserl’s concern with belief as a *species* of internal states plays an essential role in the formation and the later expansion of his phenomenological method, beginning with his exploration of psychologism in the connection of mental acts to logical truth. As is well known, Husserl published the first part of his *Logical Investigations* (the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*) in 1900 and therein catalogued and criticized various forms of psychologism.⁴ In the *Prolegomena*, the psychologistic positions explored included: anthropological and psychological interpretations of

the validity of logical laws (cf. Husserl, 2001, vol. 1, §§ 39–40), the theory of thought-economy: a sort of evolutionary or biological reductionism regarding knowledge claims (ibid., §§ 52–6), as well as radical empirical accounts of how we gain knowledge, as found in, for example, the empiricism of John Stuart Mill (ibid., § 26). While Husserl shared a strong interest in exploring thought and consciousness with earlier psychologists and psychologicist philosophers, he remained a vociferous critic of psychologism throughout his life. This led him to take up some interesting positions regarding subjectivity, objectivity and the connection between the two. To thematize the difference between subjectivity and objectivity in a more adequate manner, Husserl originally understood interior experience in a narrow manner, a result of his focus on descriptive psychological studies of the relation of mental acts to mathematical objects and the objective status of logical laws. In other words, early on, the mental is viewed by Husserl as a medium for revealing the stable elements of adequately given contents manifested in cognitive judgments.

With his “breakthrough to phenomenology”, however, Husserl came to expand the implications of his theory of the intentionality of consciousness. Beginning in the second part of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl views phenomenology as resulting from determined efforts “to lay bare the subjective sources (from which) objective scientific judgments originate”.⁵ To reveal these sources various descriptive studies of *meaning-taking* signitive and intuitive *meaning-fulfilling* intentional acts were utilized.⁶ Whenever we think about something, Husserl maintains, the correlate of our thought is an intentional object (Husserl, 1979: 303–348). Depending what I am thinking about, moreover, my thought content (along with the meaning I intend) need not even exist in the natural world. For this reason, from early on, Husserl came to believe that the structure of mental reference is not essentially related to transcendent entities. Nonetheless, Husserl also quickly began to view his original foray into descriptive accounts of experience as unsatisfactory. Descriptive psychology failed to capture the full import and the dynamic-open structure of intentional experiences. As a corrective Husserl developed his mature “transcendental” approach to phenomenology but only after various attempts at revising and expanding the earlier analytic “descriptive” phenomenology proved unsuccessful.⁷

Subjective experience and objective categories: Husserl's movement to the transcendental

Originally, interior access to evidence was relied on by Husserl to clarify the epistemic relationship of intuitions (immediate direct awareness) to objects and contents given through experience. In his earliest writings, the role of intentional objects or contents (along with their modes of givenness) were deemed important for understanding how subjective factors work in helping secure knowledge and meaning. Although influenced in this regard by the earlier philosophical work of the British empiricists, from early on Husserl rejected the empiricist assumption that consciousness is either reducible to physiological/natural categories or analogous to some kind of “container” for holding ideas.⁸ Critical of the theory that “internal ideas”, as a medium for representing the world, can produce knowledge (through mental mechanisms of “association”) the entire “way of ideas” is effectively diagnosed by Husserl as the result of an empiricist distortion of the true nature of perceptual experience.⁹ At this stage, Husserl insists, beliefs require reasons, but if doxastic justification relates solely to immanent ideas then it will be rendered problematic. Even if, as Husserl came to realize, internal properties of mental states are immediately accessible, the “non-mental” world that the beliefs are purportedly about (that is,

physical or transcendent objects and events) are rendered only indirectly accessible on a representationalist model of reference and meaning. Thus, from early on Husserl's writings directly address what later philosophers call the “access problem” in epistemology. According to Husserl, skepticism (which ultimately is also what a strong psychologism amounts to) easily arises regarding the reliability of even the most basic belief claims if radical empiricist assumptions about the mind are uncritically accepted.

Upon concluding that pure empiricism manifests fatal theoretical weaknesses, therefore, Husserl began to broaden his framework to include a critical assessment of how we attain knowledge.¹⁰ To say Husserl was critical of empiricism, therefore, is not to say that representations and mental factors for accessing the world (such as intentionality, feelings, judgments and even the “association of ideas”), do not have an important role in his account of mental life. According to Husserl, however, these processes are misunderstood when reduced to objectivist categories dependent upon external causal factors. As regards perception, for example, Husserlian phenomenology criticizes all earlier forms of representational realism. From the *Logical Investigations* onwards, perception is described as directly giving objects and phenomenal data that provides evidence about how the world is. Through perception, which is frequently correlated to public objects given directly “in the flesh” (“*leibhaft*”), we achieve immediate access to both objects in the world and the structure of perceptual experience.

Nonetheless, Husserl early on accepted that physical objects are, by their nature, given in a necessarily incomplete way. For example, my computer is presented to me from a particular perspective. Many of the details about its appearance are, of necessity, permanently hidden from me (I cannot currently see its micro-processors or internal wiring, but I assume they exist and can anticipate seeing them if I, for example, take the required steps of opening up the computer's outer casing). Matters are different in the case of concepts and ideas. What is mental, according to the early Husserl, can be given with adequacy and even apodictically, that is, with maximum evidence, through higher order “categorical” experiences. Therefore, that I am thinking about the computer as existing is impossible to doubt. That its colored surface is presented to me simultaneously with the perception of its presence in a spatial-temporal field is another *a priori* feature of perception. In this way, apart from perceiving the property of existence as adhering to any actual object or quality, the factors necessary for determining the justification for my saying “there is a computer in front of me” are largely internal to the structure of the perceptive acts that present the computer.

Given the above, Husserl's early phenomenology deemed descriptive psychology of mental acts as necessary for understanding both intuitive and symbolic presentations of objects. However, even at this early stage Husserl's thought eschews a simplistic classification of mental acts as fully justifying knowledge. Under the influence of the neo-Kantian thinker Hermann Lotze and his one-time teacher the psychologist Carl Stumpf, Husserl had developed a doctrine of “states of affairs” (*Sachverhalt*) as *ideal* and transcendent (non-physical and non-mental) references of expressions or propositions. The reference base, by contrast, accessible privately, was early on called the “situation of affairs” (*Sachlage*) by Husserl. The same represented situation (the *Sachlage* that “a computer is present on the desk”), can be apprehended in different ways by different people leading to a different situation constituting and justifying the same state of affairs as true or false (cf. Husserl, 2001, vol. 1, *Prol.* Chp. 11, pp. 144–161 and *Inv.* 1, §§ 11–13, pp. 194–199). As will be seen, these distinctions will prove essential to making

sense of the difference between truth-stating (propositional) contents versus truth-making (world-dependent) factors and, from early on will inform the Husserlian account for establishing the basis of truth. The different levels of reflection that distinguish, for example, the apprehension of something in a judgment, along with the required representational content as the possibility condition for making a judgment in the first place, is an important distinction introduced in the *Logical Investigations* and developed more fully by Husserl in later writings.¹¹

Refusing to give either internal or external factors a privileged epistemological role, therefore, the early Husserl implies that neither the extra-mental existence of a transcendent object nor the subjectively experienced sensuous contents of a concrete intuitive presentation are the most relevant factors for affirming the correlates of meaningful expressions. In the *Investigations*, Husserl instead offers a theory of “ideal” objects (there called “species”) grasped through judgments involving *categorical* intuitions, as constituting the ultimate objective reference for meaning and truth claims. Although, as we will see, this platonic understanding of semantics introduces an ambiguity on Husserl’s part regarding the ontological status of purely transcendent objects, in making the objective correlates of acts the primary focus of his research Husserl was spurred to develop a more detailed delimitation of what is “interior”. To further expand his phenomenological project, however, Husserl deemed it necessary to seek nothing less than the radical reform of modern philosophy since the time of Descartes. He proceeded to undertake this goal by theoretically conjoining the innate teleological sense of rational life to nature in a new way.

Subjectivity and Interiority as Natural versus phenomenologically apprehended contents

In a programmatic essay from 1911, outlining his idea of philosophy, Husserl asks:

How can experience as consciousness give or make contact with an object? How can experiences be mutually legitimated or corrected by means of each other, and not merely replace each other or confirm each other subjectively? How can the play of a consciousness whose logic is empirical make objectively valid statements, valid for things that are in and for themselves? Why are the playing rules, so to speak, of consciousness not irrelevant for things? How is natural science to be comprehensible in absolutely every case, to the extent that it pretends at every step to posit and to know a nature that is in itself- in itself in opposition to the subjective flow of consciousness? (Husserl, 1965: 87–88).¹²

Husserl’s earlier “analytic” phenomenology (in the *Investigations*) also tried to answer the above questions but was unable to adequately clarify the ambivalence of the subjective activity making objective knowledge possible. Using descriptive and psychological categories in the *Investigations*, Husserl effectively bypassed any account of non-empirical factors, for example, the “ego-pole” as center of all experience, and ignored the more basic constitutive sources of meaning and knowledge. In other words, Husserl’s original studies of consciousness took cognitive acts to be intentionally directed but also viewed them as methodologically divorced from any deeper analysis of the internally apprehended noetic sources of those same acts. Later, after the *Ideas I*, Husserl comes to publically maintain that the “*ego cogito*”, now understood as an “ego-pole” of pure experiences, indicates an “openly infinite” multiplicity of particular *concrete subjective* processes centered within a “transcendental ego”.

Embracing a transcendental approach leads Husserl to transform phenomenology into a much more ambitious undertaking, one seeking a broader account of experience than was found in his initial descriptive studies. The turn to the subject in the later Husserl is also accompanied by a subsequent method for obtaining adequate knowledge of the proper foundations for a transcendental project, that is, the transcendental phenomenological reduction. The term reduction (from the Latin *re-ducere*: to lead back) suggests the radical movement towards interiority that characterizes this direct and immediate contact with the world of experience. Pure phenomenology, according to Husserl, will explore experience before we apply our conceptual categories and scientific theories to its lived meanings.¹³ Since Husserl’s later approach is “transcendental” we might here question the validity of calling the insights he is seeking “internal”. This assumption, however, fails to take into account the epistemological aims involved in the use of the method of reduction, as well as Husserl’s simultaneous commitment to a non-deflationary yet also anti-representationalist view of consciousness. Briefly, if the reduction is a way of relating to the already existing world, and if the world reveals itself to us directly in what Husserl calls “positing acts”, then the immanently present psychological mental acts in their intentional world-directed nature must be the access point to initiating the reduction. In fact they form the only possible access point. To think otherwise is to fall prey to the objectivist bias of the natural attitude. In this respect, the factors that led Husserl to radicalize his earlier phenomenological approach can here be noted. Where the earlier descriptive studies posited a separation between internal and psychological, that is, concrete but subjective, acts of consciousness as distinct from the ideal species and adequately grasped meanings, a significant change about the sense of the terms “factual” and “essential” takes place in his thinking between 1900 and 1912 (culminating in the publication of *Ideas I* in 1913).

In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl opposes the “real” to both the “ideal” and the “universal” (*cf.* Husserl, 2001, vol. 1, Inv. I, §3; 8/Husserl, 1984, vol. 2, p. 101; 123). By the time of the *Ideas I*, however, (and continuing into later writings) what is “real” comes to signify what Husserl calls the “transcendent” (of the ego-pole) content with “*irreal being*” now equated to the *immanent being* of pure consciousness. What this amounts to, beyond the introduction of a “transcendental ego” delimiting a new conception of the unity of subjective life, is a reinterpretation of the fact/essence distinction. Husserl reinterprets the categories of “fact” and “essence” against a new distinction between what he calls “immanence” and “transcendence” now explored in light of sustained attempts to highlight the most basic foundations of knowledge as constituted by conscious acts.

Around 1907, Husserl clarifies that the distinction between fact and essence can actually be found within the realm of “pure consciousness” conceived as an interior sphere of egoic-life.¹⁴ Factual and “absolute phenomena” (now called, in allusion to Descartes, *cogitationes*) are held to be immanent in the sense relevant to the phenomenologist. Yet, what Husserl calls “logical modifications” of *cogitationes*, including their singular, specific and generic essences, are now described as immanent in a new sense. Since an essence does not possess its being as a “*reell*” part of the stream of consciousness, what is essential cannot be immanent in the stronger “phenomenological” sense of that term. Therefore interiority, transcendently apprehended and revealed in phenomenologically reduced consciousness, has (for Husserl) a different mode of being than subjective and real mental processes. In this way, a new understanding of transcendence (called “transcendence in immanence”) is stressed by Husserl. Transcendence in immanence can be distinguished from the transcendence manifested by transcendent objects and ideal

essences, even if both of the latter are now revealed only in the former. So the focus on interiority comes to have a more central and elaborate role in Husserl's phenomenology even as he radicalizes and expands the meaning of intentionality by applying the reduction. For this reason, Husserl's "ontologically motivated" distinction of interiority from external being through use of the reduction, once again, requires qualification.

While true that, in the first part of the *Ideas I*, Husserl introduces his transcendental phenomenology by focusing on formal and material ontologies (as "regions", cf. Husserl, 1980, §§ 9–17, 18–32), this focus on existence now becomes a *transcendental* exercise. Husserl's "regions of being" are not meant to designate transcendent being (the natural world-horizon). Making use of the phenomenological reduction, Husserl is concerned with how objectivity is "constituted" (made sense of) by examining purely immanent possibility conditions. In the *Ideas I*, for example, consciousness is ultimately conceived of as a region unto itself.¹⁵ Here, and elsewhere, consciousness is equated to a primal region (*Urregion*) grounding all others (Husserl, 1980, § 33, 65–66). This is not because, as immanent being, consciousness is opposed to or metaphysically removed from worldly existence by Husserl; rather he came to believe that consciousness is what establishes access to the world for us in its "factual" (*faktisch*) sense. In the *Ideas I*, Husserl both introduces a preliminary version of the *paradox of subjectivity* (it would more prominently resurface and also be officially named in the *Crisis* manuscript) and gives unquestionable support to an internalist account of justifying beliefs. In *Ideas I* paragraph 53, he writes:

...on the one hand consciousness is said to be the absolute in which everything transcendent and, therefore, ultimately the whole psychophysical world, becomes constituted; and, on the other hand, consciousness is said to be a subordinate real event within that world. How can these statements be reconciled? (Husserl, 1980: 124)

And in paragraph 54 we find the following:

All empirical unities, and, therefore, also psychological mental processes, are *indices pointing to concatenations of absolute mental processes* having a distinctive essential formation, along with which *other* formations are imaginable; all are, in the same sense, transcendent, merely relative, accidental. One must convince oneself that the obviousness with which every mental process in one's own life or in another's is accepted, and quite legitimately, as a psychological and psychophysical sequence of states of an animate subject, has its limit in the aforementioned consideration: that in contrast to the empirical mental process there stands, as a *presupposition for the sense of that process, the absolute* mental process; that the latter is not a metaphysical construction but rather something which, in its absoluteness, can become indubitably demonstrated, given in direct intuition by a corresponding change in one's attitude. One must convince oneself that *anything psychical, in the sense relevant to psychology, psychical personality, psychical properties, mental processes or states, are empirical unities* and are, therefore, like other realities of every kind and level, merely unities of intentional "constitution" in its sense, truly existing: intuible, experienceable, scientifically determinable on the basis of experience, but still "merely intentional" and hence merely "relative." To take them as existing in the absolute sense is consequently a countersense (Husserl, 1980: 128).

Husserl is, therefore, obviously interested in interiority as a possibility condition of "sense-making" activities for all living

rational beings. He is also now quite adamant that no logical-abstract or empirical (including psychological) approach to conceptualizing interiority is sufficient for fully grasping its depths. This means that the immanent actuality of *transcendentally apprehended* consciousness, in its full significance, cannot be captured in any "eidetic" reduction and instead requires the more radical *transcendental phenomenological* reduction.¹⁶ It does not mean that the space of interiority is understood negatively or viewed as what constitutes a hidden realm derived from external transcendent structures or spatio-temporal and causally conditioned external events and relations. Husserl's position, however, is problematic due to its failure to fully engage with, and outline a metaphysical account of, what can be called the "noematic correlates" of noetic activity. Here, some comments on how Husserl's static-phenomenological understanding of interiority connects to the immanence of the phenomenological ground uncovered in the reduction will prove useful.

In moving from bracketing the world (through the *epoché*), and after actualizing the transcendental phenomenological reduction to capture the true sense of the immediate internal acts of perception in reflection, nothing less than the *neutralization* of the "doxic-positing" (*Setzen*) of being is said to be achieved. Therefore, from an initial suspension of what Husserl calls "the natural attitude", all connection to the worldly "being-sense" of objects can be said to be analogously suspended (Husserl, 1980, §§ 31–32, 57–62). The suspension of the "being sense" of natural worldly life is not, however, an abstract transformation of the data of empirical consciousness, or a reflection of the external world inside our minds. This turn inwards is instead viewed by Husserl as a deepening of the full sense of normal, worldly, object-taking conscious acts. Instead of taking consciousness for granted, however, we now grasp how positing acts work to give rise to the natural supposition (*Vermutung*) of an external world. Examining the implications of these experiential accomplishments reflectively is what allows the intentionality of consciousness to be viewed as a theme for exploration. Husserl then introduces new terminology (the *noesis-noema* correlation) for thematizing the fact that doxic acts are always object-taking (cf. Husserl, 2001b: 17–22; 267).¹⁷ However, as mentioned, this initial static account of the transcendental reduction remains unsatisfactory since no ontological analysis accompanies Husserl's descriptive phenomenological accounts of the structures of experience.¹⁸

After expanding his studies to include further analyses of temporality (mostly excluded from the *Ideas I*), and after stressing the intersubjective nature of transcendental experience, Husserl came to hold that an even deeper (but passive) level of constitution exists.¹⁹ In his later writings, he attempts to more clearly formulate this distinction between a deeper sphere of interiority and related levels of immanence contributing to the constitution of meaning. The internal horizon (complementing the external horizon of the world) is thus equated to the realm of *transcendental subjectivity*. For the mature Husserl, furthermore, all doxic-positing in the transcendental attitude comes to be viewed as a modal modification of intentional horizontal consciousness (*Längsintentionalität*). As a consequence of transcendental intentional analysis what is "interior" now gains yet another perspective from which to be apprehended in relation to objective structures. The phenomenological reduction (later undergoing yet another critical modification into what can be called an "apodictic" reduction, cf. Husserl, 2002: 178) is now articulated by Husserl as incrementally allowing further and more radically dynamic perspectives on interiority.²⁰ The later Husserl introduces the term "transcendental experience" in order to study what he calls these "essential structures" revealed by deeper insights into passive aspects of consciousness. In his exploration

of internal time consciousness, for example, Husserl came to believe that the flow of time opens a new dimension of transcendence for the ego. Since time is the essential condition against which all conscious acts unfold, a pre-temporal vertical intentionality (*Querintentionalität*) must complement horizontal intentional acts with the two working in tandem to constitute the deepest level of experience: absolute consciousness (Husserl, 1990: 80–81).²¹

In later studies, Husserl also describes both *pure* and *empirical* acts of consciousness as revealing essential data. Regarding the sense of internal factors relating to experience, Husserl gives detailed accounts of how consciousness manifest its very own “felt necessities” that are not to be confused with “causal” factors influencing knowledge and, therefore, should not be confused with objective forces outside of experience. “Motivations”, instead, are said to be expressions of internally formed habits, instinctually connecting together subjective life (*cf.* Husserl, 1989b, §§ 56, 63). However, no causal or genetic laws can be turned to for determining the unfolding of these intentional acts and, in the same way, no externalist account of knowledge attainment can fully explain how knowing subjects can grasp objective facts about the world that can be both intuitively and inter-subjectively confirmed.

By the early 1920’s, therefore, Husserl had come to maintain that no form of neutralization could characterize the absence of doxic positing in an act of pure free fantasy (*freie Phantasie*) (Husserl, 2001b, § 20). Fantasy or imagination, as internal thought, is, in this way, clearly separated from both acts of memory and other merely subjective forms of image consciousness. These later formulations have consequences for how the mature Husserl comes to clarify his method of eidetic variation which, in turn, influences his understanding of both adequate knowledge and apodictic or essential insights.²² Husserl’s studies of inter-subjectivity and the essentially embodied status of cognition also led him to eventually understand truth as fully and actually grasped by an *embodied living ego-subject* in the *Life-world*.

Transcendental Phenomenology as a response to the “paradox of subjectivity”

Transcendental philosophy in general has been called a “philosophy of the subject” (*cf.* Henrich, 2003). Husserl would have agreed with this characterization and his explorations of the foundation of experience led him (although anticipated here by Kant) to locate access to an “*a priori*” within the knowing subject. The turn inward, as Husserl was also aware, marked his project as broadly Cartesian (and, therefore, modern) in essence. Husserl’s project has been described as a “(truer) synthesis of rationalism and empiricism than what Kant was able to offer”.²³ Here, it can be noted that interesting consequences for understanding interiority and internalist factors in justifying knowledge result from Husserl’s transcendental methods. The method of eidetic variation, for example, can be distinguished from any straightforward psychological act of apprehending contents. When we reflect without performing the reduction, we focus on interior data given in imagination or internal images in consciousness that are indirectly dependent on real but subjective conditions. Through the reduction, Husserl thinks, we can purify all empirical factors leading to a subjective focus but one that helps us to grasp *essential* structures. This new assessment of access to necessary structures vitiates against viewing Husserl’s transcendental concept of the interior as a closed off container or Cartesian theater. In effect, it can be said, in deconstructing the “natural attitude”, Husserl’s thought became even more radically opposed to the reified “container” models of consciousness.

In his transcendental phenomenology, therefore, Husserl is interested in interiority as opening up a radical form of immanence different in kind from any psychological or worldly sense of interior private space. Husserl’s accomplishment here cannot be underestimated. If the reduction is workable, then transcendence in immanence can be viewed as both internal and external with consequences for any exploration of epistemological questions. Although some of the essentialist aspects of the transcendental strategy used to justify the full reduction will be criticized below—vitiating against Husserl’s claims that he can adequately secure the transcendence of essences from an analyses of consciousness — rather than reject Husserl’s mature methodology and assumptions outright, we can instead take a different approach. For example, one thing that seems certain is that Husserl’s transcendental methods address matters that are relevant to epistemology. In distinguishing the properly “phenomenological” realm (transcendental subjectivity) from both transcendent ‘worldly’ and transcendent ‘eidetic’ spheres, for example, the reduction offers a more radical exploration of interiority than can be found in alternative approaches. Moreover, in highlighting how interior conditions act as essential to the attainment of knowledge, Husserl’s phenomenology highlights how the “paradox of subjectivity” should be of central concern to any fully philosophical account of belief formation and the attainment of knowledge.

Thus, while at no point in his career did Husserl subordinate the clarification of essences to real or psychologically internal conscious states, he was later puzzled about how natural consciousness (as descriptively apprehended) provides proper motivation for engaging in the transcendental reduction permitting access to transcendental subjectivity. If, as his genetic studies led him to believe, passive affection is the primordial foundation of perception and knowledge, and if passive genetic constitution (and temporality) are beyond the grasp of apodictic descriptive insights, this leads to an immediate tension regarding the determination of the essential differences between the subjective structures in concrete versus their transcendental forms (that is, as apprehended from within the transcendental perspective). This complex problem finds expression in Husserl’s mature thought by a new focus being placed on the “paradox of subjectivity”. According to the mature Husserl the paradox of subjectivity can be said to arise when we attempt to theoretically account for essential and objective structures, the facts grasped by thought, by relegating them the unavoidable epistemic status of conditions somehow connected to subjectivity.²⁴ An obvious candidate for theoretically classifying subjective states, and thereby classifying different experiences, is the science of psychology. However, as was noted, the later Husserl held psychology to be incapable (in any of its existing forms) of addressing the paradox of subjectivity. For this reason, and since it is not a properly transcendental approach to investigating experience, Husserl held that psychology shared the failure of all previous scientific attempts to distinguish between worldly and transcendental contents in consciousness.

The paradox of subjectivity, therefore, cannot be addressed by objective science, since natural scientific knowledge is bound to the “natural attitude” and, as such, does not attempt to answer ultimate questions about, for example, the justification of principles of logic and knowledge claims. Objective science, therefore, ignores the essential *being-status* of the phenomena it explores. In a similar vein, the positive sciences are said to take the natural world for granted. Phenomenology, by contrast, accepts the paradox of subjectivity by tracing its origin to the hidden—constituting—acts of consciousness making up the ultimate horizon of knowledge: the life-world. As a result, Husserl came to accept that subjectivity is essentially correlated to

every objective content or transcendent entity precisely as the pre-condition for appearances. The paradox is resolved, Husserl thinks, once the basic tenets of transcendental idealism are accepted as central to phenomenology. We can then accept that we are both natural beings in the world, but also necessarily dependent, in order to actualize the full dimensions of our cognitive lives, on the inter-subjectively constituted structures of transcendental consciousness.

Internalism and Externalism *redux* or what Husserlian phenomenology can contribute to epistemological internalism

In contemporary epistemology the focus on how interior sources are relevant for justifying belief claims has led to a debate surrounding the distinction between “internalist” versus “externalist” explanations of the justification of knowledge. While many philosophers have noted that the concepts “internal” and “external” are, in effect, ambivalent blanket terms, very few have offered sustained phenomenological assessments to help clarify the sense these concepts have. Subsequently, few epistemologists connect the internalism-externalism debate to the paradox of subjectivity. The above examination of Husserlian phenomenology, however, has provided important clues for how an internalist might further address the philosophical question of what role thought and consciousness have in grasping truth. Since his writings carefully explored the subjective elements necessary for allowing us to grasp truth in the first place, Husserl’s phenomenology may also be able to shed light on the internalism/externalism debate.

The main virtue of applying Husserlian tools to existing internalist frameworks is the help they might provide in more carefully examining what is called “the basing problem”, that is, the relation between beliefs and our reasons for holding them, by highlighting how the examination of the role of “truth-making” conditions in relation to properly internal factors in the formation and justification of belief is important. Subsequently, the essence of truth—if we adopt a Husserlian strategy—cannot be grounded on interiority understood in any empirical or real (spatio-temporal) sense. Nonetheless, internal or immanent conditions must be present to both establish reference and do work as necessary conditions for securing belief and evidence. Truth, for Husserl, is manifested in a mediated way through experience but cannot be established on contingent “causal” grounds or in any solely subjective way.

Nonetheless, Husserl’s approach can still be viewed critically insofar as, on his account, interiority (understood phenomenologically) can never give full access to the absolute transcendence of phenomena.²⁵ This last fact points to a challenge facing orthodox Husserlians who must address the prominent role played by the method of the transcendental reduction as a strategy for clarifying truth claims by suspending all external relations. In this respect it is interesting to note that, to date, Husserl’s name has been invoked by proponents of both internalism and externalism, as well as critics of both approaches, in support of their positions.²⁶ In what follows I will argue, building on the above outline of Husserl’s thought, that transcendental phenomenology can be viewed as a *sui generis* form of internalism. This renders Husserlian phenomenology relevant for addressing questions central to epistemological internalism, nonetheless its methods run into limits that will require supplementation if any ontological or deeper analysis of the internal and external as philosophical categories are to be arrived at.

David Woodruff Smith summed up the ongoing problem of characterizing the metaphysical status of Husserl’s thought in one brief sentence: “The question ‘Realism or Idealism or What?’ is

perhaps the thorniest branch of interpretation in Husserl scholarship” (Smith, 2007: 169).²⁷ In his later writings, Husserl claimed that his mature transcendental idealism should not be understood as metaphysical in any traditional sense of that term. Although Husserl’s position has been read as amounting to a fundamental break with all traditional philosophy and metaphysics (in fact all earlier modes of thought), there exist many references in his writings that indicate how phenomenology aimed at being more than merely methodological in scope. In his later years, for example, Husserl often viewed his project as a radical and pure science but also as manifesting an explicitly philosophical dimension.²⁸ These references, to be sure, can be confusing. For Husserl’s phenomenology to be philosophical in the deepest sense implies a metaphysical understanding of his project.

While most commentators seem to agree that Husserl’s mature or transcendental phenomenology has (or implies) some kind of idealist metaphysical doctrine at its core (usually also characterized as compatible with a Cartesian sense of metaphysical “internalism” in epistemology), Smith is correct that there is no universal agreement on how to interpret Husserl’s phenomenology as metaphysics. We are, however, in many ways, in a better position today to answer the above question of how to understand the relation between Husserlian phenomenology and ontology or theory of external and mind-independent being than many of Husserl’s contemporaries were.²⁹ Perhaps because of the often voiced assessment that Husserl was a Cartesian, his thought is still frequently taken to advocate a strongly immanentist form of internalism. This assessment can be challenged on several fronts. As was shown above, the details of Husserl’s “Cartesian” strategy for establishing truth conditions for knowledge is, first, hardly analogous to what some contemporary philosophers call internalism—either traditional (representationalist) or modern (mentalistic) accounts, and especially not if we mean the term in a stronger ontologically committed sense. Husserl’s focus on interiority, as was claimed above, cannot be taken as equivalent to any simple advocacy of subjective reflection or empirical introspection as leading to anything like a reliable justification of knowledge claims.³⁰

What Husserl can contribute to the position of internalism is the following. To begin, his writings can help articulate how the focus on ultimate justification must be explored with some reference to the phenomenology of knowing. As was outlined above, Husserl’s strategy goes hand in hand with attempts to gain insight into both the essence of scientific knowledge and the possibility conditions for any knowledge whatsoever. After the transcendental-phenomenological reduction is undertaken, Husserl maintains, pre-delineated and intuitively apprehended “apodictic” insights can be obtained. These justified insights are the only possible way to establish the most fundamental conditions for making truth-claims. Truth for Husserl, as for many philosophers, has a central role in the study of knowledge but whereas earlier thinkers (such as Descartes and his empiricist successors) took either “clarity” and “distinctness” or the vivacity of subjective ideas and impressions to be the conditions for discerning truth, Husserl focuses on evidence as given either in a mediated or immediate manner and with or without adequacy and apodicticity.

Ignoring (for various reasons) the naive or popular distinction between the “inner” and the “outer” (as understood for example by so-called “folk psychology”), whether we take the philosophical category of “internalism” to signify what can be called epistemological (*semantic*) levels of establishing truth-making conditions or an ontological and metaphysical category representing a concrete aspect of mind-independent reality, it can be seen that Husserl has something to contribute to improving our

understanding of the internal. Epistemological internalism, for example, is a necessary condition for understanding truth according to Husserl.³¹ On this view, in order for someone to grasp the truth of a proposition “that p” (that is, p’s being the case) a necessarily internal set of events is required. The above mentioned theory of “epistemological internalism” is sometimes formulated with an attendant stronger claim that the mental (or “mind dependent” aspects of the grounding of our knowledge claims) is in some significant sense also sufficient for grasping truth; independent of external factors in establishing what a proposition is about. Husserl’s work is also relevant here. The above stronger formulation of the “access problem” promoting knowledge internalism can be described as presenting individuation conditions for thoughts and thought contents as established *inter alia* without any direct reference to wider “non-mental” (read: physical or objective) contexts, or objects, or states of affairs.³² Here, Husserl would disagree.

According to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, the reflective insights into both adequate and apodictic sources of knowledge are neither strongly internalist nor statically formal or externalist. Whereas, it might be believed that phenomenology makes internal reflection on concepts an always adequately given and secure source for grasping truth (as was the case for Descartes), Husserl came to view the internal horizon of experience as inadequate since conditioned by temporal aspects. Moreover, precisely as temporally conditioned, Husserl’s phenomenological insights cannot be tied into any deductive or strictly formal sources to begin with, as they are simply not given in anything like an enclosed delimited “interior space”. Through his genetic studies of the temporal nature of pre-predicative experience, for example, Husserl tried to show how the ultimate normative basis for all knowledge (whether formal-scientific or non-formal) was the ecstatic self-constituting ground of the intersubjective field of transcendental subjectivity. Viewed as a region or space of meaning, this ground can effectively be described as a sedimented series of accomplishments in the ultimate world-horizon: the life-world. Finally, the life-world, while the true source of all experience and knowledge, is also viewed by Husserl as a field of ego-monads.³³

Taking all the above factors into consideration we can say that, on the Husserlian framework, the process of affirming truth can be parsed as follows. First it requires a basis (something that can be immediately grasped as true or false) and, subsequently, our truth-claims must meet specific conditions (requirements of fulfillment) that can establish what-is-the-case. The latter, truth-making conditions, of course, are what internalists and externalists largely disagree about. As we saw, Husserl, from early on, made internal conditions essential for truth-making. Furthermore, in his work we find a theory of propositional content (truth-bearing conditions) that can be distinguished from cognitive judgments (as intentional acts constituting situations and forming beliefs that can be true or false) with propositions and judgment acts both distinguished from states-of-affairs which (if verified in experience) become the truth-makers. How is the claim that my computer is on my desk corroborated? On Husserl’s account by looking at my desk and seeing that my computer is there before me. The same sensual immediate access to evidence confirming a veridical perception, moreover, is also at work serving as a founding act which forms the basis that permits the achievement of higher order truths.

Nonetheless, in outlining Husserl’s thought in the above way and imposing it onto the internalism-externalism debate, we quickly run up against Smith’s problem of interpreting the accompanying “transcendental idealism” that Husserl himself stressed was essential to his mature project (*cf.* Husserl, 1950: 119). After all, according to Husserl, the computer is given to me

in a series of necessarily subjective acts that reveal its presence through a connection of “adumbrations” or aspects that unfold in a law-like way. In adopting a postulate of epistemic primacy and branding the computer a transcendent and not imagined or hallucinated object, this still leaves open the question of what the real existential status of the computer might be. In this respect, maintaining that Husserl is an externalist, because a mind-transcendent object “causes” our beliefs about existence to form, is untenable. This reading seems to presuppose that some kind of systematic ontological position can be attributed to Husserl’s later phenomenological thought (and this does not seem to be the case). In fact, Husserl was apparently unable to complete the ultimate synthesis that his phenomenological studies required to establish a fully philosophical account of his research. Finally, it can be said that Husserl’s essentialism, especially as it relates to his generative phenomenological method (in linking passive forms of motivation to external and causal categories conditioning static forms of constitution) also remains problematic precisely as a philosophical account of essentialism in relation to a descriptive ground for establishing ultimate existence claims.³⁴

Given the central role of intuiting essences and bracketing existence claims in Husserl’s overall strategy, the above shortcomings render any metaphysical interpretation of his system problematic at best. Therefore, and since the ultimate transcendence of objects and essential structures are given in phenomenological immanence, Husserl cannot be called an epistemological externalist. Husserl’s phenomenology, therefore, should be regarded as a *sui generis* form of internalism.

Conclusion

It was shown how Husserl’s thought, from early on, focused on understanding interiority and immanence as essential aspects of experience. Through his transcendental approach to phenomenology Husserl attempted to categorize different forms of immanence and analyse the role of various reflective acts in establishing truth claims. In conclusion, Husserlian phenomenology can be viewed as a *sui generis* kind of internalism with, as was pointed out, tensions resulting from his position (especially regarding the incorporation of his essentialist framework premised on the transcendental method of reduction, to non-transcendentally conceived ontological categories). These tensions work to mitigate against affirmations of Husserlian phenomenology as epistemologically externalist. Criticisms of its brand of essentialism, however, do not diminish the usefulness of the role that Husserlian phenomenology can have in better understanding internalism and externalism. For example, externalist positions, in positing a standard for knowledge lying beyond experience (premissing, in effect, “a view from nowhere”) and holding beliefs to be ultimately justified independent of any essentially subjective factors, render themselves incoherent from the Husserlian perspective, since they ignore and bypass, rather than engage with, the “paradox of subjectivity”. By contrast, taken seriously, Husserl’s paradox of subjectivity provides an important clue in exploring the nature of knowledge and the connection between experience and science. The above study has shown how a fuller understanding of Husserl’s writings is important to these contemporary concerns.

Nonetheless, any application of transcendental phenomenology to these problems must ultimately move beyond a strictly phenomenological account of the ultimate categories of transcendence or immanence. Insofar as we are interested in understanding interiority philosophically, however, few thinkers provide more resources for exploring this theme in greater detail than Husserl.

Notes

- 1 A large part of the problem in resolving the internalism/externalism question is certainly due to the ambiguity of those terms. Internalism, for example, can be regarded either as a category in meta-epistemology or as an idealist position making a stronger, ontological, case about the grounds for the justification of beliefs. In what follows I defend an epistemological reading of internalism that borrows resources developed by Husserl for exploring the justification of knowledge. Epistemologically, the strength of maintaining an internalist versus externalist view of the justification of belief states can be connected to the more coherent resolution offered by the former to what contemporary epistemologists call the “access problem” and the “basing requirements” necessary for explaining the content of a belief state. For some historical background on the categories “externalist” and “internalist” as well as a critical assessment of the accompanying vagueness of these terms in contemporary philosophy of mind, cf. (Feldman and Conee, 2004). For more details on how internalist factors are related to epistemic justification as responses to Gettier cases (cf. Feldman and Conee, 2004, esp. pp. 144–146 and Poston, 2017). Further accounts of internalist versus externalist arguments for justifying belief can be found in (Pappas, 2017). For an influential advocate of the “externalist” strategy see (Armstrong, 1973) (which may be the earliest known use of the term “externalism”). For modern applications of internalist accounts of knowledge attainment used in a contemporary sense outside of the phenomenological tradition, and stemming from a broadly conceived “Cartesian” premises, cf. (Goldman, 1980: 27–52) and (Bonjour, 1980: 53–74).
- 2 Husserl’s original phenomenological method began to take shape at the turn of the twentieth century and grew out of earlier sustained analyses of the theoretical foundations of logic and mathematics. For examples of Husserl’s earlier writings on mathematics, logic and descriptive psychology see: (Husserl, 1970), (Husserl, 1983), and (Husserl, 1979).
- 3 Intentionality in contemporary philosophy is a technical term for describing the character of “aboutness” or directedness that thought has. Understood in this way, it is not concerned with practical intentions or pragmatic aspects of behavior and thought. Terminologically, the concept of mental intentionality is a development of the Aristotelian-Scholastic notion of the “intention” signifying object-directed thinking. Husserl, however, uses the term as it was used by his teacher Franz Brentano who introduced the concept of “intentional inexistence” in his writings. Brentano not only re-introduces the Scholastic terminology but interprets it in the context of a modern psychological framework by making intentionality the empirically relevant “mark of the mental”. Brentano also characterized intentional quality of psychic object-taking acts as their “aboutness” and manifesting a “relation-like” quality that pertains to all mental life and helps distinguish it from what he called “physical phenomena”. cf. (Brentano, 1874: 124–126).
- 4 The full texts of the *Investigations* can be found in: (Husserl, 1975), (Husserl, 1984), (Husserl, 2001) and (Husserl, 2002b).
- 5 For an account of Husserl’s own purpose for writing the *Investigations* see (Husserl, 1975b).
- 6 cf. (Husserl, 2001, vol. 2, p. 166). As Robert Sokolowski points out, Husserl’s studies begin “not by looking inward at consciousness...[or making use of]...introspection” but: “through the public, palpable and worldly phenomena of signs, both indicative and expressive”, (cf. Sokolowski, 2002: 171).
- 7 The work of developing transcendental phenomenology, subsequently, would occupy Husserl for the rest of his life. His ambitions for moving phenomenology into a transcendental framework also led Husserl to publish introduction after introduction to the phenomenological method. These programmatic introductions make up most of his mature published work. They span from *Ideen I* (1913) (cf. Husserl, 1980) to *Cartesianische Meditationen* (1929) (cf. Husserl, 1950) and the late work: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* (1936) (cf. Husserl, 1954). As is also well known, Husserl’s published works were only the tip of an iceberg of thousands of pages of important research manuscripts (*Forschungsmanuskripte*). Husserl’s manuscripts bear witness to the depth of his project as he undertakes therein concrete phenomenological studies often expanding on, but sometimes questioning, earlier results.
- 8 The shared features and differences of Husserl approach with the methods of the earlier British empiricists have been remarked upon. For example, see Richard T. Murphy who notes: “[t]hroughout his works...Husserl...often praised [the British empiricists] and, in particular, saw in Hume’s philosophy the culmination of a worthwhile tradition, which constitutes the authentic forerunner of strict phenomenology” (Murphy, 1980: 90).
- 9 This assessment is maintained into his mature writings cf. Husserl’s critique of Locke’s “physicalized soul” in the *Krisis* manuscript (Husserl, 1954: 85/Husserl, 1970b: 63). By 1911 Husserl attributes the appeal of empiricism to uncritical acceptance of a naturalist framework as ontologically valid for explaining consciousness. In what follows our interest is in Husserl’s understanding of these earlier movements and thinkers in his writings, any detailed consideration of how accurately or faithfully he interprets earlier systems is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 10 Although the original aim of Husserl’s project was to provide a coherent theory of science, in exploring questions about the origins of experience and knowledge his work provides many philosophical insights. For example, Husserl’s critical assessment of empiricism as a flawed epistemology leads him to maintain an alternative, phenomenologically informed, account of how general ideas and concepts originate. On this point, see the Second Logical Investigation (Husserl, 2001, vol. 1, Inv. II, § 21) and (Husserl, 1969: 14/ Husserl, 1974: 13).
- 11 For the early Husserl, interior aspects of mental acts serves as a foundation for contributing to meaning. Founded and experienced contents participate in the signitive role of intending meaning and also contribute to the expression of actual meaning by constituting “intentional” objectivating acts possessing both a “material” and “qualitative” aspect, cf. (Husserl, 1984/2 96–7/Husserl, 2001: 244–246). Intentional acts also present objects and contents and in this way can fulfill (or fail to fulfill) meaning intentions. Objectivating acts as treated in the Sixth Logical Investigation and held there to be the interior conditions for making possible both significative (meaning-bestowing) and intuitive (meaning-fulfilling) conditions in both sensuous and categorial intuition cf. (Husserl, 1984/2, p. 748; 749–750). The focus on perception and its role in linking meaning to reference, however, is also richly exploited by Husserl in the sections of the *Investigations* treating of “indexical” expressions cf., (Husserl, 2001/1, §§ 13ff, p. 26; vol. 2/Inv. VI, §§ 4, 25, 44, and so on.).
- 12 cf. (Husserl, 1965: 71–147). The allusions above to the “validity” of statements (*Geltung*) and things valid “in” and “for” themselves, are a testament, even at this late date, to the strong influence on Husserl’s thought of the earlier German thinkers Bernard Bolzano and R. Hermann Lotze.
- 13 The transcendental reduction in Husserl, therefore, is meant to serve a dual role. First, it allows insight into the fundamental grounds of knowledge and being, that is, eliminating skeptical threats to objective knowledge by *showing* the grounds of that knowledge. This point should be stressed since many read Husserl’s *epoché* and methods of bracketing as themselves skeptical moves and related to the “removal the world of things”. As will be shown, the reduction is better viewed as a radical modification of reflection allowing for concrete insights and Husserl was convinced anyone could learn and practice it. The reduction, therefore, combines practical or regulative with theoretical concerns and insights about epistemology. Through the reduction Husserl wants to elucidate how beliefs can be justified and evidence that can lead us to truth and authentic knowledge obtained.
- 14 Husserl thinks that it is within an immanent sphere of immediate accessibility that we are given both “absolute phenomena in their singularity” and phenomena as the objects of “ideating abstraction” cf. (Husserl, 1950: 7, 35–8).
- 15 For an account of regional ontology in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology cf. (Landgrebe, 1963: 145ff).
- 16 Nonetheless, many critics of the *Ideas I* understood Husserl’s theory of “eidetic variation” as the giving of a key role to subjective exercises of imagination as constituting the phenomenological method. This reading, of course, distorts the actual meaning of the reduction by binding phenomenology to a quasi-aesthetic mode of reflection. This mistaken reading also confuses the different kinds of reflection elucidated by Husserl in the *Ideas I* and elsewhere. In effect, the above interpretation takes transcendental phenomenology to be a kind of eidetic psychology, that is, a science of essences obtained in a psychologically immanent–internal-sphere. However, Husserl was very clear that this was not the case: “[C]onsciousness, as a datum of psychological experience...is an object of psychology, in experiential scientific research, an object of empirical psychology; in essential scientific research, an object of eidetic psychology. On the other hand, as having the modification effected by parenthesizing, the whole world with all its psychical individuals and their psychical processes [*Erlebnisse*], belongs within phenomenology: all of it as a correlate of absolute consciousness” (Husserl, 1980: 172 translation slightly modified/ Husserl, 1976: 143). Obviously this “within” should not be understood in an objectivist, that is, externalist, sense.
- 17 cf. (Husserl, 2001b).
- 18 The entire account of the noema in the *Ideas I* is fraught with problems. To take only one example, Husserl claims that the “iterability” of imaginative presentations allows for the fact that one can imagine imagining an object [cf. Husserl, 1976: 251–253]. Here, one is genuinely forced to wonder how the above representation can be in any way “eidetically manifested”? What is missing from the account of the reduction in *Ideas I* are Husserl’s genetic methods and involvement of constitution at the deeper level of internal time-consciousness.
- 19 The study of time consciousness will open up, for Husserl, genetic phenomenological studies of constitution. In *Ideas I* §81, Husserl writes: “time is a name for a completely delimited sphere of problems and one of exceptional difficulty” (Husserl, 1980: 193).
- 20 cf. (Husserl, 2002).
- 21 What this implies, according to Husserl, is both that consciousness is internally related only to itself and that the absolute flow of consciousness is, properly speaking, “supra-” or trans-temporal: “The flow is something we speak of in conformity with what is constituted...[it is] ...absolute subjectivity and has the absolute properties of something to be designated metaphorically as a “flow”: the absolute properties of a point of actuality, of the primal source-point “now”, and so on. In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of reverberation. For all this, we have no names.” (Husserl, 1990: 370).
- 22 cf. for example, see (Husserl, 1939b), the posthumously published *Erfahrung und Urteil*, §§ 87a–d for an account essential seeing as grounded on pre-predicative experience.
- 23 See (Banham, 2005: 2–3). On transcendental philosophy see (Heinrich, 2003). On Husserl’s characterization of phenomenology as transcendental philosophy of experience, see Part II of *Ideas I* § 62 where he claims: “[i]t is understandable that phenomenology is, so to speak, the secret nostalgia of all modern philosophy.”

- (Husserl, 1980: 142). Husserl adds that the first thinker to truly perceive the profundity of Descartes' fundamental thought, (that is, the turn to the subject) was Kant, albeit with the disclaimer that Kant misinterprets phenomenology as a form of transcendental psychology. Elsewhere Husserl writes of how transcendental phenomenology is the only single philosophy among all modern thought: "...in which modernity's striving for the transcendental [has achieved] complete clarity and provided a solidly formed, apodictically necessary idea of transcendental philosophy" (Husserl, 1989: 168).
- 24 In the *Crisis* text § 53 Husserl writes: "...[T]he juxtaposition subjectivity in the world as "object" and at the same time "conscious subject for the world," contain a necessary theoretical question, that of understanding how this is possible" (Husserl, 1970b: 180–181). The paradox of subjectivity seems to be the mature correlate of what Don Welton refers to as "the paradox of objectivity" in Husserl's earlier pre-transcendental writings. According to Welton, the possibility of the condition for an object realm cannot itself be objective (that is, another object realm). Instead, in the *Logical Investigations*, consciousness [the condition for the presentation of "real" objects] is at times described by Husserl precisely as just such an *ideal* object realm. *cf.* (Welton, 2000: 73–74). Thus, on this reading Husserl moves his thought into a consistently transcendental position after the *Investigations* precisely to avoid this problem; yet the radical presupposition of pure subjective structures grounding all possible experience now call for their own explanation that his transcendental phenomenology will seek, with varying degrees of success, to provide.
- 25 Intuitive or immediate givenness is at the heart of Husserl's phenomenological method, guided by what he called the principle of principles: "every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition..." (Husserl, 1980: 44). Nonetheless Husserl acknowledged that different types of intuition give evidence according to varying degrees of objectivity. Regarding external transcendence towards phenomena, there can be no immediate insight into the true nature or aspects of reality, which transcend intuitive presentation. To better understand these dimensions, Husserl says, the symbolic knowledge of the positive sciences is required. Unfortunately, Husserl also thinks that phenomenology is supposed to clarify the nature and role of these same objective sciences and be a "science of science". These claims lead to tensions in his work regarding the proper role of phenomenology as metaphysics-elucidating what is beyond the grasp of empirical science, and as an eidetic science in its own right clarifying the basis and foundations of all knowledge claims.
- 26 A. D. Smith, for example, has described Husserl's phenomenological approach as providing potential insights into, and a more sophisticated understanding of, externalism and mental reference. Smith argues that Husserl's phenomenology provides both a "disjunctivist" understanding of the mind-world relationship as well as articulating a realist account of intentional acts related to the "world horizon" (*cf.* Smith, 2008: 313–33). Dan Zahavi, on the other hand, has claimed that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology explodes the purported internalist/externalist distinctions altogether (*cf.* Zahavi, 2004: 42–66). More precisely Zahavi thinks that, in important ways, Husserl's thought transcends or corrects the Cartesian tradition of the "philosophy of the subject" (the latter, of course, being the internalist tradition that Husserl's thought is frequently seen as exemplifying). Zahavi also maintains that Husserlian phenomenology is a viable alternative to what he describes as "analytical" approaches in philosophy of mind. Thus, according to Zahavi, if we take Husserl's transcendental idealism seriously it can potentially call into question "the very division between inner and outer" (Zahavi, 2004: 52). Finally, Lilian Alweiss has likewise defended the position that Husserl (at least in the *Investigations*) is not a methodological solipsist as any strong "internalist" reading of his thought would contend. Even so, she argues that there are definite internalist aspects present in his epistemology (Alweiss, 2009: 53–78). There seems to be, therefore, no consensus on the exact position Husserl's own writings have in relation to contemporary internalist-externalist strategies and no universal agreement about what his thought can precisely contribute to the debate.
- 27 *cf.* (Smith, 2007).
- 28 For example see Husserl's letter to Dilthey of July 5/6, 1911 (Husserl, 1994: 50) and his correspondence with the German/Swiss philosopher Karl Jöel, March 11, 1914 (Husserl, 1994: 206–207). Evidence can be found that Husserl's phenomenology does make use of concepts and theories that point precisely to the subject matter that is normally the focus of traditional philosophy and metaphysics. These concepts include: necessity, existence, the absolute, and so on. The relationship between phenomenology and philosophy moreover, can be corroborated from notes present in Husserl's research manuscripts and private correspondence. Nonetheless, translation of Husserl's categories into traditional philosophical ones is rendered difficult by his own insistence that doing this is a "mortal sin" ("*Todessünde*") prohibited by his phenomenology. *cf.* (Husserl, 2002: 73).
- 29 The reason for this is that the editing and publication of Husserl research manuscripts (many of them written in an outdated shorthand script called *Gabelsberger*) has only recently released volumes dealing closely with philosophy and metaphysics. *cf.* <https://hiw.kuleuven.be/hua/editionspublications/husserliana-gesammetewerke>. Much of the content of these volumes still needs to be interpreted and more material is planned for publication. *cf.* (Bernet, 2004).
- 30 Of course few modern internalists, excepting perhaps radical coherentists and idealists would accept this characterization of epistemological internalism. Nonetheless it has been said to characterize Husserl's thought. However, this reading is easily dispelled. For example, reference to his writings shows how, as early as 1902, in lectures developing his theory of the reduction Husserl clarifies his position in relation to Descartes. Descartes, he writes, was interested in constructing an *absolutely fixed basis* for knowledge (*absoluten sicheren Fundamenten*) by turning inward. Husserl, by contrast, argues that he is not interested in this goal and describes his own focus as being placed on the clarification of epistemological questions (*cf.* Husserl, 2001c: 90).
- 31 Historically, this immanent data has been called alternatively "reflection on presentations" (Descartes), "ideas" (Locke), or "impressions" (Hume). More recently, following the lead of Hilary Putnam, internal data has been conceptualized to signify the semantic conditions we require to, at the very least, make sense of truth claims. Putnam deems this position "semantic internalism" and it amounts to the hypothesis that, on some fundamental level, subjective mental or psychological factors condition thought and are a *necessary* component of understanding both truth and meaning (Putnam, 1975: 131–133). The Husserlian notion of the noema seems to have a similar role as the contents of semantic internalists, but without uncritically presupposing the same naive naturalistic ontology.
- 32 For more detailed descriptions of these concepts see (Voltolini, 2005).
- 33 As in the case of calling his transcendental project "Cartesian", the use of the term "monad" is not to be taken in the traditional sense as used by Leibniz (that is, a self-enclosed, metaphysically isolated *windowless* and pre-programmed spiritual substance). For one thing, although Husserl says that the ego as a "sphere of ownness" is an "absolute...monadic and primordial sphere" (Husserl, 1950, CM, IV, § 34, p. 103; V, § 47, pp. 134–5), he also stresses that this sphere of ownness intrinsically manifests "transcendence towards the intersubjective world" as an *essential* aspect of its nature. Other descriptions of the transcendental ego as a "monad" make clear that Husserl views it as always in an individuated process of becoming (*read*: not temporally finite or closed off). As Anthony Steinbock attempts to clarify: "Self-temporalizing consciousness constitutes itself primordially as a unity of becoming in and through its experiences, that is, through its diverse living presents" (Steinbock, 1995: 33). Husserl's frequently infelicitous choice of terms to characterize his ideas sometimes makes one wonder if he did not harbour an almost neurotic urge to be misunderstood.
- 34 In this respect see Xavier Zubiri's brilliant (but unfair) critique of Husserl's theory of essences. In his assessment Zubiri claims, *pace* Husserl, that essences cannot be the meanings of things, but must be viewed as intrinsic formal properties of reality. Although I think this a successful critique of Husserl's static phenomenology, Zubiri's assessment ignores Husserl's genetic and generative approach, which is closer in spirit to his own later conception of an "open-essence" in relation to human existence (Zubiri, 1980: 57–65). See also (Zhok, 2012) where it is argued that Husserlian essences emerge from temporal experience and should therefore be viewed as "*ontological thresholds*" separating "what is individual and transient from what is stable and, therefore, 'truly existent'" (Zhok, 2012: 127).

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were analysed or generated.

Additional information

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