

Chapter 9

Phenomenal Experience and the Scope of Phenomenology: A Husserlian Response to Some Wittgensteinian Remarks

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Introduction

In his groundbreaking work published in 1913, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Husserl affirms that ‘phenomenology is, so to speak, the secret nostalgia of all modern philosophy’ (1982, p. 142). Although we have to wait until the *First Philosophy* lecture in 1923/24 to find an extensive interpretation of the history of modern philosophy from the point of view of phenomenology, the core insight expressed in this brief statement is clear enough. The kind of thematization and direct investigation of subjectivity as the transcendental source of all meaning and objectivity that phenomenology sets out to accomplish brings to an explicit and mature expression a tendency that is present in the work of the major philosophers of the early modern period up to Kant: “The striving toward phenomenology was present already in the wonderfully profound Cartesian fundamental considerations; then, again, in the psychologism of the Lockean school; Hume almost set foot upon its domain, but with blinded eyes. And then the first to correctly see it was Kant, whose greatest intuitions become wholly understandable to us only when we had obtained by hard work a fully clear awareness of the peculiarity of the province belonging to phenomenology” (Husserl 1982, p. 142).

If we look at the history of philosophy after Kant, however, we see that this ‘nostalgia’ reaches far beyond the age from Königsberg. In fact, the term ‘phenomenology’ figures in the work of the most ambitious and original philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In particular, it seems to arise wherever the project of a radically new and encompassing philosophical project is undertaken. Apart from Husserl and all the thinkers directly inspired by him, we

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find sustained claims to ‘phenomenology’ both before and independently from Husserl. Hegel entitles his breakthrough in absolute idealism *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of American pragmatism, starts from the beginning of the twentieth century to enhance his early semiotic account of reality with a discipline that he calls ‘phenomenology’ or ‘phaneroscopy,’ which was not just meant to be an appendix or a preliminary stage of his sign-centered pragmatic philosophy but rather a fundamental dimension of inquiry, a set of problems and questions “upon the answers to which, whatever they may be, our final conclusion concerning pragmatism must mainly repose at last” (Peirce 1998, p. 147). And, last but not least, in 1930, we find Wittgenstein responding to Drury, a colleague who was going to attend a conference at the Cambridge Moral Science Club, where he would be asked to comment on Wittgenstein’s work: ‘You could say of my work that it is phenomenology’ (Gier 1990, p. 273).

It goes without saying that the appropriation of the label ‘phenomenology’ by each of these prominent figures does not prove anything *per se* about the philosophical agenda that they pursued under it. It would be naive at best to argue that, since such different philosophers all employ the term ‘phenomenology’ to label their work or some decisive portions of it, they must in some respect share a common project, and even less, that they must somehow share Husserl’s project. However, the appropriation of the label phenomenology is by no means irrelevant. It does not point at a shared project, but I believe it does point at a shared *demand*. This demand is that philosophical claims may be underpinned *as much as possible* by direct descriptions of our experience. However, and this is where all differences spring from, there is no obvious sense attached to words such as ‘experience’, let alone ‘phenomenological description of experience’ or ‘phenomenology.’ In view of the manifold appeals to experience and phenomenological description in modern philosophy both before and after Husserl a decisive set of questions arises: (1) *how much description of experience is of import in philosophy?* (2) *What is it exactly that we describe when we describe our experience?* (3) *What shall we reasonably hope to achieve, philosophically speaking, from a description of experience?*

The different, more or less explicit answers to such questions identify the different projects envisioned when something like a phenomenology is called for. The broader the import of experience for philosophy is understood to be, the richer the scope and the ambition of the envisioned phenomenology. My plan for this paper is obviously not to provide definitive answers to the above questions, which would require a much more extended treatment than a single paper allows. However, I would like to set a basis for a possible line of research suggested by these questions by way of contrasting two divergent views of ‘phenomenal experience’ and ‘phenomenology’: Husserl’s and Wittgenstein’s. I will show how Husserl’s broader understanding of what phenomenology is about bears more fruit—philosophically speaking—than Wittgenstein’s. I will address some remarks by the late Wittgenstein in his *Bemerkungen über die Farben* [*Remarks on Colour*] concerning precisely this point, in order to then counter them from a Husserlian point of view. My thesis is that Wittgenstein (at least in the remarks I will consider)

fails to acknowledge the full scope of phenomenology and that Husserl's work concretely shows that there is more to achieve philosophically with phenomenological descriptions of experience than Wittgenstein concedes. This point is particularly timely if we consider that, as I will argue, the renaissance of phenomenological disputes in contemporary philosophy of mind and the references to phenomenal knowledge in epistemology are largely reliant on Wittgenstein's characterization of phenomenology.

The analyses presented in this paper can be considered a late supplement to Richard Cobb-Stevens' seminal book *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy* (Cobb-Stevens 1990). It is Cobb-Stevens' merit to have presented a first full-scale comparison of Husserl's phenomenology and the analytic tradition. In this context he also discusses Wittgenstein's philosophy at some length (1990, pp. 32–50.) However, and in accordance with the overall target of the book, he tackles primarily linguistic issues, which characterized the first decades of so called analytic philosophy. However, now that terms such as 'phenomenal knowledge', 'first-person perspective' and 'phenomenology' have gained currency in the analytic debate, it is appropriate to revive the spirit of Cobb-Stevens inquiry and address directly Wittgenstein's conception of phenomenology. In spite of recent conciliatory approaches (cf. e.g. Benoist & Laugier 2004), I hope to show that Wittgenstein and Husserl *do not* agree on the scope of phenomenology. While Wittgenstein endorses a form of phenomenalism according to which phenomenology is exclusively about the qualitative side of experience, Husserl's work broadens the scope of phenomenology and in so doing progressively transforms the philosophical meaning of descriptions of experience. Experience is not simply the realm of the appearance of things but rather the field in which both things and all kinds of connection between things are constituted.

First, I will introduce Wittgenstein's position. In so doing I will not claim to provide any original contribution to the debate concerning the idea of phenomenology in the different phases of Wittgenstein's thought, but simply to report and interpret some statements, which, by virtue of their clarity, can be paradigmatically considered in order to display a possible position on the scope of phenomenology. Second, I will sketch out Husserl's treatment of the problems of logic. *Contra* Wittgenstein, this will prove logic as the first and fundamental field in which phenomenology displays its philosophical import. Third, I will address the relationship between the domain of experience and empirical being from the point of view of transcendental philosophy. Drawing in particular on one insightful manuscript and some other recently published Husserlian materials, I wish to show that the scope of phenomenology also includes empirical being, primarily in its characterization as *being* (and without therefore altering its *meaning* as empirical). As a conclusion I will address the sense of phenomenology as a discipline, arguing that phenomenological problems are not just a bunch of disconnected difficulties but that they systematically lead back to a unitary root underlying all of them—what Husserl called transcendental subjectivity.

Wittgensteinian Temptations

In *Remarks on Colour*, a collection of notes written in 1950 and 1951 shortly before his death, Wittgenstein contends, in spite of what he had stated about his own work 20 years earlier, that “there is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenological problems” (1977, p. 9e). As is usual in his later work, Wittgenstein does not provide us with arguments to sustain his thesis. Nonetheless, this aphoristic remark is more than simply an extemporaneous statement of Wittgenstein’s overall anti-systematic and piecemeal approach to philosophy. Rather, it entails a sustained view on the status of phenomenology that clearly comes to light in further notes.¹ In particular, the conviction that “there is no such thing as phenomenology” is a direct consequence of what he considers “phenomenological problems” to be. Let me expand on this point.

As suggested by the title of this collection of notes, Wittgenstein is engaged in an attempt to understand the laws governing our experience of colors. At issue are phenomena such as comparisons between brighter and darker nuances of the same color (why do we speak of the *same* color, being once brighter, once darker?), regularities and irregularities in the combination of primary colors (why do we directly perceive the red element in a shade of orange as a yellow tending to the red, while we do not directly perceive the blue element in a greenish yellow, as a yellow tending to the blue and rather see it as tending to the green?), and the like. These are, according to Wittgenstein, paradigmatic phenomenological problems. In order to be tackled, they essentially imply a reference to our subjective experience of the world. Basically, they are problems pertaining to the *qualitative dimension of experience*. In fact, the qualitative dimension of experience turns out for Wittgenstein to be the *only* dimension where genuinely phenomenological problems arise.

In one further note, Wittgenstein proposes the following description: “Blending in white removes the *colouredness* from the colour; but blending in yellow does not” (1977, p. 15e). However, immediately after he asks, “But what kind of a proposition is that, that blending in white removes the colouredness from the colour? As I mean it, it can’t be a proposition of physics. Here the temptation to believe in a phenomenology, *something midway between science and logic*, is very great” (1977, p. 15e, my italics). By locating phenomenology this way (or better, by telling us where he would be tempted to locate it, if there were such a thing) Wittgenstein reveals his unexpressed assumption, which consequently leads him to the rebuttal of the idea of a phenomenology and to a conception of experience as a

¹ Interestingly, the few Wittgenstein scholars, who took this statement into consideration seem not to be really keen on thinking through its implications. Gier finds the statement ‘odd’, given Wittgenstein’s previous commitment to phenomenology (see Gier 1990, p. 278). Brenner, instead, grants us that Wittgenstein actually meant the opposite of what he wrote: ‘Wittgenstein’s negative comment on phenomenology in *Remarks on Colour* should not be taken as a rejection of everything that has gone under that name. Indeed, he would insist that, properly understood, there is such a thing as phenomenology’ (Brenner 1982, p. 298. n. 3).

domain of essentially scattered problems, as I will explain in a moment. Phenomenology, if there were such a thing, would pertain to the qualitative zone that stretches midway between the pure formality of logic and the mere empiricity of the properties of mind-independent, physical objects. In the domain of the qualitative, namely, we have problems and riddles that essentially need to be addressed in phenomenological terms (as is the case with colors). This is not the case when it comes to logic and physics. The manifestation in experience of logical and physical objects is a non-essential feature; they can and must be dealt with by referring to very different criteria than subjective modes of appearance. Thus, the midway-status of phenomenology suggested by Wittgenstein provides us with a relevant point concerning what he conceives phenomenological problems to be and, consequently, how he determines the scope of phenomenology. Experience, in its philosophically relevant sense, is the domain of the qualitative, such as colors. And, this restriction is precisely the reason why there cannot be such a thing as phenomenology for Wittgenstein, i.e., a systematic account of this domain. As he states: “here language-games decide” (1977, p. 3e), and language-games never identify substantive structures allowing for a scientific, systematic account but only changeable, life-related practices: “There is, after all, no *commonly* accepted criterion for what is a colour, unless it is one of our colours” (1977, p. 4e).

Linguistic ascriptions of qualitative properties to experienced things are for Wittgenstein the only kind of orientation we have to chart the terrain of experience (conceived of as the domain of the qualitative) and the regularity of such ascriptions depends upon essentially variable conditions: “Imagine a *tribe* of colour-blind people, and there could easily be one. They would not have the same colour concepts as we do. For even assuming they speak, e.g. English, and thus have all the English colour words, they would still use them differently than we do and would *learn* their use differently” (1977, p. 4e). All regularities we might find in the domain of the qualitative are essentially liable to change and do not form a substantive interconnection suitable to be fixed in scientific terms: “The various colour concepts are certainly closely related to one another, the various “colour words” have a related use, but there are, on the other hand, all kinds of differences” (1977, p. 26e). Given these differences that essentially characterize the domain of the qualitative (the one in whose scope, according to Wittgenstein, phenomenological problems come about) the idea of a “science” pertaining to it is a non-starter. The only philosophical project suitable for the domain of the qualitative is the charting of our intrinsically relative and variable ways to orient ourselves in it, namely, through linguistic ascriptions.

To sum up and highlight the core point, in his *Remarks on Colour*, Wittgenstein tacitly propagates the view that phenomenology becomes philosophically relevant only when it comes to the clarification of the qualitative side of experience. This kind of clarification does not allow for a science but only for piecemeal mappings of disconnected problems. The space of such problems—phenomenological problems—stretches midway between science and logic. When it comes to science and logic, consequently, the problems stop being phenomenological and we reach the limits of the import of experience and its description in philosophy.

Now, it is easy to see that this sketched view is tacitly accepted by many of the participants in the contemporary debate about *qualia* and the so-called phenomenal knowledge. Even philosophers, such as Frank Jackson, Thomas Nagel, John Searle or Sidney Shoemaker, who want to defend the epistemic relevance and irreducibility of our qualitative experience of the world, maintain that experience is fundamental only or at least primarily when it comes to this qualitative side of things. To paraphrase Nagel (1974), phenomenal knowledge pertains to the “what-it-is-like” aspect of things. Or, as in Frank Jackson’s famous paper (1986), phenomenal knowledge becomes relevant only when Mary leaves the colorless room in which she grew up and encounters for the first time a colorful world.

To be sure, our qualitative experience of the world does not only pertain to colors. We have qualitative connotations of sensations, such as pain, of perceptions, such as beauty and ugliness, and the like. For all these phenomena, subjective experience indeed has a great import. However, if this were all, then Wittgenstein would be right to argue that there is no phenomenology but only phenomenological problems, namely, piecemeal what-it-is-like problems. But is it true that experience and its phenomenological description primarily or exclusively regard the qualitative side of things? And is it true, accordingly, that phenomenological problems must be located midway between logic and science? I believe that the answer has to be negative. The contrary is true, namely, that the import of experience and its description primarily regard the possibility of a philosophical foundation of logic and the clarification of the status of mind-independent objects in the physical world, precisely the ones treated by the natural sciences. Husserl, I want to argue, provides us with all the necessary theoretical tools to realize this not only in principle, but in great detail and through substantive analyses.

Phenomenality and Logic

The import of phenomenology in logic is strictly related to the unfinished debate between psychologism and logicism. From a psychologistic point of view, the elements and laws of logic are essentially the expression of how the human mind functions. Consequently, logic is to be considered as a branch of psychology. According to this position, the universality and necessity we ascribe to logical constituents leads back to the factual structures of the human mind. For instance, the conjunction of things we refer to when we say “A and B” is an expression of the conjunction of thoughts that diachronically occurs in our mind, namely, the thought of A and the thought of B. The form of conjunction expressed by the word ‘and’ is founded on the ability of our mind to relate mental states to one another. According to a logicist perspective, on the contrary, logical constituents are not expressions of the structure of the human mind but *objective forms and relations* that the human mind is able to grasp but that possess their validity in themselves. The source of validity of the pure form of conjunction (to stay with our example) lies in the very relation it expresses and its logical properties (such as “A and B” = “B and A”),

which have nothing to do with the diachronic succession of thoughts in an empirical mind. We do not need to refer to mental processes and states in order to account for such validity. Rather, it is the mind itself that operates within the space identified by objective logic validities.

The two theories seemingly call for a clear-cut one-or-the-other kind of decision. And still one feels somehow uncomfortable in having to make a decision. On the one hand, rebutting logicism seems to imply a depreciation of logic as well as absurd consequences; one should, e.g., admit that if our mind were structured differently, then a different form of thought might happen to 'replace' conjunction. But what would a replacement mean in this case? Can we really conceive of a relation 'replacing' conjunction? Rebutting psychologism, on the other hand, seems to imply a kind of logical Platonism that makes it extremely hard to account for the plain fact that, in the end, it is us with our empirical minds that articulate such a discipline as logic and that are capable of grasping and verifying logical relations. Cats and dogs, as far as we know, do not possess this capacity. Thus, logicism seems to imply a depreciation of the peculiar status of the human mind, without which such a thing as logic would be unconceivable. Given this puzzling situation, how are we to make a decision?

The prime merit of Husserl's phenomenological approach to this problem in the *Logical Investigations* is to have clearly highlighted that here, against all appearance, there is no decision to be made. Logicism and psychologism are not contrasting theories on the *same* objects but rather two distinct focuses on two distinct and yet correlated dimensions of logic. But this clearly comes to light only if the phenomenological dimension is addressed, i.e., if we inquire into the way logical elements and relations are given to us within our concrete experience. Logical validities are not experienced directly, in simple acts of consciousness. Rather, they are given to us as the intentional correlates of complex intentional acts through which our empirical minds can relate to them. The structure of such complex intentional acts is a phenomenal structure, i.e., it manifests itself in experience and can be described. Let me briefly expand on this point. The strategy of distinguishing between mental acts and contents of mental acts and charging psychologism with failing to draw such a distinction was developed by defenders of logicism, such as Frege, in order to debunk their psychologistic adversaries.² Husserl adopts this distinction and thus rebuts psychologism, but he goes a step further: He argues for the necessity of drawing a second distinction within the very notion of "content," which the logicists want to hold is independent from that of the mental act. The content, in the case of pure logic, is on the one hand the purely ideal validity of the grasped state of affairs, and on the other, the real, immanent, and phenomenal

² Cobb-Stevens aptly emphasizes that this distinction and Frege's ensuing anti-psychologism is "the founding document of the analytic tradition." (Cobb-Stevens 1990, p. 2) The difference between Husserl and Frege on this point is that while they are both critics of psychologism, Husserl never endorsed an *anti*-psychologism but on the contrary attempted to reformulate the "reasons" of psychologism so that they would not put in jeopardy the objective validity of logic.

content that makes this grasping possible for us by fulfilling intentions directed towards the ideality of the logical state of affairs. This second dimension is not itself just a mental act performed by an empirical mind, but rather, something indwelling and integral to a mental act, belonging to its internal intentional sense but still not exhausting the “transcendent,” objective sense of the validities thereby intended. The title ‘phenomenology of logic’ does not just mean the being-manifested of logical validities in concrete acts of thought, but rather, it identifies those definite phenomenal elements internal to these acts that put us in connection with logical validities by fulfilling the intentions directed towards these validities. Phenomenology of logic is all about laying out and defining such elements. As Husserl writes: “Phenomenology [...] lays bare the “sources” from which the basic concepts and ideal laws of *pure* logic “flow,” and back to which they must once more be traced, so as to give them all the “clearness and distinctness” needed for an understanding, and for an epistemological critique, of pure logic” (1975, pp. 249–250).

This becomes especially clear through Husserl’s notion of categorial intuition, developed in the Sixth *Logical Investigation*. In this groundbreaking text Husserl shows that all the intentions directed towards logical idealities (elementary concepts such as concept, proposition, truth, etc.; syntactical forms such as disjunction, conjunction, etc.; categories of meaning such as object, state of affairs, etc.) may be intuitively fulfilled, and thus grasped with evidence, through the peculiar syntheses that occur in underlying acts of simple perception when we articulate them cognitively by highlighting some of their characterizing features. To keep our previous example, when we concretely perform the conjunction “A and B,” say, “this glass and this pen,” we do not have just the sum of two single perceptions, but we also intend, albeit at first only implicitly, the relation of conjunction, of which the glass and the pen are articulated as members. If we study this perception we see that whereas the intention “glass” and the intention “pen” may be fulfilled by sensible materials, which we directly experience (the actual profiles or “adumbrations” of the two objects), the syntactical component of conjunction, “and,” may not. There is evidently nothing in our sensuous experience capable of fulfilling the intention “and” in the same way in which the intention “glass” may be fulfilled. And yet the peculiar synthetic link of the two objects that we evidently grasp when we shift from the simple directedness towards them to the consideration of the state of affairs of their being conjoined in an “and-relation”, albeit not being a sensible content, is capable of intuitively fulfilling the general intention “conjunction”. In so doing, the synthetic link instantiates the pure relation it expresses in the concrete case of “this glass and this pen”. When we are simply directed towards “this glass and this pen” we experience this glass *in* conjunction with this pen and not *the* conjunction of this glass and this pen. If we correspondently shift our attention to the conjunction, Husserl argues, we are not simply grasping the same object (this glass in conjunction with this pen) in a different light, rather we re-direct our intention and grasp a higher-order, non-sensible object, namely, the relation of conjunction *as* fulfilled (more or less adequately) by the state of affairs “this glass and this pen”.

This grasping, contra psychologism, is not a concealed production. We do not produce the validity of the relation of conjunction by mentally linking the sensibly fulfilled perception of A to the sensibly fulfilled perception of B, but rather we grasp this relation in its pure ideality by correspondently shifting the direction of our intentionality to the state of affairs as such, thereby intending something other than its internal elements. However, and contrary to orthodox logicism, the possibility of being instantiated in mental acts through the intuitive fulfillment provided by the articulating thematization of a state of affairs as such—and thereby being grasped with evidence—*belongs to the very essence of logical validity*. The dimension of phenomenal, describable experience is thus located at the very heart of logical validity. The fact that we can grasp logical validities in their pure ideality and operate with them in the domain of concrete experience is due to the fact that logic is embedded in phenomenal experience, and not just the expression of the empirical structures of our empirical mind. As Robert Sokolowski puts it in his recent book *Phenomenology of the Human Person*: “Logical form or syntactic structure does not have to issue from inborn powers in our brains, nor does it have to come from a priori structures of the mind. It arises through an enhancement of perception, a lifting of perception into thought, by a new way of making things present to us” (2008, p. 57).

Some prominent phenomenologists, notably Merleau-Ponty and Rudolf Bernet, characterized Husserl’s position as an intermediate solution between psychologism and logicism. However, by highlighting the import of phenomenal experience in logic, Husserl does not merely mediate between logicism and psychologism, but rather discloses a new and challenging dimension of being and lays the foundation for an entirely new account of logic. Furthermore, the meaning of “phenomenological description of experience” undergoes an important transformation if compared to Wittgenstein’s phenomenalism. Describing experience phenomenologically does not merely amount to describing its qualitative side. Rather, a phenomenological description of experience aims at identifying and articulating those structures that render experience intelligible and find their systematic expression in logic.

Phenomenology and Empirical Being

The second half of Wittgenstein’s remark implies that phenomenological problems do not directly pertain to the ambit of reality investigated by the natural sciences. According to Wittgenstein, phenomenology, if there were such a thing, would be something midway between logic and science. We have seen how phenomenal experience has a foundational import to logic. In this section I would like to sketch out Husserl’s location of phenomenology with respect to the natural sciences. Wittgenstein’s position on this point, although he does not make it explicit in the remark we considered, may be easily motivated by the following train of thought: The natural sciences investigate empirical being in its intrinsic properties. Such properties, for the most part, seem to have nothing to do with our immediate

experience of things. Often they even seem to counter our phenomenal experience: The chemical constituents of water, for instance, expressed by the formula H_2O may not be experienced in simple first person perception. Moreover, the fact that water is made of countless clumps of atoms seems to counter our direct experience of a continuous, colorless liquid. Thus, as regards empirical being, a radical distinction seems to be consistently motivated. On the one hand, we have phenomenology (which views water as a continuous, colorless liquid), which pertains to the way empirical being qualitatively appears to us, and on the other hand, we have natural science (teaching us that water is H_2O), which pertains to the way empirical being is in itself. This is patently nothing but the distinction between primary and secondary qualities famously drawn by Galileo Galilei at the very dawn of modern natural science. If such a distinction were the last word on this issue, then phenomenal experience indeed should be understood as a non-essential dimension as regards empirical being. But, Husserl has shown that there is more to be said and that phenomenologically describable experience, on the contrary, has a foundational priority when it comes to empirical being. This can be shown by means of two considerations, (1) genetic and (2) transcendental:

(1) Although it is certainly true that many properties of empirical being discovered by the natural sciences do not manifest themselves directly in the domain of phenomenologically describable experience, it does not follow that such properties have nothing to do with it. When we predicate of water that it is made of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, we specify a property that we ascribe precisely to that colorless and continuous liquid, which we experience phenomenally. The simple perception of water as an empirically existing reality and the set of predicates we can articulate about it in direct experience (colorless, liquid, etc.) are the necessary presupposition for all the further inquiries we can carry out on it and, consequently, for all the conceivable sets of predicates we can articulate through such inquiries. As Husserl puts it in the recently published 1909 lecture *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*: “The scientific knowledge of nature too, just like the common-sense knowledge already does, works only in this way: it infers from what is immediately experienced, i.e. perceived, to what is not perceived. Non-perceived being is thus largely assumed within physical nature, however, only on the basis of perceived being” (2005, p. 13).³ The mode of givenness of water in simple perception as an existing reality bearing definite perceptual properties is the source of the motivation that pushes our reason to carry forward our inquiry and to lay bare new properties, which do not manifest themselves immediately. Such an enterprise rests essentially on the describable experience of empirical being, without which the idea of investigating empirical being further in order to discover new, non-immediately given properties would lack its motivational source.

³ “Wie schon gemeine, so erkennt auch wissenschaftliche Naturerkenntnis nur so, dass sie von unmittelbar Erfahrenem, also Wahrgenommenem, auf nicht Wahrgenommenes schließt. Nichtwahrgenommenes Sein nehmen wir also in der physischen Natur genug an, aber nur aufgrund von wahrgenommenem.”

For instance, we are aware of the fact that in spite of the changing light in the room that makes it appear brighter or darker alternatively, water has a particular, “real” perceptual appearance, that we call colorlessness, that stands out more clearly in certain optimal conditions of observation. A transparent glass will reveal more optimally the “real” transparency of water than a blue glass will do. Through a blue glass we will ‘see’ transparent water through its blue appearance. In this sense, and without having to leave phenomenal experience behind, we already discriminate between what appears “merely” as an appearance and that which appears therein. We know that we can vary the perceptual circumstances in order to transform suboptimal perceptual conditions into optimal conditions and thereby let the real features of empirical objects shine through their momentary appearance most clearly. A consideration of intersubjectivity and normal bodily functioning as opposed to bodily abnormality will eventually lead to an appreciation of the relativity of so called secondary qualities to our bodily make-up. Colors and tactual properties are what they are because our human body (in normal conditions) functions in a certain way. This realization sets the basis for a further step of inquiry, geared towards identifying those properties of things that are detachable from the normal functioning of our body, i.e., the merely quantitative and geometrical properties that constitute the object of natural science. Once this path that leads from the world of appearance to the perceptual world to the world of physics is visualized, there is no point in setting up the “world of natural science” against the world of phenomenal experience. As Husserl puts it in the following passage: “All the judgments of the natural sciences presuppose actually the pre-given nature. Let the physicists tell us that, strictly speaking, the things of sensible perception do not exist in the way they appear before our eyes, that physics demonstrates that actually all reality can be reduced to constellations of atoms, ions, energies or whatever. Regardless of how such statements are to be assessed, it is certain that such statements are also referred to the pre-given nature, viz., to the same nature that appears in sensuous perception” (2005, p. 17).⁴

There is thus a genetic continuity in the determinations we articulate on empirical being, a continuity whose point of departure lies in phenomenality. Non-phenomenal determinations may be articulated only by virtue of underlying phenomenal determinations. Therefore, it makes little sense to think that non-phenomenal determinations can ever substitute or “rectify” phenomenal determinations.

Phenomenal experience does not only function as an inescapable presupposition and foundational soil for non-phenomenal determinations of empirical being. There

⁴“Alle naturwissenschaftlichen Urteile setzen in der Tat die vorgegebene Natur voraus, mögen uns die Physiker auch sagen, in strenger Wahrheit existierten die Dinge der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung, nämlich so, wie sie uns da erscheinen, nicht: die Physik bewiese, dass in Wahrheit alle Wirklichkeit sich auf Konstellationen von Atomen, Ionen, Energien und was immer sonst reduziere. Möge es sich mit solchen Aussagen verhalten wie immer: sicher ist, dass auch sie auf vorgegebene Natur sich beziehen, und zwar auf dieselbe, die in der sinnlichen Erfahrung erscheint.”

is more to say about its constitutive import for empirical being already at the level of simple perception. Husserl contends that phenomenal experience has a constitutive role for the empirical being precisely *as being*. This is the core-insight of Husserl's *transcendental* phenomenology as he started to develop it after *Logical Investigations*. He understands the relationship between empirical being and consciousness, viz., phenomenal experience, in terms of a constitution accomplished within the latter. Husserl argues that while empirical being always refers back to lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*), in which empirical being manifests itself as such, lived experiences do not refer back in the same way and are thus to be considered as an absolute domain of reality. This line of argumentation, although it definitely breaks with our way of understanding empirical being in the natural, unreflective attitude, proves to be consistent if we try to describe the way in which we concretely experience the world. When we say of water that it is colorless, liquid, drinkable, cold, and the like we articulate such phenomenal properties on something that is given to us in rect experience. This "something" is a being, which thereby functions as a substrate for such predications. If we were asked why we say of water (e.g. a glass of water lying on the table before our eyes) that it is colorless or cold, we would definitely refer to the experiences we have if we look through it or if we dip our finger into it. Now, that 'being' which we call water and articulate as colorless and cold is not something that stands beside or behind such properties and may be grasped independently from them. If someone were to ask why we say of the water lying before our eyes that it is a "being" we could not refer to experiences other than the ones just mentioned. There is no action like dipping our finger or turning our head that makes "being" appear as a property of the object in the same way in which "colorlessness" or "coldness" appear. That is, the sense we attribute to empirical being as a suitable substrate for objective properties is not independent from the lived-experiences of such properties and it rests entirely upon them. Naturally speaking we think that the defining characteristic of empirical being is mind-independency, viz., that it does not need to appear in order to be. Now, it is certainly true that the water in the glass before my eyes does not need me to look at it in order to exist, or in other words, that I do not produce the being of water by means of my seeing it. However, the mind-independency I attribute to water by grasping it as empirical being is entirely motivated by the lived experiences I have of it and is therefore unthinkable independently from them. Water may be grasped as empirical being bearing such and such properties precisely because there are lived experiences in which it shows up as such. Mind-independency is attributed within and by virtue of the dynamics of lived-experience and therefore it rests entirely upon the structures of phenomenal experience. To say that the glass of water on the table before my eyes contains real as opposed to merely imagined water means to affirm implicitly that there is an infinite series of possible experiences of that object that would constantly exhibit the same content "water" and that this water stands in a constant reciprocal relations with the world of likewise "real" objects surrounding it. Unlike merely imagined water, real water heats up when placed in the vicinity of a hot body. It belongs in a network of likewise experienceable or experienced

beings that persistently abide as the correlates of an infinite concatenation of boundlessly variable perceptions.

This is by no means intended to alter the sense of what we experience as empirical being, as if we were to interpret it as an emanation of consciousness or something like it. Rather, it is a radical and plausible account of the fact that the being of empirical objects is unthinkable without reference to an experiencing consciousness, which perceptually grasps phenomenal properties as pertaining to them as identical, abiding substrates for indefinite further determination. In a manuscript from year 1908 (almost 10 years before *Ideas*), partly published in the XXXVI volume of *Husserliana*, Husserl gives an illuminating account of this situation as follows: “Natural being is not absolute being, but rather, being as a correlate of consciousness [...]. Correlate, however, means that it is intentional being, which necessarily refers back to connections of the *intentio*, viz., of a thinking consciousness that on its part is absolute, since it does not refer back in this way. And insofar as it belongs to the immanent essence of such connections of consciousness that within them the object is thought, posited, and then in the end validly determined and known, the objective being “resolves” itself into connections of consciousness, regulated by essential laws” (Husserl 2003, p. 28).⁵ A few lines later, Husserl explains that this consideration is not meant to “dissolve” empirical being in a sequence of manifestations but to show the essential rootedness of empirical being in phenomenologically describable experience. All the sense and the possible predications referred to empirical being must not be interpreted as tacit predications about consciousness (as is the case, for instance, in Fichte)⁶: “These considerations do not pertain to the ultimate sense but the ultimate being. Therein lies the fact that “being” in the sense of the objective sciences is not “the ultimate being.” Rather, it “resolves” itself into “consciousness.” The thing itself does not resolve itself into consciousness. It resolves itself into atoms and molecules. But “a thing is in reality” and “there is a reality” and similar cognitions refer back to

⁵ “Das natürliche Sein ist nicht absolutes Sein, sondern Sein als Korrelatum des Bewusstseins (der Erkenntnis). Dieses Korrelatum aber besagt: Es ist intentionales Sein, das notwendig zurückweist auf Zusammenhänge der *intentio*, d. i. eines denkenden Bewusstseins, das seinerseits absolut ist, sofern es nicht wieder in dieser Weise zurückweist’. Und sofern es zum immanenten Wesen solcher Bewusstseinszusammenhänge gehört, dass in ihnen der „Gegenstand’ gedacht, gesetzt, schließlich in gültiger Weise bestimmt ist und erkannt, „löst sich’ das objektive Sein „auf’ in Bewusstseinszusammenhänge, die unter Wesensgesetzen stehen.”

⁶ See, for instance, Fichte 2000, p. 366: “If one assumes a consciousness [,] one assumes an object of this consciousness as well. This can only be an act of the ego, in fact, all acting of the ego is the only immediately intuitive thing; all the rest is only mediately intuitive; we see everything within ourselves, we only see ourselves [and] ourselves as acting, as we pass through from the determinable to the determinate’. („Wird ein Bewußtsein angenommen [,] so wird auch ein Object deßelben angenommen. Dieß kann nur Handeln des Ich sein, denn alles Handeln des Ich ist nur unmittelbar anschaulich, alles übrige nur mittelbar; wir sehen alles in uns, wir sehen nur uns, nur als handelnd, nur als übergehend vom Bestimmbaren zum bestimmten”).

formations of consciousness, and within these formations the being of the thing and the being of all the empirical states of affairs receives its sense” (Husserl 2003, p. 28).⁷ We are thus right to ascribe objective (both phenomenal and non-phenomenal) properties to empirical being, and there is no need to philosophically “rectify” such ascriptions by redirecting them to consciousness, in a classic idealistic fashion. The kind of insights Husserl’s phenomenology provides us with are neither meant to dispel the evidence of empirical being and its properties, nor call for a mentalistic reinterpretation of it. Husserl wants to argue that the possibility of such ascriptions depends on the manifestation in experience of the empirical being, without which the very sense of the term “being” would be annihilated. Therefore, empirical being rests entirely upon phenomenologically describable experience, in which it manifests itself, i.e., is constituted as such. As Husserl puts it: “To the essence of the transcendent being belongs the appearing, the presenting itself and only through appearances are transcendent beings given, and indeed able to be given” (Husserl 2003, p. 33).⁸

By the end of this line of analysis it is clear that what we refer to when we talk about experience in phenomenology we are dealing with more than just the fleeting subjective outlook of things. Rather, experience is the terrain where empirical being receives the full sense that we always already attribute to it prior to all philosophical scrutiny without being aware of the subjective workings that make this attribution possible.

Conclusion: Phenomenology as a Discipline

Let us recapitulate the steps we have made up to this point in order to provide, as an open conclusion, an answer to Wittgenstein’s statement that “there is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenological problems.” We first considered Wittgenstein’s understanding of phenomenology as something midway between science and logic. We pointed out that this conception of phenomenology rests upon a narrow understanding of phenomenal experience as synonymous with the merely qualitative side of experience. We displayed the insufficiency of this understanding by looking at Husserl’s treatment of the matter. His analyses reveal that there is a broader significance attached to our phenomenal experience, which proves to have a constitutive import for both logic and natural science. In particular,

⁷ “Es handelt sich nicht um den letzten Sinn, sondern um letztes Sein. Und darin liegt, dass das Sein im Sinn der objektiven Wissenschaften ‚kein letztes Sein‘ ist, sondern sich ‚auflöst‘ im ‚Bewusstsein‘. Das Ding selbst löst sich nicht im Bewusstseinauf. Es löst sich in Atome und Moleküle auf. Aber ‚Ein Ding ist in Wirklichkeit‘ und das ‚Es gibt eine Wirklichkeit‘ und dergleichen Erkenntnisse weisen auf Bewusstseinsgestaltungen zurück und in ihnen gewinnt das Sein des Dinges und das Sein aller dinglichen Sachverhalte seinen Sinn.”

⁸ “Zum Wesen des Transzendenten gehört es zu erscheinen, sich darzustellen und nur durch Erscheinungen gegeben zu sein und gegeben sein zu können.”

we saw that the objectivities of logic entertain an essential relation to the phenomenal, albeit non-sensible, fulfillments in which they are instantiated and that empirical being refers back to consciousness. Now, are these explanations enough to characterize phenomenology as a discipline, i.e., as more than a general title for disconnected problems? One could argue that what we have proved up to this point, following Husserl, is only that the import of phenomenal experience reaches far beyond the merely qualitative dimension of things but not that it is a suitable domain for a scientific discipline. We have proved that “phenomenological problems” also pertain to logic and natural science and are not to be located midway between them but not yet that ‘there is such a thing as phenomenology’. Husserl provides us with a clue to at least outline an answer to this point. In his *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, Husserl asks: ‘What makes truths belong together in a *single science*, what constitutes their unity of “subject matter”?’ (1975, p. 229). His answer runs as follows: “The truths of a science are *essentially* one if their connection rests on what above all makes a science a science. A science is, as we know, grounded knowledge, i.e. explanation or proof [...]. *Essential unity among the truths of a single science is unity of explanation.* [...] Unity of explanation means [...] *homogeneous unity of explanatory principles*” (1975, p. 229). What gives such a unity to the kind of explanations carried out by phenomenology? In other words, what makes experience into a unitary field of inquiry rather than just a scattered set of problems? In doing phenomenology, we do have something like a unity, if not of explanatory principles then at least of descriptive ones. We do not simply invoke “experience” or “first person perspective.” Rather we try to delve concretely into their structure and to lay bare their constitutive function for everything that we hold valid. In so doing, we not only refer to the field of experience in its various manifestations but we consider this field as unitary. This is because experience is not only the domain of appearance, but necessarily and at the same time, the domain of appearance *for* an experiencing subject. In other words, the essential characterization of experience is not only the intentional reference to what appears but also the transcendental reference to the subject for whom it appears. While on the side of “what appears” anything can show up (a stone, a logical law, a human being, a square circle, a centaur) and be investigated in its meaning, on the side of “to whom it appears” we cannot find anything but an experiencing subject. This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of Husserl’s talk of a “transcendental ego.” Phenomenal experience is essentially a centered dimension, the unity of which is given by the reference to an irreducible standpoint, or rather, to an intersubjective consideration – irreducible standpoints in the plural. Such standpoints are not merely empty possibilities; they are nothing but what we are, albeit normally without being aware of it.⁹ As Husserl puts it, “My life is the first in itself, the originary ground, to which all foundations must be referred back” (1965,

⁹ Donn Welton argues on this point: “For Husserl, transcendental subjectivity functions not as a principle from which the multiple modes of experience can be deduced, but as nexus of constitution, having a correlative structure, that illuminates the structures of various regions in their diversity and resemblance” (Welton 2003, p. 274).

p. 396).¹⁰ The kind of reflection carried out by phenomenology leads us to a naturally unthematized dimension of our own life and shows that this life is more than just one worldly manifestation among others, but rather, the condition of possibility for all further appearance and validity. When we refer to phenomenal experience, for Husserl, we are not dealing with a capricious qualitative dimension that can only be made intellectually accessible by reference to linguistic phenomena, as Wittgenstein would have it. Rather, we are dealing with a very well-structured dimension of reality to which all further dimensions of reality refer back. Moreover, phenomenal experience is a dimension of reality which is centered around a unifying principle: the experiencing subject. For this reason, the field of experience and all possible phenomenological problems arising therein is ‘held together,’ as it were, by the reference to an experiencing ego. The idea of readmitting a robust notion of ‘ego’ into philosophy would probably meet the skepticism of Wittgenstein and his contemporary aftermath. However, a consideration of this point would open up a fruitful terrain of discussion between Husserlian phenomenologists and current proponents of phenomenological disputes. Be it as it may, with his subtle analyses, which I have tried to reassess in this paper, Husserl shows that the philosophical import of phenomenal experience reaches far beyond the domain of the qualitative and encompasses virtually all dimensions of reality.

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¹⁰ “*Mein Leben ist das an sich Erste, ist der Urgrund, auf den alle Begründungen zurückbezogen sein müssen.*”

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