Critical Review: *The Philosophy of Husserl* by Burt C. Hopkins

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Speaking of his last writings, in which Husserl orientates phenomenological research to the historical origins of the sciences, Husserl claims to have made a “small beginning.” The principal goal of *The Philosophy of Husserl* by Burt Hopkins, a work “aimed at beginners” (6), is to trace the development of Husserl’s thinking from his early work in the philosophy of mathematics up to this “small beginning.”

In the process, the book accomplishes a great deal more. First, Hopkins argues that the turn to history that marks the final stage of Husserl’s thinking is not only consistent with but demanded by the aims and methods of a mature phenomenological science. Second, Hopkins skillfully defends Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology from some of the most forceful and well-known criticisms of it, specifically those leveled by Heidegger and Derrida. Hopkins argues that both Heidegger’s and Derrida’s criticisms of transcendental phenomenology rely on presuppositions drawn from their own facile interpretations of the historical tradition to which, they allege, Husserl is unknowingly indebted. More remarkably still, Hopkins argues that among this party of contenders, transcendental phenomenology alone—perhaps not in the exact form in which Husserl executed it but at least in its commitment to presuppositionlessness and self-critique—has the resources to investigate the sedimented presuppositions that inform its self-conception. Finally, Hopkins attempts to enlarge Husserl’s own “small beginning” by examining some of the many inherited presuppositions informing Husserl’s own thinking, presuppositions drawn, in large measure, from the sedimented history of the debate between Plato and Aristotle on the manner of being of essences or eide.

I cannot begin to touch on all of the topics covered in Hopkins’s rich and challenging book. Instead, I will focus on what I take to be one of its most important and controversial themes. One of the central puzzles of Husserl’s life work is understanding whether the concern with history that animates his last writings is compatible with phenomenology’s own basic principles. According to Hopkins, phenomenology’s “most basic principles” are (i) presuppositionlessness, (ii) pure reflection, and (iii) essential intuition (6). Phenomenology is presuppositionless insofar as it is entirely grounded in the direct seeing of the affairs with which it is concerned. It is pure and reflective insofar as it issues its claims “from a source that involves the direct apprehension of the objects of knowledge” and, in its capacity to “turn[] back” on itself, is able to “separate out the empirical presuppositions from its cognitive striving and apprehend knowledge’s proper content” (6). Unlike, say, the empirical sciences, it does not uncritically rely on a source whose ability to generate knowledge must be presupposed but cannot itself be submitted to epistemological criticism by that very source. Finally, the “contents” of phenomenological knowledge in question are essences or eide. Phenomenology is an a priori science, which produces propositions made true by, and verified by direct consultation of, repeatable types and essential laws rather than empirical individuals and contingent matters of fact.

A science carried out in conformity to those commitments appears constitutionally incapable of having access to certain regions of being, including the actual historical past. The past is not an *eidos*, cannot be intuitively given, and is most certainly something whose factual existence must be “bracketed” in phenomenological reflection. What business is it of Husserl’s,
then, to speculate about Galileo’s motivations and presuppositions, the sedimentation of our original meanings throughout science’s history, or the antics of the first geometer?

Hopkins’s answer, in extremely abbreviated form, goes something as follows. Throughout his career as a phenomenologist Husserl is concerned, above all, with rendering our epistemic accomplishments, exemplified by the sciences, intelligible and fully justified. This task is to be performed by means of a science, phenomenology, that is itself presuppositionless. Husserl realizes early on that no empirical science could perform this task, and accordingly conceives of phenomenology as an a priori science directed towards the essences or eide—which he at first conceives of as “simply given”—of those conscious acts and their contents in virtue of which objects become “constituted” for consciousness.

At its second stage phenomenology becomes, in Husserl’s hands, the “transcendental-phenomenological investigation of absolute consciousness” (110). The alleged “ambiguity of the status” of the intentional object, which in the first stage was “both the immanent content of the act” and “this act’s extra psychic and therefore transcendent referent,” is taken care of by means of the phenomenological reduction, the performance of which allows the phenomenologist to consider the object “as the meaning (Sinn) instead of the being of what appears” in an act (112). This stage of phenomenology reaches a limit, however: the sphere of absolute consciousness cannot be given with complete Evidenz owing to “its mode of synthetic connection as a flux” (139).

At the third stage, represented most clearly in the Cartesian Meditations, phenomenology becomes “transcendental idealism.” Not only the meaning but the very being of the “object” is “an accomplishment of transcendally subjective syntheses” (150), including, or rather especially, those that are “passive” and “hidden” (148). This includes, remarkably, “ideal objectivities.” “Their supertemporality turns out to be omnitemporality, as a correlate of free produceability and reproduceability at all times” (Hua I, pp. 155-6; 1977, p. 127). Transcendental phenomenology, as transcendental idealism, is charged with the “exploration of the realm of being that is accessible to transcendental self-experience” and “the criticism of both this experience and of all transcendental cognition” (149). This latter task is required to overcome what Husserl calls the “naïveté of apodicticity” (Hua I, p. 178; 1977, p. 151) that, he admits, characterizes the transcendental phenomenological investigations making up the bulk of the Cartesian Meditations.

The turn to history occurs in the fourth and final stage of Husserl’s thinking, and grows out of the concern for “origins” that marks Husserl’s thinking at each stage. Each eidos, such as an ideal meaning, contains, as an omnitemporal objectivity, “a ‘backward reference’ … to a more original meaning and the process of its formation” (180). The ideal meanings which have become “sedimented” are presented “to inner experience as a finished product of constitution.” (184) “Awakening” an original meaning requires not only examining its “intentional history” in virtue of which it retains its unity and identity after it has been presented to consciousness, but an inquiry into its “actual history,” and specifically its “original presentation to consciousness” itself. (181) Non-historical or constitutive analyses are incapable of disclosing an ideal meaning’s actual history. All that they can accomplish is a phenomenological analysis of an “object’s immediate presentation to inner experience as a persisting prominence” (184). What they cannot disclose is its “original presentation—unmodified by retentions” (185). As Hopkins puts it,

[T]he eidetic possibility of ideal meaning, if it is to pursue this possibility in terms of the transcendental origin of its status as an intentional accomplishment or
product, must push beyond an articulation of this possibility limited to its intentional genesis as an identity that is immediately present to inner experience.

(188)

What we must do is recover the “original presentation” (189) of these ideal objectivities, which, in virtue of having a “genetic origin” (199), must have occurred in history.

The turn to history is also internally motivated by phenomenology’s fundamental aims. If we are to make sense of our cognitive and scientific achievements, and if the basic fabric of science is made up of ideal meanings which essentially contain a “backward reference” to an origin in actual history, then plainly both the intentional and actual history of those ideal formations is a matter of our concern. It is a natural and inevitable extension from “the epistemological quest for foundations” to the “desedimentation of the historicity connected with the primal establishment of the foundations responsible for a given science.” (265) Furthermore, since phenomenology aspires to be both self-critical and presuppositionless, it must overcome its own “naïveté” and uncover the meanings that it itself employs—including the meaning of ideality itself.

Finally, to forestall one obvious criticism, Husserl’s turn to “actual history” does not involve “finding some historical fact” (194) about, say, the origins of geometry. Rather, it involves discovering “the transcendental conditions of possibility that give rise to such facts” (195). What the phenomenologist wants to know is not who discovered geometry and when, the knowledge of which would not make the achievement itself one bit more intelligible than it presently is, but the ideal conditions for the possibility of such a discovery and the subsequent handing down of that discovery’s contents as a tradition. And so, argues Hopkins, Husserl’s turn to history “does not lead to the problem of the opposition between the ‘facticity’ of history and the ‘apriority’ of essences, but rather uncovers their essential connection” (177).

Hopkins very convincingly argues that phenomenology’s turn to “actual” history is perfectly compatible with the task of illuminating the transcendental conditions for the possibility of knowledge, and that doing so does not require the examination of anything other than its non-empirical (either transcendental or eidetic) subject matter. It is to that extent compatible with phenomenology’s “methodological purity” (214). Phenomenology, however, is made up of more than a task and a subject matter. It also demands that phenomenological cognition be carried out in acts in which its subject matter is presented in a decidedly privileged way. At each step, phenomenological cognition must measure its claims against the affairs themselves, precisely as they present themselves in their varying but always positive degrees of Evidenz. What, then, is the nature of our access to the historical origin of those meanings that have become sedimented and whose original sense must be recovered? Can they be given with Evidenz? And is whatever knowledge we legitimately acquire necessary for authentically understanding the ideal meanings with which we currently operate?

An examination of Husserl’s own “small beginning” offers scant encouragement. Consider a few of Husserl’s claims regarding the origin of geometry. First, although we “know almost nothing about the historical surrounding world of the first geometers,” we do know that it must have had an “invariant, essential structure: that it was a world of ‘things’” which had a “bodily character” (Hua VI, p. 383; 1970, p. 375). Second, “these bodies had spatiotemporal shapes and ‘material’ qualities … related to them” (Hua VI, p. 384; 1970, p. 375). Third, “in the life of practical needs” certain shapes “stood out.” Fourth, as a consequence, a “technical praxis” developed whose goal was the production and improvement of these preferred shapes. Fifth, the spatial features that became preferred included smooth and even surfaces and straight lines.
Sixth, the first geometer must have had available to him, as part of his pregiven world, various techniques for measuring.

Among these claims, some are highly plausible but hardly informative, such as the first and second. Others, such as the last three, are hardly evident at all. Yes, geometry could have come about in this way. But must it have? Perhaps the first geometer was a synaesthete haunted by the shapes that she “saw” when her favorite music played. Perhaps geometrical thinking and its tradition began as a form of conspicuous leisure, with no other practical end than to make painfully evident to the hoi polloi just how little actual work the nobility were harassed into performing. Perhaps technologies of measuring developed only after a more industrious class finally got their hands on this elite knowledge. While there simply must have been some necessary conditions of geometry’s coming into existence as a tradition, even the majority of the highly general and (merely) empirically plausible claims Husserl makes are too specific to qualify as live candidates.

This leads me to suspect that any a priori investigation of the historicity of our concepts that could even come close to saying something genuinely informative about the origins of the sciences or any other cultural achievement of noteworthy complexity and significance—think of language, marriage, art, or humor—will be too speculative to qualify as a direct seeing of the “things themselves,” while any investigation that does confine itself to what can be given a priori will be too barren of material content to shed much light on whatever inherited but sedimented presuppositions inform our actual thinking. This holds too, it seems to me, of Hopkins’s own discussion of the history of the debate over eide and their mode of being in Plato and Aristotle. Hopkins’s account of this debate is philosophically rich, and constitutes a far more informative and phenomenologically relevant historical investigation than Husserl’s thin remarks about the origin of geometry. It illuminates from many sides and angles what eide might plausibly be taken to be and how our own thinking may be indebted to that ancient debate. But it also seems saturated with historical content that could not possibly be recovered, much less given, a priori. There are, it seems to me, many possible historical origins of our own thinking about eide, and so any determinate historical origin, and therefore the actual one, could not be known, much less intuited, a priori.

This strikes me as a rather significant problem for transcendental phenomenology as Hopkins—and, perhaps, the late Husserl—conceives of it. If the sciences, including phenomenology itself, have inherited various buried meanings and presuppositions in a manner that undermines their pretentions to have begun at the beginning, and if genuinely historical investigations are required to awaken those meanings and expose those presuppositions, then there is a region of being which phenomenology, qua transcendental theory of knowledge, must investigate. Yet it is that very region of being to which the phenomenological method of pure seeing provides almost no access.

The good news is that I think this problem can, to some extent at least, be ameliorated by reconsidering some of Hopkins’s, and perhaps Husserl’s, claims about phenomenology, the status of eide, and the nature of presuppositions. First, the demand that we turn to actual history is in part motivated by Hopkins’s contention that ideal meanings have an origin in history, and that claim is highly questionable, both as an interpretation of Husserl and philosophically. Second, there is a distinction between evidential presuppositions and ontological presuppositions, and a decent case can be made that anything we could possibly discover about history epistemically presupposes evidence available to us now, and that the fact that our
thinking ontologically presupposes a number of historical facts in no way compromises its integrity, objectivity, or basicity.

I begin with Hopkins’s remarks about the constitution of ideal objects. If Hopkins’s interpretation of Husserl is correct, the ideal meanings that make scientific thinking possible originated in history, and it is surely part of transcendental phenomenology’s task to investigate the origins of the ideal contents of thinking and whatever else is ontologically presupposed by them. Here is one of Hopkins’s main arguments for the view that ideal objects depend on their phenomenological constitution:

Husserl’s self-understanding of his so-called “Platonism” … is based in the “simple reference” to “original givens” that appear before pure phenomenology’s methodically reflective regard. Because it can make absolutely no sense to characterize the status of the “being” of these givens as existing independently of the “mind” … it would seem that only a very superficial acquaintance with Husserl’s phenomenology could lead to the claim that his talk of the apprehension of ideal objects … entailed the view that such objects exist independently of consciousness… (100)

This despite the fact that Husserl, during the period Hopkins is here discussing, claims that it is “nonsense to talk about them [essences] as psychical products and likewise as concept-formations,” and proceeds to ask rhetorically: “But are not cardinal numbers … what they are regardless of whether we ‘form’ or do not form them?” (Hua III/1, pp. 41-2; 1976, p. 42)

Hopkins’s argument appears to be that the ideal objects whose existence motivates Husserl’s “Platonism” are given to us exclusively in phenomenological reflection (see also 140), and that it is absurd to suppose that anything given in phenomenological reflection exists independently of the mind. I think both premises are rather problematic. With respect to the first, Husserl quite clearly believes that ideal objects show up for us in all sorts of acts. He is also right in so believing. When a mathematician ideates the number 5, when we recognize that there is only one word ‘penguin’ in the English language, when we can see that there is a single feature that two individuals each possess, or that two different people believe “the same thing,” we aim at, and sometimes hit, an ideal object. “The truth,” says Husserl, “is that all human beings see ‘ideas,’ ‘essences,’ and see them, so to speak, continuously; they operate with them in their thinking, they also make eidetic judgments—except,” he continues, “that from their epistemological standpoint they interpret them away” (Hua III/1, p. 41; 1976, p. 41). Yet we are not engaged in phenomenological reflection “continuously.”

It is true, as Hopkins has pointed out to me, that in a marginal note in Copy A to this sentence Husserl writes: “False. Idea and essence here identified, and significations taken as essence.” I take Husserl’s point here to be that the ideas and significations with which we operate in our thinking are not, as the passage suggests, identical with the essences that we think about and, from time to time, intuit. This is made clear, I think, within the section in question, where Husserl clearly distinguishes concepts as essences, on the one hand, and concepts as “psychical formations.” Regarding numbers, Husserl writes, “If concepts are psychical formations then those affairs, such as pure numbers, are not concepts. But if they are concepts, then concepts are not psychical formations” (Hua III/1, p. 42; 1976, p. 42). The marginal note, then, should not be taken to imply that no one has ever intended or seen an essence prior to phenomenological reflection, but merely that we need to distinguish the essences that we intend and the features and properties of our mental acts in virtue of which they are intended.
The second premise is also problematic. It is perfectly intelligible to suppose that even the essences revealed in phenomenological reflection exist independently of minds, if by that we mean, as Hopkins does seem to mean, independently of being “constituted” by or made present to minds. Perhaps surprisingly, this holds especially of those essences belonging to mental acts themselves. Consider an act A in which one apprehends, for the first time, the essence of any possible intentional act—a task, for instance, in which one grasps that every intentional act must have both a matter and a quality. The being of the essence of all mental acts cannot depend on its being presented in such an act A, since a condition for the possibility of A’s even having an intentional object at all is that it (and the acts, of which there are many, on which it is founded) exist, and in order to exist it (along with those founding acts) must already have its essential properties. Furthermore, if Husserl is correct, both (transcendental) consciousness itself and its essential characteristics exist before they ever become given to “the mind”—before, that is, anyone does phenomenology. Otherwise, phenomenological thinking would be a creation rather than a discovery of transcendental consciousness and its essential features.

Another argument that ideal meanings depend on consciousness—which, recall, means that any ideal meaning that we use came into existence at some point in “actual” history, and that uncovering this historical origin is a task for phenomenology—is Hopkins’s contention that in the third stage of Husserl’s thinking, “phenomenological constitution is responsible for the very being (or non-being) of all that is meaningful” (150). One of Hopkins’s key pieces of evidence for this assertion is the following passage:

The “object” of consciousness … does not come into this experience from the outside; on the contrary, it is included as meaning in the lived-experience itself—and thus as an “intentional accomplishment” of the synthesis of consciousness. (Hua I, p. 80; 1977, p. 42)

It is clear, however, that here Husserl is talking about the noema rather than the object simpliciter, and adhering to the helpful convention, inaugurated in Ideas I, of placing the term “object” in quotes to indicated its referent’s “bracketed” or “parenthesized” status within phenomenological reflection. “The existence of a world,” writes Husserl immediately prior to the cited passage, “and … the existence of this die are ‘parenthesized’ in consequence of my epoché” (Hua I, p. 80; 1977, p. 42), and it is this “parenthesized” die to which Husserl is referring as the “object.” Nothing in this passage entails that dice, much less galaxies, DNA, numbers, and meanings, owe their being to conscious acts, transcendental or otherwise, or that they, like noemata, are beings whose “esse consists exclusively in [their] ’percipi’” (Hua III/1, p. 206; 1976, p. 241).

What, finally, are we to make of the claim that ideal objects are “produced” in consciousness? Husserl writes, and Hopkins cites him (188), as follows:

In a living, many-membered thinking action I produce a structure: a theorem or a numerical structure. Subsequently I repeat the producing, while recollecting my earlier producing. At once, and by essential necessity, an identifying synthesis takes place … It is identically the same proposition, identically same numerical structure, but repeatedly produced or, this being equivalent, repeatedly made evident. (Hua I, p. 155; 1977, p. 127)

Regarding this passage, Hopkins writes, “it is clear in this example the original production of the ideal structure is presupposed as already having occurred” (188). This is why we must turn to history—to return to the original production of the ideal structure in question. Two problems, however, present themselves. The first is that there is nothing that I can detect in this passage or
the surrounding context that unambiguously indicates that the original production of the ideal structure is presupposed as already having occurred—except, of course, when I “repeat” my “earlier producing.” Husserl’s point, I suggest, is just that ideal objects, unlike “spatiotemporally individuated structures” (Hua I, p. 155; 1977, p. 127), can be “produced” or presented as self-evidently identical in acts that can occur at any time whatsoever—hence their “omnitemporality.” I can think of the color red at any time, and if I recall an act in which I thought of it, I will immediately see that what I am now conscious of is identical with that of which what I was previously conscious. This is not true of individuals or natural kinds. If anything, Husserl seems to be making just the opposite of Hopkins’s point. Nothing omnitemporal could have a historical beginning, or at least not a historical beginning a necessary condition of which is the temporal unfolding of antecedent processes and events (such as the development of techniques of measuring), on pain of not existing prior to that beginning.

The second problem is that Hopkins appears to take Husserl’s talk of “producing” objects in consciousness to mean that such objects are literally constructed, made, or created by conscious acts. Obviously that is a natural way to take it. But what Husserl generally means by “constituting” an object is simply making it present to consciousness. As Husserl says elsewhere: “Even God is for me what he is, in consequence of my own productivity [achievement—WH] of consciousness (Bewussteinsleistung) … Here too, as in the case of the other ego, productivity of consciousness will hardly signify that I invent or make this highest transcendency” (Hua XVII, p. 222; 1969, p. 251). He goes on to claim that the same is true of the world and all world causality. What comes to be in most of our achievements or accomplishments (Leistungen) of consciousness, including those acts directed upon idealities, is the conscious act itself, not its object.

That ideal objects are not literally made by or produced in conscious acts, and so do not have an origin in time, somewhat weakens the case for the claim that phenomenology is obliged to turn to actual history. We can weaken the case yet further by pointing out that there is something strange about turning to history to uncover the “foundations” or “presuppositions” of our present thinking, if by that we mean an attempt to uncover the epistemic or evidential foundations for what we believe now. Consider geometry yet again. Any moderately plausible phenomenological story about the origin of geometry must, first of all, presuppose a great deal about what and how those pure shapes are—that is, we must already know quite a bit of geometry. Moreover, the knowledge in question could not be merely symbolic, drained of meaning, or without any discernible connection to the life-world and its shapes, otherwise we would have no basis for insisting that the science must have had its roots in the life-world, or that it originated in an acquaintance with empirical shapes. Confronted with nothing more than a formal calculus and its corresponding manifold, we would have no reason whatsoever, a priori, to suppose that it arose from the consciousness of empirical shapes. As it happens, the rootedness of geometry in the life-world and its shapes is made evident to us in our childhood education and continually thereafter, provided we bother to look. Any historical investigation must also presuppose a number of things about the cognition of these pure shapes. One must already know, for instance, that their givenness is founded on the prior givenness of empirical shapes and that “seeing” them requires some sort of “idealizing, spiritual act” (Hua VI, p. 384; 1970, p. 377) that enables us to graduate from the imperfect instance to the idealized eidos. That scientific thinking can degenerate into inauthenticity, or even mere symbol manipulation, is also confirmed by constitutive phenomenology, and as Hopkins himself makes clear, this stands as one of Husserl’s very earliest philosophical insights.
In light of all this, it is difficult to see what any specifically historically oriented work that abides by phenomenology’s own restriction to pure seeing could provide for the understanding of geometry itself or for the phenomenology of geometrical cognition, other than providing us the assurance that what we can at any time discover to be necessarily so must also have, in the past, been so. Any evident, non-speculative story we can tell a priori about the origin and subsequent history of geometry looks to be nothing more than the existential instantiation of a set of ahistorical, eidetic propositions about any possible origin and history of geometry. We could tell literally the same story about the future origin and subsequent handing-down of geometry among an alien race. Instead of a historical phenomenological account, we have instead a constitutive phenomenology of historicity.

Hopkins is, to be fair, fully aware that any historical-phenomenological account of a given phenomenon relies upon insights borrowed from constitutive phenomenology. While he writes, “In the final stage of its phenomenological development, the principle of presuppositionlessness is manifest in the transcendental-historical project of desedimentation” (266), Hopkins is quick to acknowledge that our access to the historical origins of our meanings is through those (and other) meanings as they are experienced today.

Thus it is not as if Husserl, sitting in his study, is somehow able to conjure up the direct experience of the prescientific life-world … Rather, it is his experience of the empty meaning formations of the latter [mathematical physics—WH] that—when combined with his expectation that they must somehow be ultimately founded in a reference to … the world that is capable of being intuitively fulfilled at some level—leads to his discovery … of the prescientific life-world and its true origins. (205)

What we should expect, then, is the characteristic “zigzag” method that marks all of Husserl’s work. Nevertheless, I think Hopkins understates how thoroughly lopsided the zigging and zagging between constitutive and historical phenomenology must be.

It seems, then, that no study of the origins of a phenomenon such as geometry could be epistemically foundational vis-à-vis geometry or the phenomenology of geometrical cognition, and similar remarks go for the study of anything’s origins. Claims about the past presuppose the evidence available to us now. Of course, our ability to have that evidence might “presuppose” a rich body of facts that occurred in the past. But this is not an evidential, but an ontological, sense of “presuppose.” It is perfectly consistent, and probably correct, to claim that while our conclusions about origins rest epistemically upon evidence available to us now, our having that evidence now depends ontologically and transcendentally on those origins having been what they were.

Hopkins does not explicitly distinguish between evidential presuppositions from other kinds, though he often characterizes as “presuppositions” things which could not plausibly be taken to be evidential presuppositions. For instance, Hopkins writes, “Phenomenological description and eidetic cognition take place solely in—and therefore presuppose from the start—acts of phenomenological reflection”(140). They do not evidentially presuppose phenomenological reflection, but presuppose it ontologically, just as seeing presupposes eyes, not because seeing requires that one believe anything about eyes, but because it requires the existence and proper functioning of eyes. The consequences of making this distinction explicit are, nevertheless, fairly important.

On the one hand, it enables us to respond, at least in part, to the historicist critique of scientific cognition. Yes, consciousness is historically and socially—not to mention biologically
and environmentally—conditioned and situated. But what historicism and its ilk see as the implications of this—that we are thereby barred from having immediate access to the things themselves, or that truth itself is historically relative—simply do not follow, any more than it follows from the biological situatedness of our visual systems that we cannot see our environments. The best response to the historicist is not to agree that historicity compromises the objectivity, integrity, or immediacy of knowledge, and then attempt to recover some allegedly Edenic origin in order to submit our present beliefs to a more searching critique. A better approach would be to show that having something presented in the flesh as it is thought to be—that is, undergoing an experience of fulfillment—is a sufficient condition for non-inferential or foundational justification, independently of whatever ontological conditions (or “presuppositions” or “foundations”) make that experience possible. Whether, for example, I owe my concepts of shapes to God or evolution or association or grammar or ideology, I possess them and I see shapes; shapes are presented to me in evidential presentations, and when such presentations occur, I am thereby justified in believing what I do about the shapes thereby presented. Foundational knowledge is not knowledge that could occur without any ontological and noetic presuppositions. It is knowledge that does not derive its justification from antecedent evidential presuppositions. The ideal of presuppositionlessness is achieved each time someone comes to justifiably judge something to be thus and so on the basis of an appropriately rich and complete experience of fulfillment directed towards the object(s) in question, and doing that does not always require knowing about the historical events, processes, or conditions that make such acts of fulfillment possible. (Though acts directed towards historically conditioned objects might require historical investigations to be fulfilled.)

On the other hand, however, the considerations above do point to a limit of phenomenology that I have already argued cannot be overcome. All that phenomenology can say about actual history is what can be said about any possible history, and the actual history that we have inherited is infinitely richer than that. True, phenomenology can disclose “actual” history as Husserl understands it, but even Husserl’s scant remarks about the origin of geometry overstep the limit of what phenomenological thinking can, in conformity with its method, justifiably assert. And since many of the concepts and beliefs we inherit have not been or cannot be fulfilled by us, our thinking may very well be, just as historicism claims, partially shaped by a history (and biology) to which the phenomenological method can provide very little access. This problem, incidentally, runs much deeper than a concern with history alone might suggest. Somehow a transcendental consciousness, of all things, can be formed, remade, unhinged, or reduced to a shell by a tradition, a piece of shrapnel, a parasite, or a drug, and there is, I fear, precious little that phenomenology, at least as Husserl conceives of it, can reveal about that.

What this shows, among other things, is a massive presupposition that appears to inform Husserl’s thinking from about the second stage of his career onward—and of which Husserl became increasingly cognizant—namely that phenomenology’s task of investigating transcendental consciousness, its achievements, and the conditions for the possibility of those achievements will happily harmonize with its methodological strictures. Hopkins’s book provides, among a vast array of other challenging and original claims and arguments, an exceptionally sophisticated and informed analysis and defense of this claim. Nevertheless, I think more work needs to be done to establish that the turn to history, along with the other factors that

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1 See, for instance, Hua XXXIX, Text Nr. 43, as well as the manuscripts collected in the forthcoming Husserliana edition Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie, which deal with such topics as unconsciousness, sleep, death, instincts, and drives. For some very
contribute to the shape our consciousness now assumes, is compatible with anything like Husserlian phenomenology’s restriction to what can be intuitively given.
Works Cited


