1. Phenomenology is a resumption of the project of Locke and Hume, which – as Hegel writes – “have driven out metaphysics through the analysis of sensuous experience” (Hegel 1969–1971-II, 377).

To the apparent evidences of formal constructions, Husserl opposes the phenomenological foundation, which goes back to the intuitive origins of abstractions (Hua XXXII, 90). For “all concepts stem from intuition and have a sense that refers to intuition” (Ms. A VII 20/20b–21a). To speculation, characterized as a bottomless thinking in mere word-meanings, he opposes his intuitionism; yet this intuitionism has nothing to do with supernatural enlightenments or mystical intellectual intuitions, but simply means that I only judge reliably when I can also exhibit what I mean, and ultimate exhibition is seeing or something exactly analogous to ordinary seeing (Hua XXXV, 288–91; Hua IX, 345; Hua XLII, 271n1). As Husserl writes to Spranger in September 1918, in phenomenology “one does not speculate about things, […] but he/she sees things”, for “speculation cannot become rectified, one can rectify only in a domain of given things”. Phenomenology arises precisely from a radicalization of Ernst Mach’s and Ewald Hering’s method, which was a reaction against the bottomlessness of theorizing in the exact sciences by means of mathematical speculations and of concepts remote from intuition (Hua IX, 302).

Whereas rationalism does not grasp the significant core lying behind the skeptical absurdities of empiricism and proceeds in a purely conceptual way by constructing conditions of possibility of objective validity from the top down, the empiricist method of returning to the intuitive origins of knowledge is an anticipation of the phenomenological method, which is alien to transcendentalism (Hua VII, 146, 182, 187, 382; Hua XXXVII, 197–8). British empiricism is nevertheless “an unclear and half-way intuitionism” (Hua XXXV, 290–1), insofar as it does not adhere to its own principle, according to which one must always go back to the experience, viz. to the grasping of something itself, and refrain from stating anything that is not drawn from intuition (Hua VII, 136). Phenomenology aims at realizing the empiricist program by defending empiricist intuitionism against itself and carving out genuine empiricism from the apparent one (Hua VII, 148). This amounts to liberating empiricism from its naturalistic and sensualistic limitations.
Naturalism is inconsistent. If the assertion “there are no reasons, but only causes” were true, it should apply even to itself and it could not claim to be well founded. If all seemingly insightful ascertainments are reducible to psychophysical processes, even this seemingly insightful ascertainment is reducible to such processes. A theory that denies any primacy of evident judgment over blind judgment annuls what distinguishes itself from an arbitrary assertion (Hua XVIII, 119). “Without insight, no knowledge” (Hua XVIII, 156). Because an insight can only be questioned by another insight, the validity of evidence is presupposed, even when it is denied: the claim that seeing is reducible to a psychic feeling presupposes that one reliably sees that this is the case (Hua XXXVI, 10). For example, since “we” designates a plurality of egos, Hume’s statement that “the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one” (Hume 1888, 259) signifies that the identity, which I ascribe to the mind, is only a fictitious one; since only an identical ego can ascribe or revoke to the mind an identity, such an ego is presupposed by its denial.

2. Husserl proposes to unite the rationalistic tendency to ground knowledge in eidetic laws with the empiricist one to ground knowledge in factual experience (Hua XXXV, 288–9), but on the terrain of experience itself: material necessity is immanent to experience, because it derives from the sensuous stuff, hence the a priori form of experience depends upon the essence of the factually given contents. Consequently, phenomenology is an eidetic empiricism.

Like the British empiricists, Husserl regards experience as the ground of knowledge; yet, unlike them, he claims that it has an objective structure determined by the nature of its contents, because relations of ideas govern experience as well. Thus, he desubjectivizes the structure of experience by conceiving it as the structure of real being. Reality is sensuous, since both real contents and their real connections are sensuous. Accordingly, the inquiry into reality and its a priori structures is a descriptive one, and only sensuous or material concepts have real significance, i.e., ontological bearing.

By arguing that philosophy can uncover, but not alter, the sense the world has for us and gets solely from our experience (Hua I, 177), Husserl embraces Avenarius’ idea of an explication of the “natural concept of world” via a description of the given exactly as it is given: since all theories refer to the world given prior to them and are legitimate only if they do not violate the sense of the immediate givenness, it is necessary to bring out the “universal sense-frame of the world in immediate experience”, by describing “the world as it gives itself to me immediately”, namely “experience with respect to the experienced as such” (Hua XIII, 196–7). It is a matter, therefore, of what is presupposed by theories (Hua III/1, 45; Hua XXXV, 476).

Although the description of what is encountered in preconceptual experience can only be carried out through concepts, the material or sensuous concepts, which are drawn from experience and can be grasped in it, are quite different from exact and formal concepts. And, although sediments arising from thought-activities adhere to what is experienced, one can always distinguish what is passively given from the thinking exercised upon it and the thoughts formed therein, in order to take what is experienced just as it gives itself (Hua IX, 57–8, 95–6). It is a matter of “a most fundamental difference” (Hua XI, 291). Whereas the grasping of real objects is “a mere receiving of a pre-constituted sense” (Hua XXXI, 41), in the case of ideal objects “a pre-constituting activity precedes the objectivating grasp” (Hua XXXI, 53); things present themselves in subjective experiencing “as objects already existent beforehand”, for they are “pregiven to active living as ego-foreign, are given from outside”, while thought-formations “are given exclusively from inside, exclusively by means of spontaneous activities and in them” (Hua XVII, 85–6).
3. Husserl argues that experience with its demands precedes conceptual thinking and its demands (Hua V, 34; Hua XXXII, 233). He takes up the view which Hegel, in §40 of the *Encyclopedia*, argues is the shortcoming of both Kant and empiricism: experience is the only ground of knowledge. For cognition draws its legitimacy exclusively from experience (Hua XXXV, 289; Hua XXXII, 142), which leads back to sensuous perception (Hua III/1, 81; Hua XV, 502; Hua IX, 193). Experience is the “access to the being itself” (Hua XXXIX, 207) and the “measure of all other opinions” (Hua XXXIX, 685); insofar as experience uncovers the illusion and settles the doubt on whether something is or is not, it is “the source of confirmation and disconfirmation,” viz. “the self-testimony of the existent,” although it can be refuted by further self-testimonies (Ms. A VII 20/38b). “What the things are, […] they are as things of experience” (Hua III/1, 100).

Since, therefore, “experience can be confirmed and annulled only by experience” (Hua XXXIX, 231), whatever questioning of an experience presupposes trust in experience. Insofar as any sensuous phenomenon can be questioned only on the basis of other phenomena conflicting with it, one can doubt every single phenomenon, but not all phenomena together, i.e., the sensuous as such, otherwise the basis of validity enabling the doubt is removed (De Palma 2012, 211–6). We see the things themselves, and not images or signs of them. We can also be deceived, but it proves to be a deception on the basis of a seeing of real things themselves. To say that all seeing is a deception annuls the sense of talking about deception (Hua XXXV, 22–3).

By taking up Descartes’ view, in Book IV, Ch. I, §1 of the *Essay* Locke writes that the mind knows things only mediatly, since it has “no other immediate object but its own ideas” (Locke 1999, 515). Likewise, Hume claims that “every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception”, for “no external object can make itself known to the mind immediately, and without the interposition of an image or perception. That table, which just now appears to me, is only a perception, and all its qualities are qualities of perception” (Hume 1888, 193, 239). Now, perception is an act, in which an object immediately appears, while an image is an object, which immediately appears and by means of which another object mediately appears. Perceived things can serve as images of things not perceived, but they do not appear via the interposition of images. There is no “veil of perception”, for immediate objects are not ideas, i.e., acts or mind-immanent contents serving as representatives of things, but things. That table is a perceived thing, and all its qualities are qualities of thing.

Because external experience is “that mode of the having of something itself which pertains to natural objects” (Hua XVII, 170), “the thing perceived in perception is the thing itself in its own existence” and, “when perceptions are deceptive, that signifies that they are in conflict with new perceptions, which show with certainty what is actual in the place of the illusory” (Hua XVII, 287). “Only perception unseats perception” (Hua XXXVI, 40). Since, therefore, perception is nothing to be grounded, but it is itself grounds providing (Hua XXIV, 8), it is “the ultimate measure of reality” (Hua XL, 314) and thus the source of justification of knowledge, although it can deceive.

By embracing the world-view of modern science, Brentano claims that sensuous contents are “an illusion”, for they “are not things which really and truly exist”, but “signs of something real […]. In and of itself, that which truly exists does not come to appear, and that which appears does not truly exist” (Brentano 1924, 250, 28). By rejecting the world-view of modern science, Husserl overthrows Brentano’s antiempiricist view: the scientific world is an ideal world constructed by the subject, whereas the real world is the world of experience, which is given prior to every theory and functions as ground of validity for every theory. The dismissal of the inferential theory of perception makes the problem of the external world senseless; sensuous phenomena...
are not indications of the real, but the real itself, whose modes of givenness are grounded in its ontological nature.

Against the Platonic, Christian, and rationalistic “degradation of sensuousness”, Husserl claims that sensuousness is not a “misty medium, which, instead of the things in themselves, gives mere appearances of the same” (Hua-Mat III, 170, 172). Against the prejudice according to which the sensuous world does not truly exist, he argues that the sensuous world just as it gives itself in experience is the only real world (HuaVI, 397, 360, 49). For the true being of things is their itself-givenness, and not something lying beyond possible experience. Unexperienceable entities are substructions of a bottomless thinking and differ from the ghosts only in that they cannot be refuted by experience (HuaXXXII, 216). Reality is the correlate of concordant experience and can prove to be an illusion only on the basis of further experience, for illusion signifies that the course of concordant experience is other than was predelineated by the up-to-now experience (Hua XV, 49).

4. Husserl argues that Hume “indicated the way of all inquiry into origins” with the “principle of tracing back every cognition to ‘impressions’” (Hua XXXVII, 224), and understands the return to the origins just as a return from ideas to impressions (Ricoeur 2004, 301–2). Accordingly, Husserl refuses Kant’s method of transcendental deduction as a “masterpiece of top-down transcendental proving” (Hua XXXVII, 212), and adopts Locke’s empirical deduction of categories (Hua VII, 97–9; Hua XXXV, 289), which he however reinterprets in an eidetic sense: categories are neither to be traced back to the adventitious causes of their production in experience nor to the judgment forms of logic, but to sensuous what-contents. Because they can only be grasped insofar as their singularizations are sensuously pregiven, real categories are not to be deduced from a principle, but to be found in experience via a bottom-up procedure (Hua V, 25). The conditions of possibility of experience are its “ontic-a priori essential structures” obtainable through the “method of eidetic variation” (Hua XXXII, 118) and lie not in the subject, but “immanently in the essence of experience” (Hua XVI, 141). This empiricist denial of the constructive procedure in favor of the descriptive method entails a refusal of the transcendental approach (cf. De Palma 2015; De Palma 2016).

If the a priori didn’t lie within experience, the latter would have no objective structure. The sensuous given can only be intellectually grasped and determined insofar as it has a lawfulness independently of thinking. The structure of experience is given in experience itself, because it is due to sensuous forms of being, which arise from contents, and not to logical forms of thinking, which are “additions of the activity of judgment and of the syntheses that arise from it” (Hua XVII, 398) and cannot bestow upon contents a material shape.

As James remarks in “A World of Pure Experience”, for a radical empiricism the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted for as real. Phenomenology, which Husserl defines as “radical empiricism” (Hua XXXV, 513), is the realization of this approach. Against the view that all relations are produced by the subject, Husserl takes sensuous contents and sensuous relations (fusions, configurations, similarities, etc.) to the same extent to be real, for both are given independently of the subject’s intervention. He distinguishes between formal relations or categorial forms produced by intellectual activities and contentual relations or material forms, which depend upon the particular nature of the contents and, just like these, are given in experience prior to every connecting act (Hua XIX/1, 288–91; Hua XIX/2, 665–7, 714–16; Husserl 1972, 214–23). In the former case, we have a “subjective interrelating and forming of a relation”, in the latter a “real ‘relation’”
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(Hua XLI, 262), which yields a “material or real unity” (Hua XIX/1, 291; Hua XXXI, 105). Whereas the formal unity of a categorial set is established by thought, the real unity of a sensuous whole arises from the material contents and constitutes itself in the unity of a sensuous intuition (Hua XXXI, 101; Husserl 1972, 223, 296–7).

Categorial intuition is not a genuine intuition, because formal essences are “not intuitively seizable”: properly speaking, there is intuition only of individuals and of material or sensuous essences, to which alone individual presentational contents correspond (Hua XLI, 160). The possibility of analytic judgments is more difficult to understand than that of synthetic judgments a priori, precisely because exemplary intuition plays no role in their grasping (Hua XXXV, 445–6, 449, 452, 467).

5. The abstraction theories of British empiricism dissolve the general concept in its extension by regarding it as a representing function that we bestow profitably upon an individual moment. This is wrong, inasmuch as (1) the intuition of general objects is grounded indeed in the intuition of individual objects, but these are the foundation of abstraction, and not what is intended in it; (2) the talk of similar or equal individual objects presupposes something identical, i.e., a species, under which the compared objects come; now, if the general is dissolved in its extension, viz. in the corresponding individuals, one cannot explain what gives unity to the extension. Nevertheless, the general exists exclusively in the individual: Husserl argues not only against the psychological hypostatization of the general, namely the assumption of a real existence of the species in thought, but also against its metaphysical hypostatization, namely the assumption of a real existence of the species outside thought. Moreover, general concepts have a genesis from preconceptual experience: the sensuous similarity, which is passively pregiven and connects the contents prior to every comparison, is the condition of comparison and abstraction (Hua XXXV, 437; Hua XXXII, 153; Hua XXXIX, 457). Since there is a “consciousness of similarity without active relating” (Hua XI, 406), before any conceptual apprehension everything perceived is typically apperceived due to its similarity with other things perceived (Hua XXXII, 200; Hua XLI, 273).

Husserl claims that intellect cannot exist without sensuousness (Hua XIX/2, 712–3; Hua-Mat III, 170–4) and rejects the Platonic conception of the general (Hua IX, 73; Husserl 1972, 397). He explains that the talk of ideal objects does not imply their equalization with real objects, because “reality has an ontological primacy over whichever irreality, since all irrealties relate back essentially to an actual or possible reality” (Hua XVII, 177) and have “manners of possible participation in reality” (Hua XVII, 163). Therefore, as he acknowledges in his later years, reality precedes possibility (Hua XV, 519; Hua XXIX, 85–6). Ideal essences exist only as structures of a factual reality. Consequently, phenomenology accomplishes an empiricist overthrow of Platonism: “Every conceptual truth presupposes experience, every conceptual content presupposes experienceable being, every being presupposes individual being” (Hua VIII, 408).

6. In Husserl’s view, a priori truths are relations of ideas, since they are grounded purely in the essence of their respective contents. Because of the “ontological turn of the concept of evidence”, the necessity of a priori laws is not a subjective incapacity to conceive otherwise, but an objective impossibility to be otherwise (Hua XIX/1, 242–3).

Depending on whether essences are formal or material, the a priori is formal-analytic or material-synthetic and its negation yields a logical contradiction or a material incompatibility. Eidetic laws govern even in sensuousness (Hua XXXVII, 220–6), for there are truths of reason “based
on sensuous presentations” (Hua XXVIII, 403). Not only thought, but also experience has therefore an a priori lawfulness (Hua XXVIII, 243); beside the logical laws valid for thought-connections there are ontological laws valid for sensuous reality (Hua XXIV, 333, 293).

The material a priori is “contingent” (Hua XVII, 33) or “affective”, because “only such subjects can acquire it who have the relevant examples, and these stem from affection” (Hua XLI, 101). For material laws are grounded in the particularity of sensuous essences and these (e.g., the eidos color) can only be grasped insofar as their singularizations (e.g., an individual color) are passively pregiven (Hua XXXVI, 147–8). Accordingly, eidetic knowledge has a factual ground: everyone can grasp only those material essences whose singularizations occur actually in his/her sensuous experience, and can know only the material laws concerning such essences.

Experience has a material structure presupposed by every induction, for the given is always predelineated in its ontological type, e.g., as a spatial thing. But if experience had not given me things, the word “thing” would have no sense for me (Hua XXXV, 474–5). Consequently, the material a priori depends not upon experience qua induction, but upon experience qua givenness of material essences (Hua XLI, 282–3).

At the basis of Husserl’s concept of material a priori are Hume’s notions of relation of ideas and of tracing ideas back to impressions (Hua XXXVII, 224). Kant didn’t grasp the authentic concept of the a priori as an eidetic necessity: by remaining bound to the rationalistic prejudice according to which sensuousness is lawless and the true a priori is the analytic one, he misunderstood Hume’s concept of relation of ideas, which designates the synthetic a priori too, and explained the latter by resorting to subjective forms, whereas it stems from sensuous what-contents.1

The world of experience determines the forms, in which it can be known, because it is not a conglomeration of formless contents, which would acquire a different shape depending on the conceptual scheme adopted by the subject, but has “structures, which bind us” and “place demands upon our predicative thought” (Hua XXXII, 101). Accordingly, experience is already method (Hua XV, 98; Hua XXXIX, 81–3; Ms. B I 13/37a; Ms. AVII 20/19a) and can only be rationally known insofar as “rationality” already lies in its givennesses (Hua-Mat IX, 439). If there were no steady things, logic and mathematics wouldn’t be applicable to experience. For anything can be conceptually determined, connected, and enumerated independently of its particularity, but determination, connection, and enumeration presuppose that what is determined, connected, and enumerated is identifiable as the same (Ms. AVII 20/43a). Only material connections can bestow upon experience a material shape that enables the application of formal thought-determinations: one can lend to the world of experience a thought-form only insofar as it possesses an a priori structure prior to thinking. Scientific knowledge presupposes that the sensuous world is “capable of bearing the scientific thinking”, has “possibilities and tendencies toward idealization”, and is therefore an “anticipation” of an exact world (Hua XXXII, 97, 100–2). Consequently, contrary to what Hegel claims in the note to §442 of the Encyclopedia, the sensuous given is not “merely the empirical first”, but “the truly substantial foundation”.

7. Husserl retrieves a classical issue of empiricism by recognizing that the laws of association underlie the formation of objectual apperceptions.2 The world is “an associative nexus” (Hua XXXIX, 9) and world-experience is “a universal synthesis of association” (Hua XXXIX, 462). Accordingly, as Hume claims at the end of the Abstract, the laws of association are “the cement of the universe”. Hume’s fictionalism, particularly in his doctrine of the origin of thing, persisting existence, and causality, contains anticipatory discoveries shrouded in absurd theories and the task of the eidetic phenomenology of association
is the rehabilitation of such discoveries, by showing the \textit{a priori} genesis thanks to which a real world constitutes itself for a soul in habitual validity (Hua IX, 301, 286).

Hume demonstrates that the lawfulness of experience is a lawfulness of expectation, since the anticipation of future experience, grounded in past experience, goes through present experience. The induction of the non-given from the given belongs from the start to the structure of perception, in which the present field functions as “down-payment” for a future field (Hua XXXII, 144). Yet, there is no warrant that the course of experience will be the same as it has been until now. What kind of legitimizing ground, therefore, do the inferences of future events have? The weight of belief is determined by \textit{a priori} laws, which Hume saw, but misunderstood in psychological sense: the force of expectation grows with the number of instances, and therefore with habit, but “it is not at all a question of the human mind and of the effects it experiences due to empirico-psychological laws” (Hua XXIV, 354), for “presumptions based on experience stand under principles themselves having the characteristic of relations of ideas” (Hua XXIV, 352). Accordingly, the originary form of motivation, in which the similar is reminiscent of the similar and motivates its positing, is “an originary form of reason”: since expectations arise in virtue of an analogical apprehension tracing back the ground of the \textit{propter} to a \textit{post}, they have a rational ground in the previous experience (Hua XIII, 356–7).

Husserl thus takes up the \textit{empiricist} problem of genesis from an \textit{eidetic} standpoint: experience arises from experience, yet not according to empirical laws, but rather to a priori laws. If there were no material lawfulness in the factual course of appearances, no expectation, no apperception, no world could become constituted. Habit as induction is, as Hume correctly argues, the originary source of every bestowal of objective sense, but precisely for this reason it is not, as he wrongly argues, a mechanism of blind association (Hua XXXII, 146). Hume falls into a circle by explaining habit through similarity and similarity in turn through habit. It is not habit, which gives rise to lawfulness, but it is lawfulness, which enables habit. The principles legitimizing all inductions cannot be justified in turn through inductions (Hua VII, 172). Induction can only occur insofar as experience is homogeneous and the future appearances are predelineated by the past ones (Hua XXXII, 60–6, 249–50).

Not only the constitution of the object, but also that of the subject as a substrate of habituations rests on association (Hua XI, 386). For “the ego has unity in virtue of the world, if it is an actual world, if it is the title of a realm of truths-in-themselves” (Ms. A VI 30/38b), because I preserve my personal ego only “if a world of objects remains constantly preserved for me” (Ms. A VI 30/54b). “Without object, I am not an ego” (Ms. A VI 30/54a). If things and their determinations changed lawlessly, I would be not the identical subject of my acts, but a “‘variegated’ self”, namely a “worldless” “ego-pole” with “no personal habitual sense”, although I would preserve “the unity of my life, the multiplicity of my sensation-data in the unity of the immanent time” (Ms. A VI 30/52b).

Husserl accomplishes a depsychologization of association by showing that it depends upon the “pre-affective peculiarity of the elements” and has therefore “material conditions” (Hua XI, 165). Associative syntheses occur passively, viz. independently of the subject’s intervention, because they rest on similarity, which is a relation of ideas, i.e., a nexus grounded purely in the contents (Hua XI, 185, 285, 399–400; Husserl 1972, 215).

Accordingly, sensuousness has its own eidetic structure entailing the performance of acts: it is not the subjective acts that determine the material articulations of experience, but the latter that make the former possible. “What is one ‘materi ally’, so to speak without the ego’s participation […], also exercises an affection” (Hua-Mat VIII, 195), that motivates the turning-toward of the ego and gives rise to the \textit{intentio} (Hua XI, 84–5; Hua IX, 131, 209). Since, therefore, intentional
acts are a “response” of the ego to an affection (Hua XI, 166–7; Hua-Mat VIII, 184, 189, 191) and the occurring of affections depends upon homogeneity and contrast among sensuous contents, sensuous similarity and sensuous contrast are “conditions of the possibility of intention and affection” (Hua XI, 285) and constitute “the resonance which grounds all which is once constituted” (Hua XI, 406).

8. Since the actual world is the correlate of the concordant and in infinitum concordantly ongoing experience (Hua VIII, 457), its dissolution consists in the dissolution of the concordance of experience, namely in the falling away of anticipation (Hua VIII, 48–9). The legitimacy of world-belief coincides with the legitimacy of anticipation, because the world exists “only in the continually predelineated presumption that experience will go on continually in the same constitutional style” (Hua XVII, 258).

Husserl’s world-annihilation hypothesis is inspired by Hume and is due to the circumstance that the validity of experience depends upon further experience, hence only evidence of anticipation can secure the becoming confirmed in infinitum (Hua XXXIX, 214): were the anticipation of future concordance constantly disappointed, there would be a conscious succession of appearances, but no objectual apperception. The world-annihilation is nothing else but the dissolution of the objective ground of association. That consciousness can exist without there being a transcendent reality means just that we can fill arbitrarily immanent time, so that a nature would be not constituted (Hua XXXVI, 78–9); since formal-temporal syntheses independent of contents can be carried out irrespective of material-associative syntheses produced by contents, consciousness would persist, even if appearances were materially unconnected and their course didn’t allow any thing-apperception. Consequently, the formal unity of consciousness is a necessary, yet not a sufficient condition for the material unity of object. A real world can become constituted only through contentual syntheses, which depend upon the particularity of the given stuff and can be performed only if “contentual conditions of association” are fulfilled, i.e., if there occurs “a continuity of similarity” in the content (Hua-Mat VIII, 9). The constitution of an objective world is therefore contingent: consciousness could be completely equipped to be able to cognize rationally, but its factual content might not be rationalizable, because “a senseless chaos is there, which in itself does not allow for a cognition of nature” (Ms. D 13 II/200b), i.e., because “conflicts irresolvable not only for us but in themselves” make it impossible to maintain the positing of things (Hua III/1, 103).

Since each material category “prescribes rules for manifolds of appearances” (Hua III/1, 350), constitution rests on the nature of sensuous contents: the objective peculiarity of the content determines the objective connections between it and further contents. Subjectivity is not the principle of constitution, but only the place of legitimation: whatever has to be accepted by the ego as rightful, must legitimate itself in the ego’s acts, but its existence and essence do not have their explanatory ground in the ego (cf. De Palma 2016, 316–9). Accordingly, only in a formal respect is every existent relative to transcendental subjectivity, which is nothing else but the empirical subjectivity itself, insofar as it becomes conscious of being for itself the ultimate site of any validity and legitimation (cf. Hua I, 103; Hua V, 147; Hua VI, 205; Tugendhat 1967, 198–9).

9. Husserl endorses the empiricist thesis that one can single out a purely sensuous and therefore unhistorical core of the world-experience. Sensuous fusions are indeed “unhistorical” (Hua-Mat VIII, 338).

The “eidetic doctrine” or “ontology of the life-world purely as world of experience” (Hua VI, 144, 176), which aims to grasp the a priori structure of the “world of pre-scientific intuition”
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(Hua IX, 56), is nothing else but the “transcendental aesthetic” (Hua XXXIX, 268, 692), in
which one excludes all judicative knowing and restricts oneself to perception (Hua XI, 295),
in order to bring out “the ontic in its ontic essential sort, as it is included in experience itself”
(Hua XLI, 346).

At the basis of the many culturally determined surrounding worlds is a unique cultureless
world of experience (Hua XXXIX, 28), which is endowed with a spatio-temporal and causal
“aesthetic essential form” (Hua XXXIX, 685). What gives to the world “its identity and actuality
in front of the changing manners of apperception” (Hua XV, 167) is such “absolutely identical
objective structure” functioning as “substratum of all realities” (Hua XXXIX, 297–8): “material
reality ultimately underlies all other realities” (Hua III/1, 354). Because the givenness of spiritual
senses is grounded in that of physical bodies, the world of things is prior in itself to the world of
culture (Hua IX, 119), which has a restricted objectivity and an accessibility that is not uncon-
ditional (Hua I, 160–2). For whereas cultural determinations don’t have the same content for
everyone and are something “relatively objective” that changes depending on the world-view;
sensuous determinations are something “absolutely objective” and enable the identification of
the real (Hua XXXIX, 297, 295). It is the same sun, the same moon, etc., that are differently
mythologized by the different peoples (Hua XXIX, 387). Everyone is aware that every particular
community apprehends differently the one identical world (Hua XV, 217), and thereby presup-
poses that a world in itself manifests itself in the surrounding world relative to the subject. “That
presupposition is not a theoretical, historical-factual prejudice, but belongs to the essential sense
of world-experience of everyone” (Hua XXXIX, 684).

Sensuous experience is not an accidental starting point, from which one can free oneself, as
if it were a ladder that one can throw away after one has climbed up on it, because its legitimacy
is presupposed, even when it becomes delimited (Hua XXXV, 475). For even the scientist uses
the sensuous given “not as something irrelevant that must be passed through, but as that which
ultimately grounds the theoretical-logical ontic validity for all objective verification […] The
seen measuring scales, scales-markings, etc., are used as actually existing things, not as illusions”
(Hua VI, 129). Every scientific formation refers back to the prescientific world and every veri-
fication leads back to sensuous evidences: experience is “the source of evidence for the objective
asseriments of the sciences, which are never themselves experiences of the objective”,
because the latter – just as something metaphysically transcendent – is “never experienceable as
it itself” (Hua VI, 130–1). The grounding of scientific truths leads back to everyday truths: one
can read the result of an experiment only through a perception that can become rectified only
through other perceptions. Perception is therefore the ultimate court of appeal of every theory.
Sensuous objects with their sensuous structures are given before every subjective intervention,
do not depend upon theoretical assumptions, and are the ground for theoretical assumptions.
Since perception does not presuppose the acceptance of scientific theories, whereas scientific
theories presuppose the acceptance of perception, the sensuous world in its sensuous givenness
is epistemicallyuncircumventable and the alleged overcoming of sensuous relativity by objective
theory is deceptive (Hua VI, 135).

Science does not alter the world of experience, which “remains unchanged as what it is, in
its own eidetic structure and its own concrete causal style, whatever we may do with or without
artifices” (HuaVI, 51). Since theoretical entities are at the time (depending on the theory) useful
to explain invariant (theory-independent) sensuous phenomena, their epistemological and onto-
logical status cannot be higher than that of such phenomena.3 If one regards theoretical entities
as real, he/she takes “the dangerous road of double truth” (Hua VI, 179) by turning empirical
objects into images or signs of alleged objects causing them. Yet causal inferences presuppose
a homogeneous basis of experience and cannot lead from what is experienced to what is in
principle unexperienceable (Hua XXXVI, 178). Otherwise, Aquinas' proofs of God's existence would be well founded. Moreover, if an unknown cause of the appearances existed at all, then it would have to be possible in principle for it to be perceived via appearances, if not by us, at least by superior subjects, and so on in infinitum (Hua III/1, 111). Such a recursive character makes the explanation of the observable through the unobservable inane, as Hume already remarks in his Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, where he comes to the conclusion that the present material world contains the principle of its order within itself and is therefore God.

10. Husserl relates his “idealism” to British empiricism (Patočka 1999, 275–6). He ascribes the introduction of the transcendental question to both Locke and Hume (Hua VII, 279, 348; Hua XVII, 263), whose Treatise he regards as a draft of transcendental philosophy (Hua VII, 226, 241), and speaks, when referring to Mill, Schuppe, and Avenarius, of “a transcendental philosophy basically determined by English empiricism” (Hua VI, 198).

The backbone of phenomenology is the empiricist equalization of the real with the sensuous, i.e., with the correlate of possible perception (Hua XIX/2, 679, 703; Hua–Mat III, 168–71; Hua XVII, 457). Precisely because the real world is sensuous, its constitution presupposes a bodily subject (Hua XXXVI, 132–43).

Since things exist even if nobody experiences them, they are transcendent and in themselves, but yet constantly experienceable (Hua XXXVI, 191, 152). For they are independent of single factual appearances, but not of possible appearing (Hua II, 12): every object “is what it is whether it is known or not”, but is “in principle knowable even if it has factually never been known or will be known” (Hua II, 25), and when it comes to real objects, “knowable” means “experienceable”. An in principle unexperienceable reality is therefore a countersense.

The concept of thing-transcendence is to be gathered from the essential content of perception (Hua III/1, 101). “In itself” or “transcendent” is that which can be perceived as the same in several perceptions and whose esse does not exhaust itself in the percipi, i.e., in the momentary givenness. Consequently, being is not the actually perceived, but the perceivable, which yet can be determined only on the basis of the actually perceived. A real but unexperienced or even factually unexperienceable thing lies in principle in the domain of possible experience, because the actual perceptual field is a member of a continuity of perceptual fields that leads eventually to the one in which the thing would be experienced; a real possibility or nexus of experience permits the justification of the being of the thing starting from the actual experience. An empty or ideal possibility, which is not predelimited by the actually experienced, is a groundless fiction, “just as much as the existence of satyrs or nymphs is” (Hua XXXVI, 119).

The existence of things signifies the existence of real possibilities of experience. A world without subjects can exist, although its legitimation presupposes an actual subject (Hua XXXVI, 19, 141). Accordingly, the dependence of reality on the subject concerns only the legitimation of something independent of the subject.

This argument entails no idealism; for the subjective legitimation of the existence-positing is uncircumventable, since even the positing of things in themselves becomes legitimated in subjective acts. And the equalization of real and experienceable denies not that things have a being in itself, but that such being is unexperienceable (Hua XXXVI, 32). It is indeed actually realistic, since if one refuses to consider the real as the given, he/she cannot help considering it as the thought and embracing idealism. Realism is nothing else than empiricism, because it argues “that things, as they immediately are, have a real existence”, whereas “idealism attributes reality to the ideas alone, by asserting that things, as they singly appear, are not something truthful” (Hegel 1969–1971–XIX, 571–2).
11. Husserl’s idealism stems from Brentano’s psychologism. Despite all criticism, Husserl adheres to Brentano’s thesis that only what is psychic is properly given; he includes the sensuous contents into phenomenological research, just because he considers them immanent to consciousness in the same way as acts are (Hua XIX/2, 767–75). The sensuous object thus originates from two immanent elements: the sensation-contents, which are the formless stuff of apprehension, and the apprehension-act, which bestows upon sensation-contents the intentional form by animating them, i.e., interpreting them as appearances of a transcendent object.

Consequently, constitution is governed by the psychological lawfulness of form-giving. This clashes with Husserl’s doctrine that sensuous forms stem not from the acts of the subject, but from the nature of contents. Against the view that only properties are given and things are thought-constructions or fictions, Husserl claims that things are grounded in the nature of properties and sensuously given with them: a thing consists only of properties – as Hume rightly claims – yet they form not a bundle – as he wrongly claims – but rather a whole. Therefore, substance neither lies beyond appearances nor is dissolvable into qualities, but it is the “unity of the real” (Hua XLI, 276), namely a material nexus of sensuous qualities. But, since Husserl considers the immanent sensation-contents as the properly given and the transcendent thing as a product of their interpretation, he falls back into the sensualistic approach.

By adopting the content/apprehension scheme, Husserl also falls back into the inferential theory of perception. Since only immanent contents are immediately given, they are the foundations of apprehension (Hua XIX/1, 399; Hua XI, 17): they can either be merely present or – due to an interpretative act – function as images or signs of the object (cf. Hua XIX/1, 80–1; Hua XIX/2, 769–70; Melle 1983, 40–51). Contradicting his own thesis that transcendent objects are immediately given through external experience (Hua XXXVI, 178), Husserl refers to external perception as “a mediate consciousness, provided that only one apperception is had immediately, a store of sensory data […] and an apperceptive apprehension, through which an exhibiting appearance is constituted” (Hua XI, 18). Spatial objects are constituted “mediately, through ‘apperception’ of sensational objects”, which are “immediate sensuous objects” and serve as “representatives” (Hua XXXIII, 319).

Husserl regards external perception as a representation, because he presumes, like Brentano, that only what is psychic has actual existence and that inner perception – in which the content is really included in the act, hence esse and percipi coincide – is the only true perception (Brentano 1924, 14, 28, 128–9; Hua XIX/1, 365–6; Hua XIX/2, 646–50, 769–71; Hua XXXVI, 21–42, 62–72; Hua XI, 16–24). Since the elements from which things arise really lie in consciousness, things are the result of a projection or inference from what is immanent (cf. Melle 1983, 50–1; Philipse 1995, 262–7), and nature is created by consciousness (Hua XLII, 170). Properly speaking, there is nothing else than minds (Hua XLII, 157–8), because everything physical is but a connection of consciousness (Hua XIII, 7). Accordingly, the transcendental attitude consists in an “introspection” (Hua XV, 23) by means of which one directs the regard to sensation and apprehension (Hua XXXVI, 129), and the method of phenomenology is the same as that of eidetic psychology (Hua XVII, 261); transcendental psychology and transcendental phenomenology are identical, for both are concerned with transcendental internality (Hua VI, 261–9), and, as psychologism claims, psychology is the place of decisions (Hua VI, 212, 218).

What leads Husserl to idealism is the view that only what is immanent is truly given and actually exists. For him, idealism consists just in the reduction to absolute consciousness or dissolution of world into connections of consciousness (Ms. B I 4/15a; Hua XLII, 577; Hua XXXVI, 27, 32, 138). However, this characterizes Berkeley’s and Hume’s psychological or subjective
idealism rejected by Husserl (Hua III/1, 120–1; Hua VII, 246–7; Hua I, 118), namely psycholo-
gism. For the latter is distinguished by the circumstance that, because objects are constituted in
consciousness, “their sense as a species of objects having a peculiar essence is denied in favor of the
subjective occurrences” (Hua XVII, 177–8).

Every reduction of given objects to giving acts, viz. to consciousness, rests on a psychologi-
tic fallacy. Hume regards difference as equivalent to separation and claims that, because I never
can catch myself without a perception, I never can observe anything but the perception (Hume
1888, 10, 252). But, although we cannot grasp objects without acts, objects are distinguishable
from acts, just like sounds are distinguishable from volumes, although they cannot be given apart
from volume. The properties of the experienced (such as extension) are cognizable only via
experiencing, but are neither properties of the experiencing (which doesn’t have extension) nor
projections or fictions produced by it.

12. The ambiguity of phenomenology is connected with that of the word “appearance” or
“phenomenon”, which can be understood in noetic sense as cogitatio or in noematic sense
as cogitatum and therefore referred to both the appearing, namely to immanent occurrences,
and to that which appears, namely to transcendent objects (cf. Hua XXIV, 405–12; Hua II,
11–14; Hua-Mat VII, 64–5; Kern 1975, 432–7). The ambiguity of reduction, which cons-
ists in a “phenomenalization” (Hua XXIV, 211) or reduction of being to phenomenon,
depends thereon. If “phenomenon” is understood as that which appears, real objects are
reduced to what they are in themselves, namely, regarded as sensuous objects, and what
is eliminated are only the explanatory entities posited behind by the subject. Accordingly,
reduction does not abandon the world, but discloses its sense (Hua VIII, 457), by enabling
the grasp of “the essential connection between the idea of an existent world and the system
of possible experiences” (Hua VIII, 400). If, instead, “phenomenon” is understood as appear-
ing, real objects are reduced to consciousness, and what is eliminated is that which appears.
By presenting reduction as an exclusion of the world and consciousness as a residuum,
the Cartesian way makes reduction to be understood just as a reduction to the stream of
consciousness, whose concern is not the world, but only the subjective acts and modes of
appearance related to world (Hua VIII, 432–4).

Husserl’s introspective conception of phenomenology is affected – via Brentano – by Locke’s
psychological interpretation of reflection as internal perception and rests upon the incorrect
presumption that acts and sensations belong to sensuousness, hence immanent perception is
sensuous perception (cf. Hua XIX/2, 706–9; Kern 1975, 248–54). However, immanent sensa-
tion-contents are not sensuously given and thus actual, but postulated. By dissolving the given
in theoretical constructs, phenomenology falls back into the explanatory approach, from whose
rejection it arises.6

If consciousness is not a box, as Husserl repeatedly asserts, it contains nothing. Sensuous
contents are therefore not immanent to consciousness. When Husserl says that colors are
extended or spread out and join together to make up sensuous fields, he is not speaking of
really immanent contents, for these do not have extension or spreading out and do not join
together to make up sensuous fields. That of which there is consciousness is not really included
in consciousness, because it is “what I myself am not, but what I am conscious of in my being
as a non-ego” (Hua-Mat VIII, 361). Constitution has precisely a “non-subjective core” (Hua-
Mat VIII, 361) that consists in ego-foreign contents lying in sensuous fields (Hua-Mat VIII,
188–9, 199, 295). Accordingly, what is immediately given and functions as the empirical basis
of knowledge are not immanent reflection-contents and sensation-contents, but transcend-
ent perception-contents, which are provided with an objective structure grounded in their nature. Only in this way does one get rid of psychologism, image-theory, and the problem of the external world.

Like all empiricists, Husserl is – to use the terminology of Plato’s *Sophist* – a “son of earth”, but he is not consistent and takes ideas for truthful being.7

**Notes**

4 Already in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl suggests that the objective grounds of every speaking of physical things lie merely in lawful correlations among psychic occurrences (Hua XIX/1, 371) and that things are constituted out of the same stuff as sensations (Hua XIX/2, 764).
5 On the affinities between Berkeley’s and Husserl’s thinking, cf. Philipse 1995, 285–7. In a dissertation written under Husserl’s direction Salmon claims that Hume’s method is introspective, but he didn’t consistently carry through the phenomenological subjectivization (cf. Salmon 1929). Yet, although Husserl distinguishes between his transcendental and Hume’s bad subjectivization (Hua XVII, 263), subjectivization is undistinguishable from psychologization.
6 “In order to overcome naturalism radically, one also has to reject the principle of immanence and the epistemological problem of the external world which is implied by it” (Philipse 1995, 300). In the first formulation of 1902–3, the transcendental question concerns precisely “sense and warrant of the assumption of an ‘external world’” (Hua-Mat III, 79).
7 I am indebted to Mario Alai, Burt Hopkins, Wolfgang Kaltenbacher, Michela Summa, and especially Daniele De Santis for their help with grammar and style. I also thank Professor Julia Jansen for permission to quote from Husserl’s unpublished manuscripts.

**References**


