

International Phenomenological Society

The Phenomenological Approach in Social Science

Author(s): Hans P. Neisser

Source: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Dec., 1959), pp. 198-212

Published by: [International Phenomenological Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2104356>

Accessed: 27/09/2011 21:20

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



International Phenomenological Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

I

The term "phenomenology" is today used in at least two undoubtedly different meanings – always disregarding Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* to which I have not devoted time sufficient for understanding it. One of the modern meanings of the term is the sense which it acquired in the work of the German philosopher Husserl; some application to social science has been undertaken by his school – not all with the master's full approval. The same term "phenomenology" appears in such publications as Van der Leeuw's *Phenomenology of Religion*. What is aimed at in this book, and in similar work, is to refrain from any *causal* explanations of the phenomena observed – to limit the observation to mere *description*. Here, I can only touch lightly on this type of empirical phenomenology as I may call it; my time will be mostly devoted to Husserl's *philosophical* phenomenology. Fortunately not much is lost by this limitation, since in most respects the methodological problems of empirical phenomenology are the same as those of the "explanatory" empirical sciences. This is so because the aim of description is here description of the real world, as it has existed and presumably will exist – the same real world which the explanatory sciences want to "explain." I mention briefly the problems and, even more briefly, will comment on them.

There is first the problem of reliable "sources" for the material to be organized in the description; secondly, we have the problem of selecting from the infinite totality of experience the particular phenomena which are to be described; thirdly, there is the problem of the *minimum* of causal laws, the validity of which must be accepted even in a mere descriptive study of this kind.

As to the source problem, no attempts can be made here to indicate even briefly the problems of historical methodology. It is, however, worthwhile pointing out that an analogous "source" problem exists in descriptive psychology: a large part of psychological description is descriptive of past subjective experience for which the describing individual has to rely on his *memory*. We shall return later to this point.

The second problem – that of selection – is probably the most serious one. No science, whether descriptive or explanatory, can aim at a *photographic duplication* of experience; this would be both impossible and useless. So there remains a problem of selection even if we knew exactly which phenomena should be labeled in our illustration religious phenomena. But what are religious phenomena? Do we only wish to describe the ritual,

the outward behavior which we call religious, like churchgoing? We may be able to distinguish it in *our* civilization from nonreligious outward behavior, but might have great difficulties in alien civilizations. Or do we aim at the description of truly religious feeling, the variety of religious experience: how do we separate the believer from the hypocrite? These difficulties, of course, would be the smaller, the less complex the phenomena to be described. E.g., in a phenomenology of the eating habits of mankind we would be guided by undisputed anatomical-physiological facts, and, to turn now to the third problem, by the elementary causal laws – by the laws of nutrition. Much more complex causal laws seep into the allegedly *pure description* of religious phenomena: would it be possible, e.g., to describe correctly the religious experience of an ecstatic like Ignatius de Loyola without touching upon the spiritual influence of both his previous military experience and his religious education and studies?

Turning away from the empirical phenomenology to Husserl's approach we note first his claim to obtain *a priori* knowledge. This *a priori* knowledge is not meant to replace the results obtained by the empirical approach of positive science, but the method is said to provide knowledge *independent* of and *basic* for the empirical approach, and without which this approach is bound to end in *confusion*.

In his own writings Husserl limited himself to expounding the principles of the phenomenological approach and to using it for the clarification of epistemological and logical problems. Even in his school the application to social sciences is so rare that I could reproduce the main content in three propositions upon which I shall comment briefly in the fourth section. This may seem to do injustice to the work of Max Scheler in the applied field, but for his psychological and sociological writings Scheler seems to have dropped at a later stage the claim to represent phenomenology.¹ Moreover, there is little doubt that Husserl included this work of Scheler when in personal discussion he repudiated a considerable part of the work of his school as missing the "transcendental aspect."

I have therefore to proceed *systematically*. I shall first formulate more strictly the phenomenological approach *as I see it*. I shall then discuss its applicability to social sciences.

¹ This surmise is based on the fact that Scheler dropped the term "phenomenology" in the later editions of his book on Sympathy. On the other hand, in the preface to his *Collected Papers, 1915* (Abhandlungen und Aufsätze) he had referred to Husserl as the methodological inspiration for his work. Not affected by this change in the label are, of course, papers which were certainly not meant to represent phenomenology like the article on the Future of Capitalism, and on the other hand, the studies in pure phenomenology which tried to develop Husserl's own work further, like "The Idols of Knowing Oneself" (*ibid.*, Vol. II).

II

Phenomenology disregards (schaltet aus) or "brackets" (klammert aus) reality – physical, psychological, social reality. It does not make statements about what exists in reality. In particular, it does not rival the positive sciences in what may be called their specific task: to predict events in the real world. In Husserl's opinion this bracketing does not imply any shutting of the content of experience, except that we disregard its "being real": we shall see, however, that this definition of bracketing (which is also called phenomenological *epoché*) creates serious problems for the *a priori* character of the phenomenological insights. As pointed out, bracketing of reality and the exclusion of prediction is not limited to nature, and the science of nature. We may concede that our knowledge of the social world is obtained in a way different from natural science, by empathy, understanding, interpretation of actions of others as actions of human beings: social science is still science of the real world and *does* predict.

Bracketing of reality is not sufficient to indicate the aim of phenomenology. Mathematics does not deal with the real world either, it also brackets it. Mathematics is, in fact, an "eidetic" science in Husserl's sense of the term – a science whose propositions do not concern existence, but "essence" or "eidos." But Husserl's interest is not in the *exact* eidetic science of mathematics, but in *description*. Of course, this is not the empirical description mentioned in the beginning, but the description of the *essence*, or of essential relations in the contents of the stream of *purely subjective experience*.²

What does that mean? I am going to explain it by laying before you a few eidetic propositions of the descriptive kind. However, before I do so, I must utter a warning. Since in a sense the mathematical, or at least the geometrical concepts, can be said to "idealize" concrete observable reality, one could be tempted to identify the phenomenological description with the *idealizing* procedure of the positive sciences, in other words, with the attempt to master by an appropriate but idealizing conceptual framework the infinite complexity of reality. Concepts like "perfect

² I use the term "subjective experience" as a translation of the German term "Erlebnis" denoting the stream of "psychological events" passing the human mind. Quotations from Husserl's writings are partly taken from Gibson's translation of the *Ideas* (London, 1931, the Muirhead Library of Philosophy) where subsection corresponds to the German paragraph; some passages, other writings of Husserl, and writings of the school were translated by me. Gibson translates "Erlebnis" by "experience," adding the German term in parenthesis to distinguish it from objective or organized experience in the sense of "Erfahrung." (The meaning of this term in German philosophy is not unambiguous). The explanation of subjective experience as "psychological event" is to be found in *Ideas*, subsec. 32, para. 2.

competition" are said to be idealized: there is nothing in economic reality that would exactly conform to them; laws like Galileo's law of falling bodies never indicate with complete accuracy the observed fall of any particular body. But all these idealizations are *tentative* and *hypothetical*, oriented to the end of predicting real events – they are formed *a posteriori* not *a priori*, they do not have the nature of *definiteness* claimed by the propositions of phenomenology, of which I am going to give six examples.

1. In the space in which I, as human being, *perceive* events, lines that are parallel in my neighborhood intersect in a far distance. But in the space in which I *represent* events, they do not, and through any point in the space of representation I can draw only one parallel to a given straight line.

2. The perception of an object existing in time always begins at a "present" moment; while a motion is perceived, it is, moment by moment, perceived as presently happening; thus the active phase of motion is constituted as a present one. But this conception of something present is analogous to the core of a comet to which a tail of retentions is attached, which all refer to the earlier "present moment" of the motion. When, however, perception ceases – we do not see any longer a motion, or in case of a melody the playing is ended and quietness rules – then the last phase is not followed by a new phase of perception, but only by a phase of fresh recollection, the latter being in turn followed by another phase of recollection, etc. In this situation there is continued shifting back into the past. The continuous complex set of phases is steadily subject to a modification, until it vanishes; for the modification is associated with weakening down to imperceptibility. The original "field" of the time obviously is bounded exactly like the field of perception (E. Husserl, *Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Inner Time* [1928], subsec. 11, p. 391).

3. An empirical consciousness of a self-same thing that looks "all-round" its object, and in so doing is continually confirming the unity of its own nature, essentially and necessarily possesses a manifold system of continuous patterns of appearances and perspective variations, in and through which all objective phases of the bodily self-given which appear in perception, manifest themselves perspectively in definite continua (Husserl, *Ideas*, subsec. 41, para. 4).

4. The inability to be perceived immanently and, therefore, to find a place at all in the flow of consciousness belongs in essence and "in principle" altogether to the thing as such, to every reality in the genuine sense which we have still to fix and make clear (*ibid.*, subsec. 42, para. 2).

5. Statements about real individual things can be intelligible even though the term denoting the thing has lost all intuitive content³ and

³ "Intuition" is the generally accepted translation of the German "Anschauung." It might be better to use the term "visualization," provided we include the functions

is used as a mere symbol. If things are intelligible, the intuitive content can be recalled by systematic analysis.

6. It is possible for a thinking individual to subject his own mental acts to reflection, i.e., mere observation, criticism, approval.⁴

These illustrations have the following in common: a) They refer to psychological or *mental acts*, more specifically to the objects of these acts – object in the sense of *content* of acts, not in the sense of something really existing. The term “act” is designed to exclude mere sensations like those of heat or pain.⁵ b) They describe formal structural features of the contents of acts; these features are *invariants* – they cannot be altered by or for a human being. c) The acts described can be repeated or “reactivated” at will. We obtain the knowledge of the formal structure by reflecting on the *contents of the repeated acts*.

The term “formal” refers to the fact that what is repeated or reactivated at will, is not the act in its entirety – to repeat *exactly* a specific perception is impossible, but it is possible to perceive at all and to note the common properties of the acts of perception. On the other hand, descriptive psychology, or as it has been called phenomenological psychology, in the sense of empirical phenomenology, far from limiting itself to the common structural forms, is also interested in the *material* content of the acts.

It will be argued that at least some of the propositions state empirical possibilities rather than eidetic necessities.⁶ Proposition six is not valid for a little child. Let us remember, however, that phenomenology does not *predict* – in other words, we do not say this particular human being Z is able or will be able to perform certain mental acts. We talk of properties of the human mind in its fully developed maturity; not every human

of the other senses. In the great majority of cases the concepts used in sentences are devoid of intuition; but in referring, e.g., to “the tree in front of my house” we are in principle able to fill this purely signitive concept with intuitive content – we could visualize the tree. (This possibility exists for all concepts, not only for those referring to physical things). Intuition, in this sense, is not a particular way of obtaining knowledge of reality, but it is indispensable for clarifying the *meaning* of concepts.

⁴ The last example refers to illustrations in a paper by Dr. M. Henle, “Some Aspects of the Phenomenology of the Personality,” presented to the General Seminar of the Graduate Faculty of the New School on October 23, 1957. The problem was discussed before by Husserl.

⁵ No distinction is made here between “pure acts” and “psychological functions” (C. Stumpf, “Erscheinungen und psychische Funktionen,” in: *Abh. d. Kgl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1906; M. Scheler, *Abhandlungen*, Vol. II, pp. 45 ff.) This distinction is not accepted by Husserl (*Ideas*, Note to subsec. 86) and is not relevant in the present context.

⁶ If Husserl and his school occasionally term phenomenology the “knowledge of the possibilities which must precede the knowledge of realities” (e.g., *Ideas*, subsec. 79, last par.), they do not refer to empirical possibilities governed by the laws of the real world (or world of “facts”), but to what is eidetically possible, or even better: what is not eidetically impossible.

being can participate in the activities of this cosmos – not a new born baby, not a lunatic, not every member of a primitive tribe. But the fact that little children or primitives cannot count beyond three, surely does not militate against the validity or the *a priori* character of arithmetic. Of course, if no two “human” minds were equal as to certain essential functions, no analysis – in fact no *communication* – would be possible. We do not deny that such communication may have particular difficulties, especially when the other party has no training, no patience, and no willingness to participate in the analysis. But in principle, the same difficulty of communication exists in applying the methods of positive science, at least in nonexperimental sciences like meteorology or astronomy: here it is necessary that several observers agree as to the content of their observations of the *same* nonrepeatable event. True, the observation is aided by specifically devised instruments, but this does not exclude the fact that, except for the similarity of normal human minds, two observers would read off different observations.

But granted all these things, it will be asked: what is the significance and fruitfulness of propositions like the ones presented? It is the main topic of this paper to examine critically the claims made by Husserl and his school for the basic significance of the latter for the positive sciences. Since the result of our investigation is largely negative, I wish at this place to point to one not unimportant application of phenomenological analysis, and in this way to answer also those critics who consider all phenomenological propositions as mere truisms. It is my conviction that the much discussed problems of the foundations of mathematics cannot be solved except by phenomenological analysis. The question is of interest not only to mathematicians: on the logical consistency of arithmetic there depends the consistency of the Non-Euclidean geometries, hence of the *physics* of our times. We maintain that the logical consistency of arithmetic can be “proved” only by a phenomenological analysis of the process of *counting*: full insight into the implications of this process alone makes clear why, e.g., $2 + 7 = 9 = 3 \times 3 = 14 - 5$.

This will sound pretentious, for the logistic school – Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* – and the formalistic school of Hilbert, found it necessary to devote two volumes each to these seemingly elementary problems, without fully succeeding in solving them. To justify my assertion, let me point out that there is implicit in Russell’s approach to arithmetic precisely the very phenomenological understanding of the process of counting which we consider indispensable. Listen to the formulation of the Whitehead-Russell approach by one of their followers;⁷ C. G.

⁷ C. G. Hempel, “On the Nature of Mathematical Proof” in the *World of Mathematics* (1956), Vol. III, p. 1628. This is meant as an interpretation of the *Principia Mathematica*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 359.

Hempel supplements the definition of "two" as the class of all "couples" by a definition of the couple contained in "Mr. Brown as well as Mr. Cope but no one else is in the office, and Mr. Brown is not identical with Mr. Cope." The last statement is a description of an elementary counting process, counting up to two. The description of which we are talking here is of course not a description of the actual psychological processes materializing in individuals who perform the acts of counting. We do not explore the obstacle which prevents the primitive from counting up to more than three, or the processes of tiring when we try to count up, step by step, to 10,000. We clarify the *meaning* of the operation of counting; in doing so we realize that at any stage of the process we would be "able" to start a new simultaneous process and can associate in couples the stages of the old process and the stages of the new process. We grasp in this way the meaning of addition and subtraction of the natural numbers, etc.⁸

The phenomenological analysis of counting, and of similar mental activities, has an important logical function, which we mention here because we will need it in a later part of this paper. The task of *defining* a specific number or of "number in general" can be solved in no other way than by reactivating and "visualizing" the counting process in full clarity. Hence we are in full agreement with the modern view that, contrary to Kant, arithmetic propositions of an analytical nature do follow from definitions.⁹ These phenomenological definitions are, however, of a peculiar nature different from the bulk of definitions used in daily life or in positive science. In the daily life of positive science the selection of features making up a concept is in principle in steady flux, because the progress of empirical knowledge requires modifications also of the concepts used, in other words of the definitions. Moreover, any human being can introduce at will new distinctions and arbitrarily reshape definitions, e.g., he can define as "full human being" only people taller than five feet. On the other hand, the phenomenological definition refers to formal structural properties of the contents of mental acts, properties *that are invariant*.

III

Phenomenological analysis appears here severely restricted in scope. Let us note that two of our restrictions cannot be found in the writings of Husserl and almost certainly would not have been accepted by him. In

⁸ In my opinion a phenomenological investigation would also shed some light on Cantor's cardinal and ordinal infinities, and the paradoxes arising from them.

⁹ Kant's concept of an analytical judgment excludes the use of intuition for obtaining the meaning of a concept like "summing up" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed., Intro., sec. V, 1, para. 3). But it is not clear how we shall clarify the meaning of "number" without taking recourse to the counting process, and the meaning of the latter without apprehending all its aspects.

two directions his approach *extends phenomenology further* than here admitted. Our criteria exclude from phenomenological analysis, e.g., the acts of volition and the phenomenon of emotion.¹⁰ One cannot resolve to resolve, or decide to be happy. One can *remember* acts of volition and states of emotion, but is not all knowledge that is based on recollection subject to error? Husserl in fact extends the analysis to all acts which can be "made present" or "re-presented" (*vergegenwaertigt*): "If one's recollection is clear, one can understand the past and make intelligible for oneself any nexus of motivation in it."¹¹ ("In it" meaning "in the past" or "in clear recollection"?) But as Husserl himself stated in another place, "It is of the essence of representations to show gradual differences of relative clearness or dimness."¹² Of the recollections in particular Husserl states: "The recollection has a peculiar inadequacy in as much as experiences really collected can be mingled with non-recollected experience" ¹³

The difficulty is almost insuperable. To base *a priori* knowledge on *dim* recollection is manifestly impossible, but to exclude the function of recollection altogether is equally impossible. Nobody will dispute the difference between acts of perception on the one hand, and acts of volition on the other hand, although the latter must be brought back into memory when we want to reflect on them. Careful phenomenological analysis has, for example, removed Schopenhauer's confusion between 1) urges or instincts, 2) the aiming at, 3) the act of willing or resolving.

I do not claim to have a satisfactory solution, but may be permitted to bring forward a suggestion. There is one type of recollection which has a clarity qualitatively different from the other types which, indeed, materialize in all shades of clarity and dimness. This is the recollection that one's mood has changed at times, or that it was at some times more difficult to make up one's mind, etc. In other words there is not only a clear distinction between the principal mental categories (some amenable to reactivation like thinking, some not like volition) – clear beyond serious doubts – but also the fact that the contents are subject to variations of a certain nature: this is their *eidōs*. When and under what conditions specific acts of a certain modus materialize and what are the particular details of the specific activities, can be only established (even if "clearly"

¹⁰ We say "phenomenon of emotion" because it is doubtful whether emotion is a separate act, or rather a kind of sensation attached to acts proper and permeating them.

¹¹ *Ideas*, Book 2 (Husserliana, Vol. IV, 1952), subsec. 69, p. 296.

¹² *Ideas*, Book 1, subsec. 44, last para. (Gibson's translation of "Vergegenwaertigung" by "presentation" obscures the meaning.)

¹³ *Op. cit.*, subsec. 14.

recollected) by the methods of experimental psychology.¹⁴ We do not want to say in the last statement that psychological experiments can be set up independently of phenomenological insights. I doubt, that any psychological experiment can be devised which would convey empirical knowledge, without in some place relying on the existence of a clear recollection of the structural forms of previous acts.

We are confirmed in our attempt to assign a constitutive function to "clear recollection" in the phenomenological description by the fact that even the positivist philosophy cannot do without some assumption. Carnap,¹⁵ for example, introduces the "recollection of similarity" as basic relation or indispensable mental activity in organizing experience by prescientific or scientific methods. Or to quote the philosopher for whom any *a priori* has been an anathema, John Dewey:¹⁶ "We establish for our use, with respect to both fact and knowledge, that we have no 'something known' and no 'something identified' apart from its knowing and identifying The statement is one about ourselves observed in action in the world." This is an implicit phenomenological statement in which appeal is made to reactivation. The authors observe themselves in action in the world.

Our conclusion is that clear recollection of the kind indicated either takes the plan of reactivation or supplements it in an essential way. In the latter respect it suffices to point out that reactivation alone would not

¹⁴ We would include as empirically established and not eidetically founded many results of the so-called phenomenological psychology, e.g., Katz's well-known distinction between 1) bi-dimensional colors localized at a given distance and coloring a perceived thing; 2) three dimensional "volumic" colors as a coloring of a liquid; 3) film colors as seen in a spectroscope. This view of phenomenological psychology is confirmed by an analysis of MacLeod's catalogue in R. B. MacLeod, "The Phenomenological Approach to Social Psychology," *Psychological Review*, 1947, Vol. LIV, p. 220. His statements are either of the negative, policing kind, namely warning against biases, or do reflect empirically obtained knowledge. (What is the social structure of the world in which the individual is living?) His final characterization of the phenomenological method is not very satisfactory: "The method is the attempt to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, to let the phenomena themselves dictate the conceptual framework and the further course of inquiry" (*ibid.*, p. 208). Can that not be said of any empirical science?

Our view of the scope of phenomenology is not at variance with Boring's interpretation of phenomenological psychology (E. G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, 2nd ed., 1950, p. 602): "The phenomenologist seeks to find an *experimentum crucis*, the convincing *single demonstration of some observed generality*." (Italics mine!) For „*experimentum crucis*” we would put "reactivation, in which a formal, or general structure is ascertained in clarity."

¹⁵ R. Carnap, *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*, 1928, sec. 78, p. 110; see also sec. 75.

¹⁶ J. Dewey and A. F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, Boston, 1949. Chapter II, "The Terminological Problem," from which we quote (p. 54) is signed jointly by both authors.

yield the knowledge of the structural forms unless accompanied by recollection of similar acts – acts in the same *modus* with the contents of which the actually present act is compared.

The extended scope which in this way is attributed to the phenomenological method still is far less than claimed by Husserl and the School. We limited it to the *formal structure* of the contents of acts. But if the descriptive phenomenological propositions are all of the kind of our illustrations, it could scarcely be maintained that the positive sciences by being ignorant of them have been confused, and that a fully developed phenomenology would revolutionize science. Of course we concede to phenomenology as to all branches of philosophy a policing function – policing unfounded metaphysical speculations like Schopenhauer's theory of volition mentioned above, or policing pseudo-empirical theorizing as in much of psychoanalysis, policing also philosophy itself, for example, the conclusion that the space of representation (see above proposition 1) is necessarily identical with the correlated space of the real world as constructed by science with a view to the prediction of events in the world of daily experience.

Moreover, the truly philosophically minded would consider the mighty structure of modern scientific knowledge unsafe and incomplete unless full clarity is obtained about the *foundations*: in this sense the phenomenology of the consciousness of subjective time is the indispensable basis for all knowledge of real events. And surely we shall have more confidence in what physics teaches us about nature if the consistency of the Non-Euclidean geometry is proved. But it cannot be said that the lack of a proof has hampered the progress of physics.

This of course would not be satisfactory to the School. But is there more? If we look in Husserl's writings for descriptive types of "essence" that refer to more than formal structure, we have a hard time finding them. In the third book of the *Ideas* entitled "The Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Science" we have not been able to find a single illustration worth quoting.¹⁷ In other books, however, references do slip in which, critically examined, lead directly to the crucial point.

Husserl first admits the impossibility of determining unambiguously the so-called eidetic *singularities* in the realm of description, then he continued, "We describe and determine with rigorous conceptual precision the generic essence of perception in general or of subordinate species such as the perception of physical thinghood, of animal nature and the like" (*Ideas*, subsec. 75, para. 4).¹⁸ Can we really do so after we have bracketed real existence?

¹⁷ Characteristically, the illustrations in Book 3 are taken from mathematics, which is not a descriptive eidetic science.

¹⁸ The discussion in Husserl's last book: *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaft*

We find here a basic ambiguity in Husserl's concepts of *bracketing*. It cannot only refer to the exclusion of such questions as to whether a certain phenomenon is only a hallucination or a dream or a true index of what it claims to be.¹⁹ For what would it mean that the world which we currently experience is a "hallucination" although unchanged otherwise in its structure and course? Indeed, according to Husserl, bracketing reaches farther: for example, the "cosmic time" (as contrasted to the time extension of the individual's subjective experience) is to be bracketed (*Ideas*, subsec. 81). On the other hand, as the quotation above shows, the experience is not to be reduced to a bundle of unstructured sensations, as they sometimes show up as "gaps" even in an otherwise structured experience. The phenomenological reduction is far from excluding all structure from the residual left after bracketing. But this reduction must be more radical than Husserl apparently assumed; it must exclude all *a posteriori* components of the real world. Certainly the distinction between the animal being and the non-animal being is based on the objective experience of the real world, organized first by the prescientific activity of the human mind and then modified by positive science. It is tentative and not eidetic. The eidetic field is indeed limited to what we called the formal structure of contents of acts, those characteristic distinctions which remain invariant when, to use a Husserl term, we vary the contents in "free fancy."

We are aware of the inadequacy of this definition – of the difficulty in distinguishing the invariant formal structure from the material content of the act, and of the other difficulty in classifying the truly eidetic propositions as, on the one hand, propositions which can and must be modified in the symbolic systems of knowledge in which we get hold of reality (positive science), and, on the other hand, as such propositions which cannot be thus modified. One is tempted to answer the last question by differentiating between propositions which make explicit the nature of thinking and those propositions which make explicit the nature of human

und die transzendente Phänomenologie (Husserliana, Vol. VI, 1954) subsec. 66, does not go further. The discussion of the "thing" (*ibid.*, subsec. 45, p. 160) parallels the discussion in the first book of the *Ideas* quoted above under nos. 3 and 4.

¹⁹ These distinctions are absent in the realm of psychological experience, which, in this sense and in this sense only, can be said to have a reality different from the reality of events in space. (The feeling of pain cannot be a hallucination!) The content of acts of external perception is as certain as that of psychological reflections or of the feeling of pain. The apperception, on the other hand, of some content of a specific external perception as a specific event in the real world can, of course, be erroneous; but the same is possible of the apperception of a mental act or sensation as a manifestation of an ego of a specific structure, especially of its so-called subconscious components. These remarks are in agreement with Husserl's analysis in *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. II, 2 App., and in *Ideas* (passim.), although at variance with M. Scheler, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 71.

intuition.²⁰ It should be realized, however, that the definitions and the distinctions for which we are looking are themselves of phenomenological nature, and can be established not in a short formulation but only in a painstaking and detailed phenomenological analysis of the universe of knowledge.

IV

For the social world our restrictions are of equal if no greater importance. What are the invariants of the acts in which we understand and participate in the social world?

First, the ego lives. It would have to organize its life as a human being in some fashion even if it were a solitary Robinson. The world around it has also the function of serving its needs – this is an eidetic insight, but the “how” is empirical and changing.

Secondly, the ego lives in a “social world”, i.e., in communication with other entities regarded as similar in basic traits to the ego. Is this an eidetic necessity? Certainly not: the ego could consider these entities as particles in a kind of molecular Brownian movement, which displays certain regularities; and the descriptive content of the ego’s subjective experience as well as the conceptual organization of this subjective experience will differ according to which of the two approaches the ego considers as appropriate.

But, it may be argued, we are born into a social world by which we orient our acts and actions – they do not fit the Brownian movement approach. Let us take the fact of the social world of other human beings as the only suitable starting point of social science, as an invariant feature of a certain class of acts; can we obtain further eidetic propositions which would form the basis of social science? *I have not been able to find any.* The few remarks in Husserl’s writings are nothing but a restatement of the definition of the social world, except for slips into the empirical.^{20a} For example, in contrasting the world in which we live to the “objective

²⁰ For Kant this distinction did not exist. The *a priori* had the same dignity whether demonstrated in a metaphysical deduction (what we would call phenomenological analysis) or in a transcendental one. In the Transcendental Analytics the transcendental deduction of the categories (there is no metaphysical discussion) aims at establishing them as constituting all knowledge of reality. (The difference from positivism is primarily that for the latter, that is tentative and hypothetical which for Kant was definite and indispensable.) Unfortunately the transcendental deduction of the forms of intuition in the Transcendental Aesthetics is differently oriented for reasons which we cannot discuss here.

^{20a} “Each particular human group, characterized by the way in which the members communicate among themselves, has peculiar forms in which it constitutes itself as ‘community’ ” (Husserl, *Krisis*, p. 167). But the groups could be homogeneous,

world" he asserts that the objective world is a theoretical-logical construction, which in principle cannot be observed, cannot be experienced as what it is by itself, while the world in which we live can be "directly" experienced²¹ (*wirklich erfahren*). But the social world is *not* directly experienced, it arises from the ego's conviction of being surrounded by analogous beings – this and nothing more is the true meaning of Husserl's assertion.

Hence it seems to me that studies dealing with the basic structure of the social world like Dr. Schuetz's classic book *Meaning as Constituent of the Social World* are based much less on phenomenology than even the author assumed, and much more on empirical knowledge (excepting of course the purely methodological parts). Naturally, we have a considerable body of knowledge drawn from *common experience* and scarcely open to doubt – this does not make it eidetic. Who, for example, would dispute the distinction between a contemporary social world (*Umwelt*) on the one hand, a future and a past social world (*Vorwelt*), on the other hand? Yet this distinction is based on the empirical facts of birth and death; how could it be maintained, if following Husserl's instruction we bracketed "cosmic time"? And clearly, for the social world of the Olympian gods, the distinction between a group of contemporary deities and another belonging to posterity would have no meaning.

Dr. Schuetz has avoided labeling his work as a contribution to phenomenology. Edith Stein, on the other hand, considers her study on "The Individual and The Community" as a contribution to the philosophical foundations of the so-called "sciences of the mind," which here include sociology.²² I found one statement there which is worth quoting in the present context: "Any member of a troupe of actors can, in principle, feel sorry about the loss which the troupe as a whole suffers when a particular member leaves it." What in this statement is an eidetic necessity? There are egotists who never feel sorry about any mishap which does not affect them directly. If we say there is a "possibility" of nonegotists we only state that the definition of the social world allows the existence of nonegotists, but that would not prevent a real social world from being composed exclusively of egotists.²³

There is apparent in Edith Stein's approach a tendency of the school to take certain typical structures of the empirical world as eidetic insights; this is achieved by using this structure as basis of the definition of a

²¹ *Krisis*, subsec. 34, d, p. 130.

²² In: *Jahrbuch f. Philosophie and phänomenologische Forschung (J.B.)*, Vol. V, 1922, esp. p. 122.

²³ Most of the statements in this section of Edith Stein's paper show a lack of clarity which make a discussion very difficult. The "community" has no consciousness (p. 125) but "subjective experience" separate from that of the member (*ibidem*), possibly a soul

necessarily somewhat vague term from daily life.²⁴ To take an example from "pure jurisprudence": that a claim expires at the moment when the obligee performs his due was considered by Reinach as an *a priori* synthetic judgment.²⁵ It is in fact an analytical statement, namely a part of the definition of "claim" in the sense that we typically do not consider a claim to be established without the implications stated by Reinach. In M. Weber's terminology the social action expected when a claim is established has a characteristic termination when the obligee performs his due. But this definition is obtained by the analysis of *typical* attitudes and *reflects* these typical attitudes – there is no eidetic necessity. Without stating something nonsensical, the law could prescribe that if the holder of the claim is a minor payment to him does *not* make the claim expire.

What shall we finally say, in this short but tedious catalog of the applications, about Dr. Back's proposition – the only one in a book of 244 pages on our subject²⁶ – that in "any possible economic production of goods the input of labor is indispensable"? Hence, the berries in the woods are not "produced" according to this definition. Completely automatic production would not be "production." Production is only where there is labor input. Here we cannot even say that the author has transformed the empirical characteristics of typical human behavior into a definition, and then considered the implication of the definition as eidetic truth. This is, in reality, an example of a completely arbitrary, man-made, definition.

Let us after these critical comments try to determine the position of Husserl's phenomenology in the history of philosophy. It is, in my opinion, a renewed and possibly the last attempt of the German idealistic philosophy to claim for pure reason what Kant once had destroyed, namely: the faculty of knowing something about the real world independently of the fertile source of organized experience. The hope never

(subsec. 3c, affirmatively answered p. 247). In section 5 of the same paper, Edith Stein, following hints of Husserl, develops the basic distinction of volition, instinct, and aims mentioned above. In the separate paper on the State (*J.B.*, Vol. VII, 1925) the vagueness has increased: "The state must be its own master" (p. 5). What has this statement, or similar ones, about the minimum population of the state to do with phenomenology?

²⁴ The "philosophical anthropology," which has become famous through Heidegger's work as "existentialism," was not interested in the contrast between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, so characteristic of Husserl's approach, and avoided the pitfalls of the phenomenological school which we discussed in the text. The question of its validity is therefore open. Are the propositions of the philosophical anthropology obtained from an experience which is valid for all mankind, or from a particular civilization in a certain stage of historical development?

²⁵ A. Reinach, *Die Apriorischen Grundlagen des Buergerlichen Rechts*, *J.B.*, Vol. I (1913), esp. p. 694.

²⁶ J. Back, *Die Entwicklung der reinen Oekonomie zur nationaloekonomischen Wesenswissenschaft*, 1929, p. 189.

seems to die. Kant himself who in *The Critique of Pure Reason* had limited the *a priori* knowledge to space, time, and a few formal principles like substance and causality, could not resist the temptation only two years later to deduce theoretically Newton's Law of Gravitation as *a priori* law (*Prolegomana*, subsec. 38); and he endeavored the rest of his life to broaden the basis for a *deductive* but *material* knowledge of nature (in the *Metaphysical Beginnings of the Natural Science* and in his posthumous work). The extravaganzas of the so-called "romantic" philosophy, especially of Schelling and Hegel, need not be called back here. It seems that the German philosophical mind in full bloom has been unable to retain for any length of time the skeptical self-restraint which the *Critique of Pure Reason* imposed, and which in different forms has proved the characteristic feature of Anglo-Saxon philosophy from Bacon and Locke to Dewey and Russell. Husserl's philosophical conscience would not have permitted him by muddling through in his analytical work to erect something like the extravagant metaphysical structures of his predecessors. It is not the completed phenomenological analyses in Husserl's work which aroused our criticism – they only arouse *admiration*. We do not object to his extension of the *a priori* beyond the narrow limits of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: in no other way could our knowledge of the real world be put on a solid foundation. Our objections are directed against his desperate attempt to claim for phenomenology a function which his own analytical work had not performed and, in our opinion, cannot perform.²⁷

HANS P. NEISSER.

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH.

²⁷ This paper was presented to the General Seminar of the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, New York City in the fall term 1957. At the time when the proofs had to be read the second volume of Husserl's *Erste Philosophie* was not yet available.