



The Nature of Belief and the Method of Its Justification in Husserl's Philosophy

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to accomplish the following: (1) to clarify and critically discuss the phenomenology of "belief" as we find it in Husserl's Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book (1913) (henceforward, Ideas I); (2) to clarify and critically discuss the manner in which the phenomenological method treats beliefs; (3) to clarify and critically discuss the manner of belief justification as described by the phenomenological method; and (4) to argue that, just as the phenomenological method can be used to validate scientific hypotheses, it can likewise be practised in our everyday worldly comportment to justify our everyday, commonsense beliefs. The paper proceeds from the idea that the phenomenological method is not the static descriptive method some make it out to be, but, rather, a living method at the service of life. The author begins with some preliminary remarks about Husserl's concerns with unfounded or presupposed beliefs and their necessary "suspension" as dictated by the phenomenological reduction and epoche ("the method"). He then engages the text of Ideas I, especially sections 101 to 106, where Husserl presents a phenomenological conception of the character of belief. The paper concludes by treating the nature of belief justification, or "rational positing", and puts forward the view that the phenomenological method in everyday practice can aid us in the realization of responsible epistemic conduct and, ultimately, lead toward responsible conduct towards ourselves and, hence, authentic being.

Introduction

Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method promises new foundations for science, logic and mathematics. This was, after all, Husserl's intention.¹ It is thus easy for readers of Husserl to ignore the obvious, namely that, in virtue of establishing the *a priori* foundations of science, the phenomenological method in everyday practice can, in much the same

way that it can validate scientific hypotheses, also prove useful in the justification of our everyday beliefs. What is thus proposed in this paper is that the phenomenological method can also be understood as a method of epistemic justification. In other words, that this method, which uncovers the manner in which intentional acts gain their justification or "fulfilment" through a synthetic act of intuition, likewise serves as the condition for the possibility of everyday knowledge.

This claim rests on the view that the paradigm of an intentional act is *belief*. In fact, some Husserl scholars have suggested that *all* intentional acts are of the

¹ In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article, Husserl states that phenomenology "designates two things: a new kind of descriptive method ... and an *a priori* science derived from it" (1927/1971, p. 77).

character of beliefs. Johanna Maria Tito (1990), for instance, states that “intentionality, the ego’s being related to its object, is an act of believing” (p. 67). The view can be characterized as follows: an intentional relation (where consciousness is *consciousness of X*) is an intentional relation of *believing* when the intention assumes a previous familiarity with an intentional object (with *X* as a possible object of cognition), or vice versa; in this way, consciousness always “believes in” the object toward which it is directed. Thus, an intentional act is “characterized” as a *believing in* an (intentional) object which, if intuitively given, confirms the act, and, if not intuitively given (as it is intended), has the effect of nullifying the act.

The focus of my attention is on the discussion of these topics as presented in the second half of Husserl’s (1913) *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book* (henceforward, *Ideas I*). In that work, the nature of belief and a careful articulation of the nature of justification, or confirmation - what Husserl calls “rational positing” - is carefully presented. The next section begins with some preliminary remarks about Husserl’s concerns with unfounded or unjustified beliefs and their necessary “suspension” as dictated by the phenomenological *epoche*. I then engage the text of *Ideas I*, especially sections 101 to 106, where Husserl presents a phenomenological conception of the character of belief. I conclude by treating the nature of belief justification, or “rational positing”, where I also put forward the view that the phenomenological method in everyday practice can aid us in the realization of responsible epistemic conduct and authentic *being*.

The “Unreasonable” Status of Beliefs According to Phenomenology²

Suspension of one’s beliefs is perhaps the most significant demand of the phenomenological method. The revelatory “modes” of *givenness* of phenomena themselves are not revealed if one does not “bracket” or “suspend” the validity of world-beliefs in a specifically *methodological* way. The clarity of thought which the method promises can only come about after all knowledge claims are, Husserl says, “tested and contested” (1913/1998, p. 62). It is the phenomenological method, as a method of testing and contesting, then, that requires us to set in abeyance

² The word “unreason” [*Unvernunft*] is opposed to “reason” (or, as will be shown, to “rational justification”, “fulfilment”, “confirmation”, and so on). Husserl considers “unreason” as the negative counterpart of reason” (1913/1998, p. 344).

both our everyday beliefs and those beliefs we hold in higher regard, such as scientific beliefs. In practice, this turns out to be a rigorous requirement, since our embeddedness in our mundane existence resists this type of universal belief suspension. Nevertheless, authentic thinking demands this effort.

The answer as to why this methodological requirement is necessary *should* seem obvious: following Descartes, we rid ourselves of unfounded presuppositions so as to re-establish the whole of human, scientific and philosophical knowledge upon apodictically certain premises untainted by dogmatic prejudices. According to some notable interpreters of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, however, the idea that the reduction’s task is to *methodologically* reconstruct the epistemological edifice is far from being the case. It is Eugen Fink who writes,

The sense of the *epoche*, on the one hand, and of the action of reduction, on the other, is liable to a misinterpretation which has its basis likewise in the mistaken view that the *epoche* has a “simple straightforward aim”, namely, that it is nothing but a “method of confirmation”, an exaggerated Methodism. (Fink, 1932/1995, p. 45)

The admonition here is that the aim of the *epoche*, of the bracketing or suspension which goes hand in hand with the phenomenological reduction, is not simply to confirm those beliefs which are held in abeyance; it is not, Fink says, an “exaggerated Methodism”. Instead, the point, Fink goes on to say, is to demonstrate subjectivity as “taking precedence constitutively over the being of the world”, as showing the priority of subjectivity in constituting the sense of the world *for us* (1932/1995, p. 48). This means that the *epoche* merely strips us of those beliefs in order to unveil a foundational subjectivity from which the *constitution* (origin and structure) of beliefs in general emerges, or upon which it depends.

The *epoche*, however, does more than open up the region of a foundational subjectivity, or what turns out to be the same, the region of pure consciousness. The phenomenological practitioner gains access to other regions, most significantly the region of *objects*. “Indeed,” writes David Carr (1999), what is opened up is “the whole world of objects for a consciousness, treated strictly as they are intended by consciousness” (p. 79). Thus, while it is true that exposing the priority of the ego, of consciousness, or of transcendental subjectivity in the process of world constitution has been a goal of the phenomenological reduction since its explicit formulation in *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1907), it is false to say that this is its *only* goal. A phenomenologist is interested in more than form, or

the *formal* conditions of constitution: she is also interested in content, that is, the objects constituted or given to consciousness. The *epoche*, contra Fink, is a methodism. After all, “we take this step,” writes Husserl in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, “in agreement with the tenet of Descartes concerning ‘clear and distinct perceptions’” (1907/1964, p. 6) - and we are all agreed that Descartes’s scepticism was, in fact, a “Methodism”. The question motivating this “step” is the *Grundfrage*, the grounding question of the phenomenological method, namely, “How can the absolute self-giveness of cognition reach something not self-given and how is this reaching to be understood?” (Husserl, 1907/1964, p. 5). Thus it is *also* the “reaching out” to the transcendent object, how acts of consciousness directed toward real-world objects gain fulfilment, how knowledge is possible, and what this possibility requires, that are at issue and dependent on the phenomenological method for their clarification, and not merely, as Fink (1932/1995) argues, the role of subjectivity in the constitution of the formal conditions of sense.³

What Husserl is conscious of, and what he aims to avoid, is the corruption of phenomenological knowledge by everyday, mundane, beliefs that presuppose their justification. This is the case with the “thesis” of the natural attitude, which, as Paul Ricoeur (1967) asserts, “contaminates *belief*” (p. 18). Our unjustified belief in the existence of a world independent of our experience, that is, *contaminates* our entire belief structure, leading us astray not only in our everyday lives (as when we claim to know, for instance, what death “is like”), but also in our scientific endeavours (as when we claim to know that sub-atomic particles are “real entities”). In either case, the evidence for either kind of claim is, in most cases, lacking and merely presumed. Thus, as “cognition only reaches as far as self-giveness reaches”, as Husserl says in *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1907/1964, p. 8), those beliefs which posit *beyond* the sphere of what is given (whose object reaches past the sphere of givenness) are surely unjustified - and, worse, *unjustifiable*.

The directive to limit ourselves to describing the objects of experience *as* experienced, and only within those limits, highlights an aspect of our existence about which we can speak without embarrassment or intellectual trepidation (regardless of whether or not we are phenomenologists). Knowledge of the world is

³ Written after Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (1929), the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (1932) is definitely influenced by Fink’s reading of Heidegger, as is evident in his attempt to ignore those aspects of Husserl’s early work that exhibit a more Cartesian flavour. Fink, in effect, attempts to portray Husserl as a critic of Heidegger, albeit anachronistically.

limited to the manner, or *mode*, of its givenness and to the “as” structure of experience - that is, its conceptual make up. Staying within these limitations, we can better grasp the *possibility* of knowledge, and, more particularly, the manner of *confirmation*, or justification, of our most important everyday beliefs. Again, this is not to confuse phenomenology with an *exaggerated* methodism (although it is a *method*, but not an overly excessive one). After all, those beliefs originally placed in suspension are not rejected; rather, we consider them as placed upon the analytical gurney where they can be scrutinized so as to reveal their origin, the modes of givenness of their objects, and the manner of their justification.

Everyday Beliefs

Before going further, however, we have to enquire as to the nature of beliefs. While commonly held to be mental states or representations (not to be confused with affective states, such as worry or excitement, but states which are more explicitly intentional) that purport to “accurately” match some situation or state of affairs in the world, from the phenomenological standpoint beliefs can be viewed a bit differently. Husserl says that a belief is a mental acceptance of the “actuality” (*wirklichkeit*) or “certainty” of an intentional object - it is a position-taking attitude where one understands oneself to be accepting something to be the case, accepting it as certain, doubtful, erroneous, and so on.⁴ For instance, my perceptual belief in the state of affairs characterized as “cars hurrying past my window” - a belief supported by my auditory senses - is also a positing of the *actuality* of the state of affairs as presented by perception. As purporting to match, or be about, *the reality or actuality* of a state of affairs itself, however, a belief can either succeed in doing so or it can fail; that is, it can be either a true belief or a false belief. True beliefs are said to be constitutive of knowledge. The problem is, as Plato shows in the *Theaetetus* (201b-c), that I can have true beliefs but not knowledge.

Ultimately, the view advocated here is that a concern with the nature, status and eventual reinstatement of everyday, mundane beliefs is central to Husserl’s phenomenological project. After all, we cannot help

⁴ Here we can speak of “occurrent” and “dispositional” beliefs. In the case of occurrent beliefs, a belief is an “actual” [*aktuell*] position-taking attitude, and one understands oneself to be in such a state at that particular moment in time. In the case of dispositional beliefs, a belief stands as a “potential” [*inaktuell*] position-taking attitude, or mental state where one might understand oneself to be in such a state in the future - or in which one has understood oneself to be in the past (cf. Husserl, 1998, §113).

but *live* in our beliefs. Moreover, at the moment of self-reflection, we cannot help but *care* about our belief's validity. Thus, it is crucial for Husserl that one question one's most deeply held beliefs so as to ultimately reinstate them with the full force of phenomenological clarity. These efforts are motivated by the idea that beliefs are requisite for conscious experience itself. Another way to say this is that beliefs ultimately determine the directionality of consciousness and the purpose of conscious life. This means, then, that "truth" itself depends on beliefs. This, however, must be properly understood. That truth depends on belief might seem to suggest that Husserl is a full-fledged idealist in the sense that an intentional act, or belief, is the "source" of truth and, what's more, evidence - that *consciousness* is the "source" of evidence, of what fulfils our intentional demands. To think that consciousness is the "source" of fulfilment is to misunderstand Husserl's entire doctrine of intuitive fulfilment, and so, as far as I am concerned, his particular brand of phenomenology. What must be stressed, however, is that, by *seeking* truth and evidence for their fulfilment, beliefs are the "source" of the *epistemic value* truth and evidence enjoy. In other words, without beliefs, truth and evidence would not be truth and evidence, since they are only of value to an experiencing, interested subject. Only to this extent is consciousness the "source of evidence".

As I see it, the underlying motive of the phenomenological method arises as a reaction to both the naïve way in which we are disposed to believe without proper evidence and the manner in which we overlook the value of beliefs in our conscious life. In our everyday, natural attitude, things in the world stand around us and we believe them to be actual and real without questioning this actuality or this reality. Husserl recognizes that, in our mundane existence, "real objects are there, definite ... agreeing with what is actually perceived" (1913/1998, p. 52). In my normal involvement with things around me, I take my perception as "accurately" representing those things in a definite manner. I do not think my perceptions are problematic. Perceptions "correspond" to real existent objects in the external world, and I firmly believe that visual experience, for instance, gives me a complete representation of the objects that I see.⁵ Consequently, I do not think, nor do I have a *reason* to think, that I am lacking an aspect of the object, or that I am "adding" to my experience of the presented object pieces absent from what is in fact presented. Due to the trusting nature of my everyday attitude, I thus fall easily into error and am easily deceived. In

⁵ A valuable commentary on Husserl's theory of perception is given by Kevin Mulligan in *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl* (Smith & Smith, 1995).

the natural attitude, that is, I simply *accept* that all of my beliefs regarding objects and states of affairs are *true*.

That the world and the entities in it turn out to be the way I uncritically assume they are is not enough for genuine knowledge, since it is false that true beliefs on their own constitute knowledge properly speaking.⁶ As far as my everyday comportment goes, to be uncritical of my beliefs is to be constantly on the verge of self-deception. The scientific disciplines have long known this. Natural science engages in the perpetual quest to affirm or deny that which we think about the world - to "justify" our thoughts about it, our hypotheses. Nevertheless, the inquiries of the natural sciences do not go far enough, since, while they question the beliefs about worldly entities, they fail to question the belief in "the world" itself, assuming the independent existence of the world as true, whether justified or not. As Husserl puts it:

"The" world is a fact-world always there; at the most it is at odd points "other" than I supposed, this or that under such names as "illusion", "hallucination", and the like, must be "struck out of it", so to speak; but the "it" remains ever [a] world that has its being out there. (1913/1998, p. 57)

The thesis that the "world has its being out there" as an entity essentially independent of my conscious life allows the sceptic to argue that our beliefs are supported by neither sense experience nor reason, but merely by our habitual reliance on the "constancy and coherence of certain impressions".⁷ For Husserl, then, in order to distinguish between mere blind belief or opinion and genuine knowledge, the "general thesis of the world", the naïve belief in its independent existence arising from the constancy and coherence of "certain impressions", must be suspended (1913/1998, §31) and, more importantly, *tested and contested* (1913/1998, §32).

If the "general thesis of the world" turns out to be true after we submit it to phenomenological scrutiny, it will not only be a true belief, but it would also be justified; it will thus count as knowledge (in Husserl's sense). Moreover, after the reduction, *if we accept* the thesis, or the belief, regarding the independent existence of the world, this will not be due to the fact that it is *true*, but to the fact that *we now have reasons*, arrived at in the most rigorous way - that is, by means of the phenomenological method - for

⁶ That is, in the tradition of Plato and Descartes and pre-Gettier epistemology.

⁷ The notable sceptic here is, of course, David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739/2000, 1.4.2).

accepting it as a viable thesis. *However*, because what is given in conscious experience - the field of phenomenological research - is only phenomena, I *cannot* be justified in believing in a world whose “being” is “out there”, since I cannot get past the phenomenon of the world to what lies behind it, to what “causes” it.⁸ In such a case, I must form a different belief which more adequately coincides with the state of affairs revealed as a result of the phenomenological approach to it. This is the case, or should be the case, not only in our scientific search for truth, but also in our everyday compartment.

Everyday Beliefs Exposed

In the fourth chapter of the third part of *Ideas I*, Husserl discusses the noetic and noematic structures of experience. It is within this discussion that Husserl treats the phenomenon of belief, explicating its manifold characteristics and its different modalities. What was initially left at the doorstep of phenomenology is thus ushered in, or reintroduced, and itself subjected to the phenomenological method.

What are beliefs, then, phenomenologically? We reject first the psychological conception of belief in terms of a *feeling* of conviction, such as “I believe in P because I feel that P is true”. Phenomenologically, beliefs are acts of consciousness which can either find fulfilment in a correlative experience or remain empty. They are, furthermore, intimately related to intuitive evidence, and so can be neither verified nor nullified by *feelings*. For this reason, Husserl finds it necessary to relate modes of being [*Seinsmodi*], which are given, to belief characteristics [*Glaubenscharaktere*] (1913/1998, §103). This correlation is one between that which appears and an intentional act or a belief, which, moreover, is made certain by the appearance itself. By considering these primal believings in being certain, all that is claimed is that they are *about* something “actual” [*wirklich*], namely the perceived object as perceived. Husserl writes:

As noetic characters, correlatively related to modes of Being - as “*doxic*” or “*belief characters*” - we may cite as closely linked with intuitable presentations the perceptual belief present as a real (*reell*) factor in normal perception, and functioning therein as a “sense of reality”, and, more closely still, perceptual assurance or its equivalent; to it corresponds in the appearing “object” as noematic correlate the ontical character “real” (*wirklich*) Such are “*thetic*” acts, acts that “posit” Being. (pp. 249-250)

⁸ Unlike Kant, Husserl suggests that one can neither *know* nor *think* what lies behind phenomena.

Beliefs are thus *thetic* acts, or acts that posit being.⁹ Furthermore, as Husserl suggests in the quoted passage, the belief itself functions as an intentional noema; that is, it functions as, in general cases, the “sense of reality”, and, in particular cases, the “sense of a particular thing”. Thus, we can say that beliefs are acts correlated to, and believings in, being - in the certainty of that which is given. The positing of, for example, “something real” as an object emerges in the horizon of our experience, ultimately *determines* our attentional ray to something that *is* (as opposed to something that *is not*). The belief, in other words, posits the substructural scaffolding of what might be made intelligible given the manifold nature of presentations.¹⁰

Beliefs as noetic acts are thus characterized as certain if their noematic objects have the characteristic of being actual, or of “being real”. Beliefs, however, can easily take on the character of doubt if their objects *appear* questionable or “doubtful”, as is the case when I doubt whether what appears is a mere illusion, or a “mere seeming”. The profiles of an appearing object “suggest” a man, but further profiles suggest a tree which in the night “seems” like a man moving. Consciousness thus takes on the character of doubt: I am no longer sure of what I see, or whether what I see is actual. But, as more and more profiles are given, one possibility gains “weight”, Husserl says, and the belief acquires again the character of certainty (1913/1998, p. 250).

Belief modalities, therefore, pass from certain, to probable, to doubtful, depending on the “weight”, or the evidence, of the given in perceptual intuition. As suggested above, however, the root of all possible modalities lies in an original belief that was at a time certain. Husserl calls this belief the “primary belief” [*Urglaube*] or “protodoxa” [*Urdoxa*]. In other words, the modality of probable belief, as in “that might not be a man after all”, presupposes a more fundamental belief, such as “that is a man”, which came before it when I first encountered the profiles suggestive of a “human-like figure”, and immediately before that as “a thing”.

Related to this is the “radically false doctrine” [*Die*

⁹ Notice that the Latin *posito* or *positus* renders the Greek *thesis* which means “holding”.

¹⁰ In terms of the language of noesis-noema, if we take the object of the belief as a noema, then this noema is a sort of *blueprint* which allows perception to be perception of something. If the belief posits a “red car”, the noema “red car” allows the noetic act to recognize the red car when it appears. This is the view of Dagfin Føllesdal, who refers to the noema as a “pattern” (1969, p. 687), and Michael Dummett, who calls it an “instruction” (1993, p. 113).

grundfalsche Lehre] concerning beliefs. This doctrine holds that “a genus ‘Belief’ simply splits up into certainty, supposal, and so forth, as though the relation could be expressed by spinning out a series of co-ordinate species” (1913/1998, p. 252). The reason this doctrine is false is because it assumes that the proto-belief, the original belief, could be otherwise than certain; to put it differently, what is assumed is that, upon perceiving an object, one believes that the object is *not* actual. In fact, whenever we perceive an object, we perceive it as actual, and our belief is always certain, or else we cannot claim to perceive the object at all. What is important is to keep in mind the phenomenological principle which states that what we are always conscious of are *appearances*. Thus, for instance, I walk toward a shadowy structure in the darkness. The belief in the shadowy structure is a belief in the *presence* of a shadowy structure - it is a belief possessing the character of certainty. As I move closer, I begin to think, or believe, that the shadowy structure is, in fact, the heavy shadow of a large Eucalyptus tree. The original belief is a certain belief in the actuality of *whatever* appears. Time and perspective, however, allow me to acquaint myself with what appears, perhaps leading me to specify the object of my belief more clearly, and I may then believe that what I see is a tree and not a shadow. Closer inspection, moreover, forces me to modify my belief once again: it is not a tree, but something else ... I am not sure *what* it is. Thus, the foundational proto-belief is always certain, since its object is given *as* actual. This can change, however, with time, perspective and accumulation of evidence, from certain to probable as the belief’s “weight” changes, ultimately changing a consciousness itself into uncertainty.

Beliefs, in both their scientific and everyday manifestation, are thus fundamental in the sense that they make up the whole of our intelligible world. Originally, all my beliefs are certain; it is only experience, evidence, that can overturn this certainty. Thus, beliefs *motivate* us to live, since only through life can this original certainty be upheld or nullified. In this way, “protodoxa” are the conditions for the possibility of subjective preferences, intentional directedness, rejection and acceptance, affirmation and negation, and so on. “Every negation,” writes Husserl, “is a negation of something, and this Something points us back to this or that modality of belief” (1913/1998, §106). The attitude of the ego toward things is thus informed by what we can call background or, more appropriately, *enabling* beliefs.¹¹ These enabling beliefs allow the ego, or consciousness, to direct itself; these are the conditions

¹¹ For more on “enabling” beliefs see John Searle (1992, 175-196).

for the possibility of intentionality! In its intentional life, consciousness expresses preferences and inclinations which cannot be explained otherwise than by appeal to these enabling beliefs. Believing in this or that object is in this way similar to the nature of “preferring” [*vorziehen*], or of a *leaning-toward* accepting *the reason* for believing in what is believed. However, proto-doxa, or these primal beliefs, Husserl suggests, are more primordial than “interests”, “leanings” or “preferring” (1913/1998, p. 254).

Justification and the Phenomenology of Reason

Once the phenomenological status of beliefs is explicated, the next step in the inquiry requires Husserl to show how these beliefs constitute knowledge. The way in which the phenomenological method can clarify the possibility of legitimate knowledge is thus the topic of the fourth part of *Ideas I*. Entitled “The Phenomenology of Reason”, it attempts to clarify the nature of “rational legitimacy”, or *Ausweisen*.¹² “Whatever we assert,” writes Husserl in the prologue to chapter 2 of part four, “concerning objects - provided we speak reasonably - we must submit, whether as meant or spoken, to ‘logical grounding’, ‘proof’, direct ‘vision’, or mediated ‘insight’” (1913/1998, p. 326). Klaus Held interprets this as saying that “Intentional, living consciousness keeps moving forward in its search for the fulfilment and verification of its intentions which are, more or less, ‘vague’ or ‘empty’” (quoted in Welton, 2003, p. 18). For Husserl, this project is the continuation of thoughts expressed in the *Logical Investigations*, where he writes, “we prefer to speak of ‘knowledge’ where an opinion, in the normal sense of a belief, has been confirmed or attested” (1913/1970, §16).

Consequently, integral to Husserl’s “phenomenology of reason”, is the distinction between mere opinions and justified beliefs. Husserl puts the matter as follows: “We have *in the first place* the distinction between positional experiences in which what is set down acquires *primordial givenness*, and those in which it does *not* acquire such givenness; between ‘perceiving’, ‘seeing’ acts, that is, ... and non-‘perceiving’ acts” (1913/1998, p. 326). In the “first place”, where the belief gains intuitive fulfilment, we have a presumptive rationality; in the “second place”, what we have is an *a-rational* [*Unverkunfft*] belief,

¹² “Ausweisen” is used by Husserl to mean “to legitimate”, “to show”, “to demonstrate”, “to prove”; “ausweisbar”, as in “vernünftig ausweisbar”, is translated as “that which is rationally demonstrable”, or “being something which can be shown rationally” (F. Kersten’s translation), but it is also used by Husserl to mean “that which can be rationally legitimated”. See Dorion Cairns (1973), *A Guide for Translating Husserl* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).

since it does not receive intuitive support. For a belief to be rationally grounded, therefore, is for it to be justified methodologically and not merely presumed nor a-rational.

The place of “reason” in the phenomenology of reason and in Husserl’s theory of justification should not be misconstrued, however. By “reason”, Husserl means the following: perceived objects “motivate” beliefs in the sense that, when an object appears, a proto-belief in the object *as* certain is formed; when the object-appearance takes place, consciousness has no recourse but to consider the belief in the object as certain, and this is the case, Husserl suggests, of having a *reason to live in* that belief, or for a belief to be “rationally motivated”. Reason, in this context, thus means having rational support for a belief, or reasons to believe, in a thing when the thing is given in evidence, or in its own “bodily presence”. By being intuitively fulfilled, therefore, the belief takes on the character of a rational belief. This suggests the obvious, namely that not every belief is rational. “Although not every position is rational,” writes Marcus Brainard, “wherever there is evidence, the position is indeed rational” (2002, p. 205). To have evidence, in this respect, is to have *reasons* to stake a claim to know the thing - to be rationally motivated. In perceptual experience, the reasons that allow one to be justified are, of course, subject to falsification through future experience. Husserl summarizes the matter in the following way:

In principle a thing in the real world, a Being in this sense, can, within the finite limits of appearance, appear only “inadequately”. Essentially connected therewith is the fact that *no rational positing which rests on an appearance that presents itself so inadequately can be “definitive”, “invincible”*; that no such positing in its particularity is equivalent to the downright assertion that “the Thing is real”, but only to the assertion “It is real” on the supposition that the advance of experience does not bring in its train “stronger rational motives” which exhibit the original positing as one that must be “cancelled” in the further context [*Zusammenhang*]. Moreover, the positing is rationally motivated only through the appearance (the imperfectly fulfilled perceptual sense [*Wahrnehmungssinn*]) in and for itself, considered in its particular detail. (1913/1998, p. 331)

It is the inadequate givenness of “things in the real world”, however, that justify. I claim to know a thing, that is, on the *presumption* that further experience will continue to verify what I know about it. This means that I do not now know, nor can I claim to know, the

thing *conclusively*, or with absolute certainty, without a very pronounced dogmatic arrogance. Empirical knowledge is always subject to the limitations of experience, and its propositions and knowledge claims are always liable to “cancellation” in light of “stronger rational motives”, namely further perceptual evidence and further experience. What this means is that, while justification is a matter of degrees, the rational motivation behind my claim to knowledge is, in fact, *the imperfectly appearing phenomenon itself*. This further suggests that, according to Husserl, no philosophical theory can give us criteria that will lead us to infallible certainty, not even phenomenology!

In §140 of *Ideas I*, Husserl writes:

An evidential act [an intuitive act] and a non-evidential act [a merely empty intention, such as a belief] can coincide, as a consequence of which ... the former [the intuitive act] acquires the characteristic of a validating act, whereas the latter [the belief] acquires the characteristic of an act which is “being” validated. The positing with insight [*einsichtig*] of the one functions as “confirmatory” for the positing without insight of the other. The “positum” [the belief as meaning intending] is “verified” or even “confirmed” How the process looks, and can look, is pre-delineated by the essence of the kinds of positings in question For every genus of *posita* the forms of essentially possible verification must be made clear phenomenologically. (1913/1998, §140)

Again, to know is a matter of “coincidence” between an evidential intuition and a non-evidential intentional act. The “positing” which coincides *with* an intuitive insight is a rational positing, which functions as a confirmed intentional act, or belief. (The fundamental requirements for verification, or justification, however, are different for different types of acts and different objects. Beliefs in essential objects [e.g. number sets, circularity, redness, etc.] are, then, justified on the basis of different sorts of evidence than what is given in perceptual beliefs.)

What the phenomenological method allows us to see is that the possibility of complete and fully adequate justification for our higher level or scientific beliefs requires eidetic or essential presentations, while empirical or perceptual beliefs - the bulk of our everyday beliefs - can only approximate this level of justification, and even so only through continual experience of the same state of affairs or object of belief. Husserl refers to these different types of evidence as “assertoric” and “apodictic”, the former corresponding to empirical experience, the latter to eidetic, or essential, insight (1913/1998, §131).

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Nevertheless, the fact is that both modes of givenness are *sources* of epistemic justification for our beliefs. I can be justified in holding my belief that a certain state of affairs obtains within a certain temporally determined experience; however, that my belief will continue to be supported by further perceptual experience is beyond the scope of any rational motive I might now have. I am thus justified now, but it would be irresponsible of me to project this sense of justification to what I can be justified in believing in the future. This is because present experience is *the reason* to believe. Husserl says, “*Actual experience*, and not merely a running through in presentation of *possible* perceptions, provides an actual *validation* of positings bearing upon something real, let us say, validation of the positings of the factual existence of events belonging to Nature” (1913/1998, p. 337).

Another peculiarity regarding belief justification (in Husserl’s case) is that one can gain a high degree of justification, or evidence, depending on what one’s belief is about, or what it posits. For instance, I can be more highly justified in holding the belief that “I am the only person in this room”, than in holding a belief about my first kiss. In the first instance, the object of my belief is perceptually verifiable, while, in the second instance, its justification depends on whether or not I have a good memory. While memory is necessary for the recognition of an object presently before me, in isolated cases, such as my attempt to recall my first kiss, or the order of events precipitating a certain car accident, memory is notoriously unreliable. Thus, the degree to which the former (that I am the only person in the room) is justified is higher than the latter (my first kiss). In any event, even in the case of memory beliefs, all knowledge can be traced back to some original intuition or experience which gave one a reason to hold a certain belief in the first place. This original experience is retained in memory and is recognized in the event of its reproduction. “All mediate grounding,” writes Husserl, “leads back to immediate grounding. With respect to all-object provinces and positings related to them, the ‘primal source of legitimacy’ [*Urquelle alles Rechtes*] lies in immediate evidence” (1913/1998, p. 338).

All of this does not mean, however, that Husserl is committed to an epistemic foundationalism of the Cartesian kind. Immediate intuitions on their own are not knowledge; there must be a belief coinciding with these where the belief itself seeks fulfilment for what

it posits. In perceptual experience, a belief gains fulfilment and can count as knowledge when it achieves a perfect coincidence of itself and what it is about. This, however, does not happen in “one blow”, but rather as a synthesis, a collecting of experiential impressions in time one after another. If a conscious act of belief, judgment or anticipation were to find its fulfilment - or if it were given its object - immediately, it would, to quote Dallas Willard, “leave us in a state of shock that could hardly count as knowing anything” (in Smith & Smith, 1995, p. 146). This experience would be shocking since we would not *know* what to make of it; it would be, to use William James’s oft quoted phrase, the shock of experiencing reality as a “booming, buzzing confusion”.

Final Comment

My claim is that the phenomenological method is a method of clarification and justification whereby beliefs, whether of a scientific character or of the everyday existential variety, are *seen* for the first time as they are in themselves together with the manner of their fulfilment. We see, that is, what makes a belief a justified belief rather than a mere opinion or empty claim to knowledge; once this is “seen”, we can either reject or accept our beliefs. “I must not accept,” Husserl says, “such a proposition until I have put parentheses around it” (1913/1998, p. 62). The preceding considerations suggest that this “I” that does not accept, that this “I” that brackets, is an *I* engaged in a project dictated by beliefs that are seldom questioned but that demand to be seen in their proper light. It is within the realm of this *I*’s “perfect freedom” (1913/1998, §32), moreover, to accept, reject, or, ultimately, be indifferent to performing such a task. Responsibility would require that this *I* engage those beliefs and uncover their nature and their sources.

As rational creatures, it is our responsibility to make sure that our knowledge claims are well grounded, reasonable, or, at the very least, properly justified. Experience varies in its veracity, however, and so we also want to be clear that the beliefs about those states of affairs that we claim to know are arrived at in the right way, and that the degree of justification that makes of those beliefs pieces of knowledge *for us* is high enough (as Husserl says, “weighty” enough) to properly constitute the sort of cognitive confidence we are after as reasonable, engaged subjects.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Professor Kelly Becker for his feedback on an earlier version of this paper and to the two anonymous reviewers of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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