

METAPHYSICS, HISTORY, PHENOMENOLOGY

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Abstract: There are three interconnected goals of this paper. The first is to articulate and motivate a view of the methodology for doing metaphysics that is broadly phenomenological in the sense of Husserl circa the *Logical Investigations*. The second is to articulate an argument for the importance of studying the history of philosophy when doing metaphysics that is in accordance with this methodology. The third is to confront this methodology with a series of objections and determine how well it fares in light of them.

1 Introduction

Here is an easy observation. In one respect, we all know the methodology of philosophy as it is currently practiced today, at least among large portions of the ‘analytic tradition.’ Some person—sometimes it is more than one person—has an idea. She talks about it with colleagues or friends, either in person or by email. Eventually it is written up as a talk or as a paper, and either way is vetted in some sort of public venue. If things go well for her and her idea, the written thing eventually appears as a publication in a journal, book chapter, or whatnot; if things go not so well, it ends up as a blog post. Either way, other philosophers might eventually read the written thing, and might then have some new ideas as a consequence.

Is there a plausible explanation of how this way of doing things could be justified or reasonable given that the goal of philosophy is the acquisition of philosophical *knowledge*, that is, the acquisition of *true* and *appropriately warranted* beliefs about characteristically philosophical questions?¹ Call such an explanation a *justificatory story*.

In what follows, I will articulate and then motivate a broadly phenomenological justificatory story for metaphysics. For the most part, I will focus on the methodology of metaphysics rather than of philosophy more generally.

¹ It might be that philosophy has other important goals besides the acquisition of philosophical knowledge, and it might also be that current practice is conducive to the satisfaction of these goals. But here I am going to focus on the goal of acquiring philosophical knowledge, which is at least one goal of philosophical inquiry. Thanks to John Protevi for discussion here.

Here is a second easy observation. Many, perhaps most, contemporary metaphysicians happily practice their craft with little more than a passing glance at the history of philosophy. And it is *prima facie* reasonable for them to ignore the history of philosophy because, in general, studying the history of a given discipline is not necessary to make advances in that discipline. Moreover, history of philosophy is itself hard to do well, and so excessively pursuing it would deplete the intellectual energy needed to make advances in contemporary philosophy. This is because the history of philosophy is an unusual subfield, one that requires a variety of different skills. Perhaps the most intellectually demanding subfield of philosophy is the history of philosophy, or at least certain branches of the history of philosophy.

Consider what the ideal historian of say, Kant, Descartes, or Leibniz, would be like. What kind of skills would she need? What would her knowledge base be?

First, since these three figures are excellent philosophers, the ideal historian of these figures would also be an excellent philosopher—one who is capable of doing important independent research on the topics of concern to her figure of choice. The ideal historian of Leibniz, for example, would have to be excellent at metaphysics, philosophy of logic, philosophy of physics, and so forth.

Second, the ideal historian would have mastered the languages in which the primary texts were written, as well as whatever languages the most important secondary texts were written in. In the case of Leibniz, this means primarily Latin, French, and German.

Third, the ideal historian of Leibniz, for example, would also need a strong technical background in mathematics and mathematical physics to fully understand the central motivations and argumentative moves made.²

Fourth, the ideal historian would also have a deep knowledge of the intellectual as well as sociopolitical context of the works. Philosophy is not produced in a vacuum, and that which surrounds it must influence it even if that influence does not always explicitly make it itself manifest. The ideal historian needs to have the historical background and research skills characteristic of a historian as well as that of a philosopher.

² For example, in Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* (in Leibniz 1969), Leibniz argues from the conservation of what he calls "quantity of force," which is roughly what we now call kinetic energy, to the conclusion that Descartes' view that the essence of material objects consists in extension is false. Leibniz's views on the nature of the continuum led to searching examinations of whether extended objects are merely phenomena; Leibniz (2002) contains many of these deliberations. And a final example is the role that his notion of infinity plays in one of his theories of contingency, according to which, although all truths either are (or are entailed by) truths in which the concept of the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject (and hence are in some sense "analytic" truths), nonetheless some of these truths are contingent, namely those in which it would take an infinite number of steps to *prove* that the concept of the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject; see "On Contingency" and other papers in Leibniz (1989).

Just the *preparatory* work needed to do history of philosophy truly well is immense. This fact should give rise to the question, “If doing history of philosophy well is so much work, why do it at all?”

Let me rephrase that. Set aside the intrinsic interest you might have in the history of our discipline or even in history in general. Like many, I find both fascinating, and the study of both to be intrinsically rewarding. The question I want to raise is not intended to challenge the claim that the study of the history of philosophy has intrinsic value in its own right.

Rather, the question I want to raise is this: If the ultimate goal of philosophical inquiry is to arrive at *philosophical knowledge*—that is, knowledge of characteristically philosophical propositions—what is the relevance of studying the history of philosophy to achieving that goal?

There are a number of considerations that collectively add up to a good answer to this question. I will discuss three of these considerations in what follows. The first two will be discussed merely briefly. The third consideration is tied closely to the justificatory story of our philosophical practice that I will articulate, and hence will receive the most attention.

First, current philosophical inquiry is frequently driven by intuitions in the contemporary sense of “intuition.” (I will discuss an older use of “intuition” later in the paper. I will then use this word only in accordance with this older use, which does not fit nicely with how the term is used currently.) By this, I mean simply that one frequently finds in contemporary philosophical discourse appeals to “what is plausible,” “what seems to be the case,” and often at crucial stages in the presentation of the argument under consideration.³ If we take the fact that P seems true as evidence for P, we should determine whether P seems true to as large a group of people who have seriously and carefully thought about P as is feasible. For we have no other way of calibrating our “faculty of intuition” than by coordinating our intuitions with others.⁴ A study of the history of philosophy provides sources of data of just this sort, and this is especially useful if the figures being studied belong to a philosophical setting that is in deep ways unlike our own, for it enriches our philosophical community by widening it.

This consideration does not uniquely motivate the study of the history of philosophy. It equally suggests the importance of studying the philosophical investigations of traditions of non-European origin. Perhaps it also motivates a kind of “experimental philosophy.”

One should care about calibration if one thinks that one’s “intuitive reactions” are in some way guided by how things actually are, that is, if

³ Della Rocca (2013, 179) notes that intuitions in this sense report facts about our psychology or ways of viewing the world. The observation that philosophers use intuitions in this sense does not seem to me to be particularly controversial, although I am aware that recently it has come under scrutiny: according to a recent book by Herman Cappelen (2010), contrary to how things appear, philosophers do not extensively make use of “intuitions” in their philosophical argumentation.

⁴ Cummins (1998) raises worries about how intuitions can be calibrated.

one thinks that one is in some way responsive to reality. (Only if we are responsive to reality are we appropriately thought of as having “reactions.”) But if in general philosophical intuitions are not sensitive to how things actually are, why should we try to compare our intuitions with others? Perhaps the goal of philosophical inquiry should be for *you* to reach some sort of equilibrium in your beliefs. Before engaging in enquiry, there is a set of propositions in which you have varying degrees of credence. This set might contain mutually inconsistent propositions, or it might merely contain propositions collectively in tension with each other. Either way, you must revise your credences until you arrive at a harmonious set. If you are lucky, you will have arrived at a set of truths. It is not clear why you should study what other philosophers have thought, unless you have some special reason to think that a study of other philosophers is apt to show you tensions in that original set of propositions that you are unlikely to discover on your own.⁵

A second reason to study the history of philosophy is that philosophers are human beings, and are therefore susceptible to fads and groupthink. To some extent, this is a blameless condition; when a literature becomes sufficiently complex, the pool of people who have the time, inclination, and ability to fruitfully study it inevitably diminishes. And when this happens, the initial forays into the literature acquire a kind of centrality in our cognitive economy that perhaps they do not deserve. Nonetheless they are difficult to displace. Here is an illustration. Almost certainly, the analysis of counter-factual conditionals offered by David Lewis (2001) in his eponymous *Counterfactuals* is mistaken, yet it is the account that most metaphysicians use when thinking through examples using counterfactuals. Perhaps we have a hunch that a similar account is basically right, and so it will be ok to use Lewis’s account as a crutch. But for most of us, we have not done the work to make this more than a hunch, yet in practice we treat it as though we had. This is but one illustration, but in general it is unsurprising that there have been periods of convergence in philosophical views, even in views that, at least by our lights, are unpromising or insufficiently warranted by the arguments that were offered in favor of them.

Have we developed a resistance to these sorts of internal pressures to conform? We can be thankful that a certain sort of external pressure is no longer present: there is nothing like the Inquisition around to cull those who follow the argument wherever it leads. So we can without fear confront

⁵ There is an extensive literature on the distinction between what is called “narrow reflective equilibrium” and “wide reflective equilibrium,” in which the achievement of the latter requires that one subject one’s beliefs to the critical scrutiny provided by alien perspectives. Whether one should prefer the method of wide reflective equilibrium over narrow reflective equilibrium is one of the things at issue here, although I lack the space to discuss this further. See [Daniels \(2011\)](#) for a concise overview. [Della Rocca \(2013\)](#) is devoted to critiquing this method in all of its forms.

philosophical traditions that are alien to our own in order to shake things up in our own thinking.

But as before, it is not clear why we should want to have our thinking shaken up if the goal of philosophical inquiry is to reach some sort of equilibrium with respect to our set of beliefs. A procedure designed to shake up our thinking is a procedure designed to introduce disequilibrium! If we worry that we might not be responding accurately to how things are, then it makes sense to seek out ways to remove our blinders. If the goal is to reach a kind of internal coherence in our own beliefs, then studying the thought of others should be avoided as much as possible.

The third reason I want to discuss for having an interest in the history of philosophy is that the history of our discipline provides rich sources of reflection on “what we are up to” when we do philosophy. Specifically, we find a rich source of justificatory stories for our philosophical practice. It will emerge that the phenomenological justificatory story, if correct, also suggests the immediate relevance of the history of philosophy for contemporary philosophical practice.

2 Justificatory Stories

Recall that a justificatory story is a plausible explanation of how it is that our way of conducting philosophical inquiry is reasonable given that the goal of philosophy is the acquisition of philosophical *knowledge*, that is, the acquisition of *true* and *appropriately warranted* beliefs about characteristically philosophical questions. Philosophers who have grown up in the “analytic tradition” are usually familiar with some justificatory stories.

For example, there are theological justificatory stories, such as the one offered by Descartes in his Fourth Meditation, according to which a divine being has designed our intellects in such a way that we are apt to get things right about philosophy when we reason appropriately.⁶ For Descartes, “reasoning appropriately” meant using only ideas that are clear and distinct when reasoning; of course, this is something that he accuses his predecessors of failing to do. Obviously, those interested in justificatory stories are not always interested in preserving all the aspects of what is for them contemporary philosophical practice. Perhaps we should distinguish between *comprehensive* justificatory stories which purport to explain why pretty much exactly what we are doing is an ok way to do things from *partial* justificatory stores, the latter of which seek to reform philosophical practice in some important way. Descartes provides a theologically based partial justificatory story. That said, for the theistically inclined, it is not hard to envision a theologically based, comprehensive justificatory story according to which a divine being has designed us in such a way that our

⁶ Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* can be found in [Descartes \(1984\)](#) and many other places.

continuing to proceed as we actually are proceeding will eventually lead us to collectively discover the true answers to important philosophical questions. I have little interest in defending such stories. I will set them aside.

There are Kantian justificatory stories that, again painting with a broad brush, hold that there are features that objects *must have* for these objects to be objects that we can experience, and that we can have insight to which features these are, provided we are careful and attentive enough.⁷ Whether these features are ever features that the objects could enjoy independently of us is something that philosophers in this tradition can freely debate over. (Roughly, the question amounts to whether the metaphysics of transcendental idealism can be separated from the transcendental method of doing metaphysics.)

There are more contemporary stories that say that we are doing is basically ok provided we are understood as giving analyses of our concepts or accounts of how these concepts are related to one another, or if we are understood as giving accounts of how various language “games” we play work and relate to each other. It is easier to see how the study of the history of philosophy would be relevant to metaphysical investigation construed in this way. It is more or less contingent what concepts we end up having, and what concepts we end up having is partially determined by the concepts possessed by our predecessors. An investigation into the history of metaphysics can teach us what concepts we actually possess; and possessing this information is necessary for assessing whether a putative analysis of our concepts is correct. Similar remarks apply to the more language-oriented justificatory story; however, these justificatory stories interpret metaphysicians as not attempting to say anything directly about the world itself. But as L. A. Paul (2010; 2012) notes, most practicing metaphysicians take themselves to be theorizing about the world itself.⁸ If such a justificatory story nonetheless applies to contemporary metaphysical practice, it does so only if most metaphysicians are deluded about what they are up to.⁹

I will focus on a particular kind of story that has received comparatively less attention within philosophers of “the analytic tradition.” Call this story *the phenomenological story*.¹⁰ I am not sure that it is the correct story, but it is intriguing and deserves a proper place in contemporary discussion, and perhaps a proper refutation as well rather than the slow death of

⁷ Kant’s partial justificatory story in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998) is of course an important instance of this kind.

⁸ See Thomasson (2013) for a defense of much of metaphysics as conceptual analysis.

⁹ However, I suspect that any justificatory story will have to say that some philosophers are mistaken what about justifies their practice, including the one to be articulated here.

¹⁰ This label unfortunately suggests that there is only one justificatory story defended by those of the “phenomenological” tradition, when in fact the opposite is the case. In fact, the justificatory story I will articulate is not even the *only* one Husserl himself endorsed through his career. Nonetheless, I will stick with the label here.

benign neglect. This is not to say that the phenomenological story has been neglected by all analytic philosophers—many analytic philosophers have done laudatory jobs bringing insights from the phenomenological tradition into the conversation.¹¹

Let's get the justificatory story on the table and then assess it. Some more broad-brush painting of the background is necessary. The story I will detail is basically the methodological story of Husserl circa the *Logical Investigations*, which I interpret as a descendant of British Empiricism, albeit one in which the Critical Philosophy of Kant is in the rear-view mirror.¹²

We begin with the empiricist idea that all concepts are ultimately the products of materials gotten from experiences. There are two faculties for acquiring these materials: sensation, which gives us impressions of shapes, colors, sounds, and textures, and reflection, which gives us impressions of the workings of our own minds.¹³ Once we acquire these impressions, our minds have various active powers to do things to them. We can abstract concepts from them: once we acquire a sufficient number of impressions of redness, we can generate the concept of redness. We can conjoin impressions, at least in imagination: once we encounter something red and something else that is round, we are in the position to imagine a red round thing. If we desire to do so, we can use our power of abstraction on this creature of imagination to generate the concept of a redness and roundness. Given a sufficient supply of concepts, we can conjoin these concepts into complex representations that are capable of being true or false; these are judgments. On this picture, every concept that we have

¹¹ Philosophers such as Barry Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith have made enormous contributions in bridging analytic philosophy, and particularly analytic metaphysics, and the phenomenological movement. [Smith \(1982\)](#) contains classic papers on Husserl, formal ontology, and much more. [Mulligan and Smith \(1986\)](#) provide a helpful overview of the two editions of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. Many of the essays in [Smith and Thomasson \(2005\)](#) bridge phenomenology and philosophy of mind; of them, [Tieszen \(2005\)](#) is devoted toward a Husserlian account of our knowledge of abstract objects. More recently, Elijah Chudnoff ([2011](#); [2013a](#); [2013b](#)) has applied insights from Husserl to current concerns about the nature of intuition. In addition, broadly analytically inclined scholars of Heidegger, such as [Blattner \(1999\)](#), [Carman \(2003\)](#), [Cerbone \(1999\)](#), and [Dreyfus \(1994\)](#) have also done much to bridge the gap. I could continue for much longer in this vein. There have been a number of terrific contributions bringing insights from the phenomenological tradition into discussion with analytic philosophy. It is fair to say that many, perhaps most, contemporary analytic metaphysicians are unaware of the possible relevance of the phenomenological movement to their concerns.

¹² More specifically, this is a justificatory story that is developed in the late 19th century and published in the very early 20th century (i.e., in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*). Although the text that presents this story is largely intact in its second edition, Husserl no longer unqualifiedly accepted it during the time of its publication. See also [Smith and Smith \(1995\)](#) and [Mohanty \(1995\)](#) for a discussion of Husserl's philosophical development.

¹³ Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1979) is one classic source for this distinction. Book II contains Locke's account of the sources of all simple ideas, and it is there that Locke draws the distinction between ideas drawn from sensation and those drawn from reflection.

has an origin that is traceable in some way back to some original set of impressions that our powers have acted upon, and moreover we are in principle capable of discovering the etiology of our concepts. That we have this capability licenses a particular demand, namely that for any contested concept, one should either produce the account of how one acquired it or give up the claim to have that concept at all. Since one cannot make judgments without concepts, where concepts are not possessed, apparent judgments are merely apparent. The sentences that seem to convey these apparent judgments are empty of content, and thus are not capable of being true or false and are pointless to dispute.

In the hands of someone like Hume, this demand for etiological explanations of our concepts leads to serious skepticism about our possession of philosophically important concepts like the concept of substance, or the concept of causation, among others.¹⁴ In general, for Hume, the fact that we talk as though we have a concept is no proof that we do in fact have it.¹⁵ And according to Hume, there is no way to acquire these concepts given the materials provided by sensation or reflection. The apparent occasions for acquiring the concept of causation are really occasions for acquiring the concept of constant conjunction, but in no way do we acquire an impression of an objective necessary connection between the events whose types are constantly conjoined. More generally, how could we acquire any concept of objective necessity given the materials the empiricists provide? And if we lack a concept of objective necessity, we lack any other putative concept that would require being defined in terms of it.¹⁶ For example, if we had thought that the way to analyze the concepts of substance and property is by holding that properties can have properties but must be had by something, while substances can have properties and cannot be had by anything else, then we have neither the concept of a property nor the concept of a substance, and so metaphysical disputes about such entities must evaporate.¹⁷

Rather than embrace the evaporation of theoretical philosophy, Kant abandoned the empiricist theory of content acquisition. Although the empiricist story is partially correct—it is more or less correct about a

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, for Hume, even talk of concepts might be potentially misleading; rather we should focus on the etiology of our (alleged) *ideas* of causation, substance, and whatnot. Nonetheless, I will continue to speak of concepts rather than ideas. Thanks to Abraham Stone for discussion here.

¹⁵ See Hume (1958, 62).

¹⁶ A classic discussion is section four of Hume (1997). An anonymous referee has suggested to me that in some sense Hume does grant that we have an idea of necessary connection. But note that this idea is one that is derived not from an impression of a connection objectively obtaining between external objects and properties but rather from an impression that is the product of an act of reflection. For this reason, I decline to call it an idea of objective necessity. See Hume (1958, Book I, Part III, section XIV, especially 165).

¹⁷ For some of Hume's own worries about the concept or idea of substance, see section VI, Part I, Book I and section III, Part IV, Book I of Hume (1958).

proper subclass of our concepts—it is not correct across the board.¹⁸ There are certain fundamental concepts—the number of which need not detain us, but it is twelve—that are not the product of impressions of either sensation or reflection, or to use the Kantian lingo, not the product of intuitions of either outer or inner sense. (For Kant an intuition is not just an impression, but the relation between them need not detain us.) The understanding can abstract concepts from impressions or intuitions, but it also comes equipped with a priori content of its own. Those philosophically important concepts about which a Humean must be skeptical are either primitive concepts of the understanding, that is, categories, or definable in terms of the categories. Kant (A82/B108) calls the latter concepts “predicables.” These concepts are of only limited use to us; we can (and must) use them to characterize the necessary conditions of experience, but we cannot use them to have positive, nontrivial, and specific knowledge of things of which we can have no experience.

Enter Husserl, circa the *Logical Investigations*. Husserl accepted that all concepts have their source in original intuitions. I take Husserl to be using intuition in the Kantian sense rather than in the contemporary sense. One contemporary sense of “intuition” is something like “a seeming”: “I have an intuition that *P*” has the same content as “It seems to me that *P*.”¹⁹ The content of a contemporary intuition is always a proposition; in short, seeming is a propositional attitude. “Intuition” as used by Kant has a different meaning, which I take to be the following: an intuition of *x* is a singular representation of *x* that directly refers to *x*.²⁰

By a “singular representation,” I mean a representation that refers to one entity, rather than a general representation that is true of many entities. An intuition directly refers without the aid of a descriptive concept; if it did not, it is not clear how one could defend the claim that all concepts arise in some way from intuitions, a claim that Kant denies but Husserl upholds. On my view, Husserl accepts that intuitions are directly referential, but is more flexible on whether they are singular. First, for Husserl, singular representations may be of things that are not “particulars” in the ontological sense, and so can be, for example, representations of universals or states of affairs. Second, Husserl is open to there being an intuitive act that refers to a plurality of things rather than one singular thing. Such acts

¹⁸ See Kant (2004, 248–252) for a discussion of how empirical concepts, such as the concept of redness and the concept of a tree, are formed.

¹⁹ Bealer (1996) is one prominent defender of this notion of intuition. Another contemporary sense of “intuition” is something like pretheoretical belief.

²⁰ It is contentious whether it is definitional for Kant that intuitions are singular. Falkenstein (1995, 66–71) and van Cleve (1999, 235–238) provide useful discussions. Buroker (2006, 39) does not take singularity to be a *defining* characteristic of intuitions per se. For my purposes here, I am happy if Kant merely takes it to be true that human intuitions are singular representations. Hintikka (1995, 87) holds that for Husserl an intuition is what immediately gives us an object. Interestingly, Bell (1990, 33) seems to suggest that, circa *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, intuitions are also singular representations for Husserl.

are of importance to his etiology of the concept of number, detailed in his *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, but we need not explore this aspect of his view of intuitions here.

Like the British empiricists, and unlike Kant, Husserl holds that there are no a priori concepts, but that all concepts are generated by active powers used on acquired intuitions. (Husserl could, if he liked, understand a priori concepts to be those that are derived from a particular kind of founded experience. This would still suffice to distinguish him from Kant.) This is one reason why Husserl demands an account of how logical concepts arise from original intuitions: Husserl's content empiricism requires Husserl to determine the original intuitions from which our logical concepts derive.²¹ However, he deviates from his empiricist predecessors in several important ways, three of which I will focus on.

The first deviation is that, since Husserl recognizes a distinction between sense and reference even at the level of mental acts, we need to be careful when characterizing intuitions as being directly referential.²² They are not directly referential in a Russellian sense, according to which the only significant aspect to an intuition is the object intuited. Switching to the linguistic realm for a moment will prove useful. Note that one can draw a distinction between the sense of a name and what it refers to without holding that the former must be equivalent to the sense of some definite description uniquely satisfied by the referent. Since this is the case, one can hold that, for example, "Hesperus" and "Phosphorous" have different senses even though they co-refer, but there is still a clear sense in which these names are akin to mere "tags," unlike "the celestial body seen in the morning," the sense of which is rich with conceptual content.²³ Intuitions, I claim, work in this way for Husserl. In fact, for Husserl an intuition simply is a fusion of impressions or qualitative feels that has a sense—and it is in virtue of its having this sense that this intuition is capable of referring,²⁴ but this sense need not contain descriptive content.²⁵

Senses for Husserl are ideal entities rather than spatiotemporal realities. But although he calls them "ideal," they are in no way mind-dependent.²⁶

²¹ See Husserl (2005a, 168) for an expression of this demand. For a discussion of this kind of content empiricism as it occurs in early Husserl, see Bell (1990, 33).

²² We should also note that Husserl declines to use the Fregean terminology to describe his own view. See Simons (1995, 111–112) for discussion of Husserl's distinction with respect to linguistic entities. In several places, Husserl distinguishes between the referent of an intentional act and the manner in which this referent is presented; see (2005b, 121–122) for an example.

²³ This actually seems to be Husserl's view of the senses of proper names. See, for example, Husserl (2005b, 288–289).

²⁴ See, for example, Husserl (2005a, 213–215).

²⁵ See Caplan (2006) for an overview of the distinction between senses that contain descriptive content and senses that do not.

²⁶ See Investigation 1, section 35, page 233 of Husserl (2005a), in which Husserl tells us that meanings, propositions, and the like are in no way dependent on the existence of things that have these meanings. Husserl (2005a, 238) speaks of the intrinsic right of such objects to be granted "objective status."

Since the existence of these ideal objects is a necessary condition for the existence of intuitions, and the existence of intuitions is in turn a necessary condition for experience of any sort, there is a “transcendental” aspect to Husserl’s project in the *Logical Investigations*.²⁷ But at this stage of his career, he was not a transcendental *idealist* in any *Kantian* sense. For our purposes, it suffices to say here that Husserl sharply separates his quasi-empiricism from any sort of commitment to nominalism or anti-realism about ideal entities such as meanings, propositions, and universals.

In order to see a second important difference between Husserl and his predecessors, consider the kinds of things we have impressions of, according to a Berkeley or a Hume. Outer sense, or sensation, gives us impressions of colors, tastes, smells, shapes, etc.—in short, impressions are always impressions of the properties of things. We never have impressions of the things themselves that have the properties, and this makes immediately problematic the thought that we can have an idea of a thing *as underlying a set of properties* rather than being merely identified with that set.²⁸ At least for Hume, reflection or inner sense is no different; we never have an idea of the thing that has various mental properties, such as hunger, fear, or desire, because we have only impressions of these properties rather than of the thing that has them.

Husserl is more permissive about what can be an object of an intuition. We can have intuitions of the properties that things have. We also have intuitions of things-having-those-properties.²⁹ In short, the possible objects represented by our intuitions are not only properties, but also include states of affairs.³⁰ We also have intuitions of the features of these states of affairs. For example, we can intuit the state of affairs in which everyone in the room is sitting, but we can also intuit an aspect of this state of affairs, specifically its universality; it is of the type, *all Fs are G*.³¹ For Husserl, these intuitions are the basis for the development of our logical concepts. Recall that, for Husserl, every concept we have, no matter how theoretically important or

²⁷ See, for example, Husserl (2005a, 238).

²⁸ Probably Hume and Berkeley would distance themselves from the claims that colors, shapes, and so on are properties. For Hume, they are the sort of entities with which we are directly acquainted, but it is doubtful that he would classify them as properties. Nonetheless, the point that we have no idea of an underlying object in which these entities in some way inhere stands. Thanks to Abraham Stone for discussion.

²⁹ See, for example, Husserl (2005b, 161). For a brief discussion, see Zahavi (2003, 35–37); the general thrust of Zahavi strikes me as correct, but I disagree with the claim that eidetic variation is properly thought of as a kind of “conceptual analysis” (2003, 38).

³⁰ Our possession of intuitions of states of affairs is integral to his theory of epistemic justification. In certain circumstances, I can observe that I believe that *P* and that I see a state of affairs in which *P*, thus acquiring knowledge that the state of affairs is evidence for my belief. Eli Chudnoff has suggested to me that propositional seemings—that is, intuitions in at least one of the contemporary uses of that term—also play a role in Husserl’s theory of epistemic justification. This is an intriguing suggestion, but one I will not pursue here.

³¹ For a discussion of categorial intuition, see Husserl’s sixth logical investigation, in Husserl (2005b).

central, must have its source in intuitions; logical concepts are derived from intuitions of things that have intrinsically a kind of logical structure, that is, from intuitions of states of affairs.³² This is a huge difference between him and his empiricist predecessors.

Third, the kinds of properties we can have intuitions of is of an order much vaster than Hume would have thought. We just saw this a second ago, with respect to intuitions of the features of states of affairs, but it is also true of the features of more ordinary objects. It will be helpful to have a particular situation in mind to illustrate this. Suppose we approach a piano. You see the piano itself and are directly acquainted with the piano itself, rather than mere sense-data as the standard Humean story might go.³³ Now I play a note on the piano. You hear the note. You can also attend to aspects of the note, such as its volume and its pitch. By attending to the volume and the pitch, you can have new intuitions, specifically of the universals that the particular determinate volumes and pitches fall under. Finally, by attending to the types, you can have an intuition of an objective necessary connection. Specifically, you can have a kind of perception of the fact that you could not have a pitch of that type without there being some volume or other. A similar story would be told about how we come to know that everything red is extended, or that nothing can be both red all over and green all over, although in the latter case what can be intuited is a necessary incompatibility.³⁴ Hume was right that all our ideas must derive from impressions—all our concepts must have their source in intuitions—but Hume was wrong that we have no ideas of necessary connections. Necessary connections can be given in intuition—and they must be, since (i) we do have the concept of necessity, and the standard empiricist story of how we got this concept is doomed to failure, as demonstrated by Hume and others, *at least given the impoverished view of what sort of impressions we have*, and (ii) the Kantian doctrine of a priori concepts is not sustainable.³⁵

³² Husserl (2005a, 168) puts it, “Logical concepts, as valid thought-unities, must have their origin in intuition.” The relevant investigations are investigation 1 (in Husserl 2005a) and investigation 6 (in Husserl 2005b). See Moran (2005, 96–99) for discussion; Philippe (1995, 273) notes this aspect of Husserl’s thought. Note that Husserl’s earlier *Philosophy of Arithmetic* was also concerned with the origins of various mathematical concepts; see Husserl (1975, 33–34) for discussion.

³³ Dickie (2010) makes a powerful case against the Humean story that we are acquainted with only our sense-data and for the claim that we are acquainted with ordinary objects. See Hopp (2008) for a careful and critical discussion of Husserl’s account of our perception of ordinary objects.

³⁴ See, for example, Husserl (2005a, 175–176).

³⁵ Among the most relevant investigations are investigation 2 (in Husserl 2005a) and investigation 3 (in Husserl 2005b). Willard (1982, 395) labels Husserl a “radical empiricist” because, as Willard puts it, “Not only connections, but even necessary connections, are simply *found* by him.” Moreover, Willard notes by way of a quotation from William James that Husserl admits no *element* into a construction that is not directly experienced.

The claim that we can augment the British empiricist tradition by allowing impressions of modal properties is not entirely novel to Husserl. Husserl's mentor, Brentano, suggests something similar when he notes that his outlook is broadly empirical, but this is compatible with a certain "ideal intuition."³⁶ Moreover, when discussing Brentano's influence on himself, Husserl notes that Brentano insisted that all philosophical concepts have original sources in intuition.³⁷ Finally, one prominent British Empiricist, namely Locke, at times suggests that we can acquire impressions of at least one modal property. In Book II, chapter IV of his *Essay*, Locke discusses our simple idea of *solidity*, which might with equal justice be called *impenetrability*. Solidity is a modal feature: for an object to be *solid* is for it to be such that no other body can occupy the region it occupies. Solidity is explicitly distinguished from *hardness*, which is a feature that, unlike solidity, comes in degrees. We acquire an idea of solidity by way of *ordinary sense-perception*, specifically by way of *touch*, in much the same way as we can acquire other ideas from touch, such as shapes or textures. Thus, the idea that we can have direct, nonconceptual representations of modal properties is not wholly unprecedented. The extent to which Husserl elaborates and extends on this idea is impressive.

The Lockean picture in which we get an impression of a modal feature just by touching objects is far simpler than the Husserlian picture. On Husserl's view, in order to have an intuition of a type, necessarily one must have an intuition of a token of that type.³⁸ This is more or less what Husserl means by saying that intuitions of types are founded acts.³⁹ (He also seems to want to hold that there this particular intuition of this type could not have existed without this particular intuition of this token existing.) More ordinary perceptual acts—the kind of acts that, for example, we unproblematically attribute to lower animals, such as mice, and to human persons—are not acts that represent modal features; rather, a second sort of mental act, ontologically dependent on the former, is what does this.

³⁶ As Brentano (1995, xxv) says, "My psychological standpoint is empirical; experience alone is my teacher. Yet I share with other thinkers the conviction that this is entirely compatible with a certain ideal [Anschuuang] intuition." (Note that the translator of Brentano (1995) has curiously chosen to translate "Anschuuang" as "point of view" in this passage. I do not see the motivation for this choice.)

³⁷ See Osborn (1980, 17) for a lengthy excerpt of Husserl's description of Brentano's importance to his own philosophical development.

³⁸ One wrinkle worth noting is that Husserl (2005b, 172) is willing to consider that the token may be presented not only in an ordinary sense perception but also in acts of imagination, such as theoretically guided flights of fancy. Chudnoff (2013a; 2013b) argues that some founded intuitions are constructed out of acts of imaginations and perhaps even nonpresentational thoughts. (See also Moore 2012, 441–442.) This is the view of Husserl circa 1913, but it is less clear to me that he unequivocally asserts it in the *Logical Investigations*. I thank Eli Chudnoff for discussion here.

³⁹ Investigation 3 of Husserl (2005b) is a searching investigation of the notions of dependence and foundation. Chudnoff (2013b) argues that the notion of foundation is also partially mereological, as on his view, founded states have first-order states as constituents.

The representing of modal connections between types, or of the modal properties of types, requires further founded intuitive acts. So Husserl is not committed to the claim, for example, that a mouse can acquire an impression of solidity simply by touching objects.

This distinction between founded and unfounded perceptual acts is important to Husserl's epistemology, for it enables him to redefine or "capture the true nature" of the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic, and the a priori and the a posteriori.⁴⁰ We start with the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic. Suppose we have enjoyed some founded acts, and these have brought some properties to our attention. Suppose we have then enjoyed further founded acts that reveal aspects of the modal profile of these properties. We can now draw a distinction between two different kinds of properties: there are those types that are in principle applicable to any domain of entities, no matter what the natures of these entities are, and there are those that can apply only to certain kinds of entities. Call the first kind of properties *formal* properties and the second kind *material* properties. Examples of the first kind include *being* and *identity*; examples of the second kind include *being red* and *taller than*. Roughly, the science that studies claims that can be stated using only expressions that refer to formal properties is *formal ontology*. There are also types for which, no matter what subject matter we wish to talk about, we eventually must make use of these notions in our discourse. Call these *topic-neutral* entities. Examples of such types include *meanings* and *propositions*. The science that studies the relations between topic-neutral entities is *formal logic*.⁴¹ A truth is an *analytic law* just in case it is a truth of formal ontology or formal logic. A truth is an analytic truth, roughly, just in case it reduces to an analytic law via appropriate definitions. As usual, synthetic truths are those that are not analytic.⁴²

Now for the second distinction. An a priori claim is one that is justified by founded intuitions of universals and their essential connections; an a posteriori claim is one that is justified by intuitions of concrete particulars. For Husserl, ultimately all claims are justified by some kind of experience—so what we are tracking when we distinguish between the a priori and the a posteriori is at rock bottom *different kinds of experiences* which have as their objects *different kinds of entities*. In general, as Levinas (1973, 107) notes, "In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl identifies a priori knowledge with the intuition of pure essences." Since all claims are ultimately to be justified by what is revealed in some kind of intuition, there is more commonality between the a priori and the a posteriori than one might think. We can continue to think of philosophy as principally an a priori discipline, but we must no longer conceive of a priori knowledge as knowledge that is

⁴⁰ Much of this occurs in the third investigation of Husserl (2005b).

⁴¹ The notion of a formal or pure logic is developed through the course of the investigations, but of particular relevance here is section 29 of investigation 1 in Husserl (2005a).

⁴² Section 11 of investigation 3 of Husserl (2005b) is particularly relevant.

independent of *any* kind of experience of worldly matters.⁴³ Instead, we should accept that our experiences can be of abstract universal entities.

What about the synthetic a priori? For Husserl, a priori truths are always truths about necessary connections of some sort. A synthetic a priori truth is one that is justified by some founded intuitions of necessary connection, but is not an analytic truth—and so it must be ineliminably about some material and topic-specific property. Our knowledge that, for example, everything red is extended is synthetic a priori, whereas our knowledge that everything is self-identical is analytic a priori; however, in both cases, the justification for these claims traces back to founded intuitions. For Husserl, unlike for Kant, there is no fundamental difference between the synthetic a priori and the analytic a priori such that the former requires a special explanation for its existence that the latter does not require. The epistemology of, for example, logic is not fundamentally different than the epistemology of the metaphysics of physical objects. Here is an illustrative example: for Husserl, parthood is a formal feature, and so accordingly one branch of formal ontology is formal mereology. Formal mereology has the same epistemological status as formal logic—and more specifically, both formal mereology and the theory of identity (which we think of as a part of logic) are properly lumped under formal ontology.⁴⁴

This is profoundly cool. And of course things get even more complicated than what I've said here, but we've got enough to work with for now. What I want to do next is begin the process of examining whether there is a justificatory story for our philosophical practice that is motivated by the phenomenological picture. I'll do this by first sketching what seems to be the methodological picture adopted by Husserl circa the *Logical Investigations* and then see how well such a story can stand up to various pressures.

If the kind of empiricism about content acquisition and belief justification that Husserl endorses were true, then it would be very important to carefully attend to what is given to us in experience and to carefully describe the given as it is given. That is, prior to engaging in any sort of theoretical

⁴³ Given Husserl's reconceptualization of the a priori, we might wonder why he chooses to continue to distinguish between the a priori and the a posteriori. Why not instead say that all knowledge is a posteriori or empirical? I suspect Husserl had (at least) two motivations, one theoretical and one dialectical, for maintaining the distinction. First, there is a genuine distinction between founded intuitions of universals and intuitions of particulars, which maps on nicely to a distinction between the basic data of what were previously labeled "a priori" disciplines and those that are "a posteriori." Second, some of Husserl's interlocutors thought that mathematical and logical knowledge was tentative empirical knowledge ultimately based on induction. By championing the slogan that all knowledge is empirical knowledge, Husserl ran the risk that his own distinctive view might be conflated with a view that he was at pains to refute. (Note that Husserl 1975, 8–9 does speak of "broadening" the concepts of "perception and intuitive experience.")

⁴⁴ Investigation 3 in Husserl (2005b) is primarily devoted to developing formal mereology as a branch of formal ontology.

speculation, one should first carefully articulate the structures that are directly observable—and since those structures that are directly observable are far richer than we might have initially thought, the philosophical payoffs could be quite large.

Husserl appeared to be very confident in his powers of observation, and hence confident as to how much demonstrable knowledge could be acquired via the phenomenological method. For this reason, he saw himself as a reformer of philosophical practice. There is a view in the neighborhood of Husserl's but in which philosophers are doing something fairly epistemically responsible by doing more or less what they are doing now, provided that (i) we have intuitions of philosophically interesting properties (or entities more generally) but (ii) our individual insights are not that great considered individually, and so the "faculty of intuition," requires the kind of calibration that can be achieved only by group coordination—that is by sharing the data acquired, comparing observations in order to find patterns and discrepancies, the latter of which will ultimately be discarded as bad data while the former will be systemized into theories that are then debated in a public arena.⁴⁵ In short, what looks to be a reasonable philosophical practice on the weakened phenomenological assumptions just mentioned also looks to be a lot like what many philosophers are currently doing.⁴⁶

As Daniel Nolan ([Unpublished](#)) has pointed out, one of the main sources of philosophical data are "common-places"—that is, observations of obvious but philosophically relevant facts—and that one important thing that philosophers can do while in an armchair is sort these common-places so that they can be brought to bear on philosophical theories. One of Nolan's examples of a common-place is that we know that people can continue to persist even if they lose a limb. From this common-place, we can argue for the falsity of the characteristically metaphysical theory known as *mereological essentialism*, according to which nothing can gain or lose a part. Nolan classifies this common-place as a bit of a posteriori knowledge. Husserl would classify it as a priori knowledge, since it is ultimately grounded in our insight into the modal profile of personhood, a property we observe persons as having. I am not sure there is actually substantive disagreement between Nolan and Husserl here; with respect to both philosophers, something reasonably labeled as knowledge based on a kind of observation often plays an important role in our philosophical theorizing. In a similar vein, L. A. Paul (2010, 466) suggests that metaphysics begins with a posteriori data taken from ordinary experience, and suggests that we have

⁴⁵ Husserl never denied that the phenomenological method was fallible—see, for example, [Husserl \(1975, 59–61\)](#). Note that Cummins (1998) complains about this practice of philosophers, but he is operating on the assumption that intuitions are not perceptions, which is one of the issues in question here.

⁴⁶ In gentle opposition to [Della Rocca \(2013, 185\)](#), this does not mean that the focus of philosophers will be directed toward our intuitions or perceptions, but rather on the realities directly intuited or perceived.

“pre-theoretical experiences” of philosophically relevant entities, among which will be ordinary objects having philosophically interesting features (such as compositional structure). She also notes (2010, 467) that some metaphysical judgments are “based on but extend past what we would normally classify as perceptual experiences.” This sounds congenial to the phenomenological justificatory story just sketched.

This is not to say that there would be nothing worth changing in contemporary practice. First, we would need to make whatever steps are necessary to make the field more equitable and open to others. If philosophy is in the business of data collection and systemization and theorizing on its basis, we need to make sure that we attract excellent people from a variety of walks of life to ensure that we are collecting all the relevant data. We obviously have fallen shamefully short here.

Second, although philosophers might be especially keen at paying attention to the entities observed in founded intuitions, there would be virtually no reason to think that only philosophers always have the relevant intuitions. And so it would be important for there to be a subdiscipline of philosophy that was devoted to assessing the intuitions of nonphilosophers as well, to ensure that no data are left behind. This would be a kind of “experimental philosophy” whose focus is not to acquire data about the “concepts” of the folk, but to record and collate the apparent perceptions of ordinary persons.⁴⁷ It might be that some intuitions are possible only given sufficient training. In certain endeavors, one must be “taught to see.”⁴⁸ Whether this is the case cannot be prejudged without some experimental evidence of how well untutored folk perceive without “guidance from the experts.” We also need detailed studies of how such perceptions come about, in order to account for when such perceptions are genuine rather than illusory. Paul (2010) argues persuasively that this need implies that metaphysicians should take into account the relevant findings of cognitive scientists.

Similar remarks apply to philosophers of other cultures and other times: the data that they might provide cannot be neglected. And hence the need to have subdisciplines of philosophy that study the history of philosophy and the philosophical traditions of non-European cultures, and the importance of pressures to ensure that the findings of these subdisciplines are properly appreciated. A study of the history of philosophy would be necessary for good data collection and directly relevant to contemporary philosophical practice.⁴⁹

In short, if we were to have some sort of philosophical data, even if unreliable, this could prove important to providing a justificatory story for

⁴⁷ See [Rose and Danks \(2013\)](#) for a suitably broad conception of experimental philosophy.

⁴⁸ Compare with [Husserl \(1975, 55–56\)](#).

⁴⁹ It is an interesting question what the proponent of the Husserlian justification story sketched here should say about the fact that in the history of philosophy one also finds numerous philosophers skeptical about this sort of story.

current philosophical practice, while still allowing for internal pressures to reform it in various respects. For the reasons just noted, this justificatory story would explain why the study of the history of philosophy is important for current philosophizing. We would know why we have some reasons to “shake things up” or disrupt our reflective equilibrium. Only by coordinating our perceptual data can we be assured that we are arriving collectively at a coherent picture of our object of study.

The data that initially interested Husserl concerned theoretical philosophy, which includes metaphysics, philosophy of mathematics and logic, philosophy of mind and cognition, and philosophy of language. A similar story can be told about the practice of practical philosophy; and several variants of this kind of story have been told by members of the phenomenological tradition and beyond. A recent example is Graham Oddie’s book, *Value, Reality, and Desire* (2009), in which Oddie stresses the importance of having *data* concerning goodness and badness. Fortunately, according to Oddie, we do have such data. Like many other philosophers contemporary and historical, Oddie holds that *desires* are appearances of goodness. When I want that *P*, *P seems good* to me. (And when I have an aversion to *P*, *P seems bad* to me.) In short, we do have a source of value data, since desires are perceptions of goodness and badness. Oddie’s view belongs to a wider family according to which some or all emotional states are perceptions of value. (And of course many of proponents of this family belong to the so-called phenomenological tradition.) On this sort of view, practical philosophy, or at least a branch of it, namely axiology, proceeds by way of the “empirical method” of collecting and coordinating data, but of course this method proceeds always with a view to what is ideal as well.⁵⁰ A large chunk of Oddie’s book is devoted to showing how desires so understood could serve as data, despite the fact that our desires are not uniformly good at tracking what is genuinely valuable.

This phenomenological picture of what underlies philosophical practice should initially be fairly appealing.⁵¹ Let us now address some concerns.

3 Concerns about the Phenomenological Justificatory Story

First, one might be concerned about the inherent implausibility of the claim that one can intuit modal properties. Smith (2007, 59–63) seriously downplays talk of “intuitions of essences,” and basically says of the sort account of Husserl that I have offered that it is one on which Husserl traffics in magic. If even the most sympathetic of Husserl’s commentators

⁵⁰ If we want to go beyond axiology and look for data for deontic judgments (i.e., judgments of what is right, wrong, or obligatory) perhaps a good starting point is to assess whether we have something like perceptions of what is to be done. In this vein, recent work by Siegel (Forthcoming) could be a good launching point.

⁵¹ There is an interesting question of how congenial practicing metaphysicians will find this interpretation of what they are doing, rather than what they should be doing.

shy away from talk of intuitions of essences, how seriously should the rest of us take it? Moreover, if modal properties can be the objects of intuition or perception, why has this fact gone unnoticed or even been strenuously denied? Recall that Kant vigorously claimed that necessary claims can never be verified by any sort of experience.⁵²

I feel these concerns, but let us not overstate them. The question of what sort of properties can be represented in perception is surprisingly vexing. Some contemporary philosophers have argued that we can have representations of a certain class of modal properties, and their motivations for taking these examples seriously have nothing to do with concerns about the proper status of metaphysics or with empiricist accounts of concept formation. There is currently a live debate in the philosophy of perception over whether, for example, we can perceive an apple as *edible*.⁵³ Schellenberg (2007) argues that we perceive objects as being *perceivable* from other locations. Edibility and perceivability are modal properties. In general, there might be independent evidence for the perceptibility of a certain class of modal properties, thereby making very central the question of what kinds of modal properties can be represented. Husserl's view might initially seem a little weird—but there are “precedents” for it if these currently live views in the philosophy of perception are true.

Moreover, similar considerations might favor a Husserlian view about metaphysically necessary connections. Compare two experiences in which a kind of necessity is represented. A large boulder blocking my path *presents* itself as an obstacle, that is, as something that I cannot get past. I try to speak ever more quietly, and yet I *find* that I cannot communicate verbally without making sounds of some volume or other. The former kind of necessity is a physical necessity, but the latter kind rests on an absolute metaphysical necessity.

Bringing a discussion of Husserl's views into contact with this current debate in the philosophy of perception could also motivate a reexamination of whether there is something intrinsically antinaturalistic or antiphysicalistic about a phenomenological approach to philosophizing, at least if we understand naturalism as an ontological view about what there is.⁵⁴ It is

⁵² See, for example, Kant (2010, 64).

⁵³ See, for example, Nanay (2011) and Gibson (1986). Siegel (Forthcoming) also endorses the claim that affordances, which are possibilities for action, are among the contents of perceptual experience, and from this claim argues that we also perceive *mandates*, which are properties of the form *x-is-to-be-done*.

⁵⁴ Moore (2012, 431–432) claims that Husserl's phenomenology is committed to anti-naturalism, but perhaps Moore does not mean by “naturalism” an *ontological* view. Bell (1990, 154–155) actually attributes a kind of naturalism to Husserl circa the *Logical Investigations*, and it is clear that Bell intends an ontological position when he writes, “A Philosophical theory is naturalistic to the extent that it is committed to the view that the universe contains nothing but natural phenomena—a natural phenomenon being any object, event, property, fact, or the like, whose explanation can in principle be couched exclusively and without remainder in terms acceptable within the natural sciences” (154–155).

true that Husserl himself was against naturalism and physicalism; however, if we can represent in perception modal features, then there is either a naturalistically acceptable story of how this is possible or there is not. If there is not, then so much the worse for naturalism, but if there is, then let us see what it is, and then see the extent to which the phenomenological approach is congenial with it. We should not immediately assume that the Husserlian story must be antinaturalistic.

Some phenomenologists reject the early Husserl's insistence on intuition and perception as the fundamental intentional state. Heidegger (1962), for example, is highly suspicious of the claim that intuitions have nonderivative intentionality; in his view, the fundamental intentional states are more like precognitive behaviors or comportments, and intuitions or perceptions acquire intentional content somehow in virtue of their relations to these comportments. But a Heideggerian phenomenologist can hold that modal features are given in such comportments.⁵⁵ I mention this because there seems to be an analogous debate about features such as edibility in the current philosophy of perception literature.⁵⁶ It is sufficient for us to have the data regardless of the form of the vehicle of the data.⁵⁷

A second worry is that by letting philosophy be driven by intuitions, we both unjustifiably and arbitrarily privilege certain starting points in our inquiry. In addition, we run the risk of adopting unduly conservative constraints on what theories we will accept. Della Rocca (2013, 190–192) pushes both these worries, although his focus is on intuitions primarily understood as pre-theoretic or commonsensical judgments. I think that Della Rocca is right to be worried about intuition-driven philosophy when “intuition” is understood in this way. But on the phenomenological story, this is not the relevant sense of “intuition.” Moreover, intuitions are perceptions; and there is nothing arbitrary about letting what we *perceive* (rather than merely pretheoretically believe) either drive or constrain our theorizing.

A third worry revolves around the idea that perception is always theory laden. The rough idea is that one does not simply perceive an *x* or perceive that *P*. One never has an intuition of the sort Husserl or Kant talk about, which is a direct representation of an entity unmediated by any sort of descriptive conceptual content. Instead, whenever one has a perception, the content of one's perception is partially determined by the background

⁵⁵ That Heidegger believes that essential properties of entities are revealed in comportment is defended in Crowell (2005, 59–60).

⁵⁶ See Siegel (Forthcoming).

⁵⁷ In this context, it is worth noting that the metaphysics of material objects Heidegger arrives at (circa *Being and Time*) via his phenomenological analyses is very similar in important respects to the constitution-based metaphysics of Lynne Rudder Baker (2007), who in turn construes her metaphysics as “a metaphysics of everyday life” and states that her “aim is to see the metaphysical significance of the world as we encounter and interact with it. . . .” (240). For a discussion of Heidegger, see McDaniel (2013).

beliefs of the perceiver, and perhaps even by the perceiver's background values, broadly construed, as well.

Here is one way to flesh out this concern: start with natural language and work back to thoughts, although this direction of emphasis would be deeply uncongenial to Husserl. Consider the view that the contents of subsentential expressions are partially a function of the content of the expressions of sentential expressions. We have a bunch of natural language expressions, some of which are sincerely asserted natural language sentences. There are many available entities to be the contents of the expressions—propositions for sentences, properties for predicates, entities of all sorts for names. What determines the content of these expressions is a function that best balances at least two constraints. First, it seeks to maximize the truth of sincerely asserted declarative sentences. Second, it takes into account the objects and properties in the environment of the linguistic community, and prioritizes assigning those objects rather than qualitatively similar but not proximate alternatives. Third, it seeks to assign *natural* (in the sense of David Lewis 1983; 1984; 1986) contents to these expressions, or at least more rather than less natural contents. Let us focus on predicates, the putative contents of which we will take to be properties. On Lewis's view, even though properties are *abundant*—roughly, for every possible meaningful predicate, there is a corresponding property—not all properties are metaphysically on a par. The natural properties form a minimal supervenience base for all other properties. They are the properties that account for objective similarity. They are the properties that cut nature at its joints.

This is a simplified version of a theory of content assignment according to which the meanings of sentences are in an important way prior to the meanings of subsentential expressions. One plausible way to extend this view to the contents of thoughts is this. Take all the propositional attitudes that have correctness conditions. For *belief*, the obvious condition is *truth*: a belief is correct if and only if it is true. We amplify the content-assignment function so that the first component is not merely to maximize the truth of asserted sentences, but also to maximize the correctness of attitudes. Probably there is a behavioral constraint that in effect maximizes the rationality of the bodily motions of the members of the relevant community of thinkers. We keep the other constraints. This is a view in which the content of mental acts that fall short of being propositional attitudes is partially a function of the content of the attitudes themselves. On this view, there is no priority of intuitions over concepts, and both are posterior to propositional attitudes that subsume them both.

I am sure that there are additional constraints on content assignment, but will these constraints eliminate the kind of holism about content assignment that seems threatening to the empiricist story? If not, how damaging is this to the phenomenological justificatory I have sketched? How much can be kept?

The empiricist story of concept acquisition would be in trouble. It is central to the empiricist story of content acquisition that some subsentential representations can have content prior to the possession of content by sentential representations. This priority is not merely temporal priority but also priority in nature: concepts and whole thoughts have their representational content in virtue of how they are related to nonconceptual, noncomplex representations. But on the theory of content assignment I have offered for contemplation, intuitions have their content in virtue of how they are related to whole thoughts rather than the other way around.

It is consistent with the view that perception is theory laden that we have the kind of data for philosophy that the weakened phenomenological story depicts us as having. That perception is theory laden does not prevent me from being able to see redness; therefore, it is not clear why it would prevent me from seeing apples as being edible, or colors as being necessarily extended. It is the perceptions of essential features that are central to the phenomenological justificatory story I have described. What the empiricist story of concept acquisition does is *provide an argument* for the conclusion that we have such perceptions, and it is distressing to lose an argument for an attractive conclusion, but we cannot immediately infer that the *conclusion* is false.

It would be good to have a back-up argument. One line of argument worth pursuing is whether the arguments for the perception of the edibility of an apple can be extended to the perception of the inability to square a circle. A second line of argument worth pursuing stems from the considerations of common-places discussed earlier. It is not clear how it is that we have the kind of widespread knowledge of the modal profiles of the objects we encounter in experience.⁵⁸ The claim that a person can survive the loss of a limb seems as obvious as the claim that some people in fact do not have four limbs. On the Husserlian model, the obviousness of both has the same explanation: the relevant facts have been *perceived*.⁵⁹

The final argument I will discuss grants that we have intuitions of essences, but then claims that this fact should *decrease* our confidence in having interesting philosophical data rather than increase it.

I mentioned earlier the Lewisian notion of a natural content. Strictly, I should talk about natural properties. Think for a moment about how natural in the Lewisian sense the properties revealed by ordinary (i.e., unfounded) perception are. The answer is not very natural at all. This is not exactly news—Locke is famously dubious about the place of colors,

⁵⁸ An alternative story relies on the idea that our knowledge of the modal profiles of objects relies on our competence with the concepts of various ordinary objects, and in this specific case, our concept of persons. Interestingly, Husserl seems to anticipate this line of response, and argues that even the knowledge that comes from conceptual competency requires the intuition of essences at its foundations. (See [Husserl 2005a](#), investigation 1, section 22.)

⁵⁹ See [Chudnoff \(2013a,b\)](#) for further arguments for our being intuitively aware of abstract objects.

textures, and so forth in the physical world. For Locke, there is nothing in our ideas of colors that really resemble something in the bodies themselves. They are mere “secondary qualities” that at best amount to nothing more than powers in bodies to produce sensations in us—powers that bodies have in virtue of their internal structure.⁶⁰ Trying to explain exactly what Locke means by these claims would be a foolish venture in this venue, but at a minimum, colors do not score well on the naturalness scale, and neither do any other of the so-called secondary qualities.

From our view point, things are worse. Locke at least hopes that among the primary qualities there are explanatorily fundamental properties, with shape, mass, and motion being initially plausible candidates. But it is no longer plausible to think that these qualities are very natural. Spatial distance, for example, is merely relative to an inertial frame of reference *at best* (and at less than best only a locally definable relation) and the underlying spatiotemporal relations whose distribution grounds the frame-relative facts about spatial distance are not ones that we seem to have impressions of, but rather are the *posits* of a theory. Similar remarks apply to the other primary qualities recognized by Locke. Even our impressions of so-called primary qualities do not reveal to us fundamental aspects of reality. We must turn then to *theory* (specifically physics) to inventory the truly important properties underlying the properties that are apparent in perception.

There is an initial worry that, given our track record, even if we do have intuitions of modal properties, we have little reason to think that these modal properties score highly on the naturalness scale. Our perceptual apparatus has proved across the board to represent merely what is important to us to navigate our environment rather than what is metaphysically fundamental. Perhaps some precedent could be made by appealing to the perfect naturalness (or at least high naturalness) of mental properties for which we have ideas acquired via the faculty of reflection.⁶¹

Let us try to formulate this concern as an argument. There are two plausible ways we could do this. We might start with the premise that, for example, modal properties are highly natural properties, and hence it is highly unlikely that we have perceptions of them, since all the other perceptible properties do not score highly on the naturalness scale. Alternatively, we could eat the conclusion that modal properties are not very natural, which in turn seems to downplay the metaphysical significance of the phenomenologist’s discoveries. We should be more interested, at least if our goal is a description of fundamental reality (a worthy goal for a metaphysician indeed!), in discovering what the underlying properties are that give rise to modal properties. The phenomenological story seems ill-equipped to explain how we are supposed to do this. With respect to

⁶⁰ See Locke’s *Essay* book 2, chapter 8.

⁶¹ This is a route that so-called friends of qualia might find congenial. See Chalmers (1997).

the more ordinary perceptual properties, we turned to theory (specifically physical theory) to determine the more natural properties. But physics by itself does not seem capable of providing an account of what grounds metaphysically necessary connections. We must turn to metaphysics. But instead of describing what is given as it is given, we are now forced to fall back to pure metaphysical speculation, since phenomenology as the method of metaphysical discovery is now infeasible.

Perhaps the only way out is via a “partners in crime strategy.” As I noted earlier, for Husserl the epistemology of logic and mathematics, which are analytic a priori disciplines, is not fundamentally different from the epistemology of synthetic a priori disciplines. The grounding intuitions for the analytic discipline of logic are intuitions of the logical forms of states of affairs and inferential connections between them. Perhaps these features—logical forms, inferential connections—are highly natural.⁶² Similar remarks might apply to mathematical cognition. If so, the track-record for founded intuitions latching on to natural properties in relations is quite good. Perhaps this is an interesting and important difference between founded and unfounded intuitions, although why this difference exists is something that clearly demands an explanation.

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⁶² Perhaps in this context one could appeal to something like Sider’s (2009) “logical realism” to buttress this case. See also McDaniel (2010) for concerns about such an appeal.

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