Husserl on Hume

Abstract: This article offers an account of the development of Husserl's assessment of Hume's position in the history of philosophy. In Husserl's early treatment of Hume, Husserl's interpretation was shaped by the anti-Kantian views of his teacher Franz Brentano. Later, however, Husserl concentrated on those themes in Hume's philosophy that were of relevance for the development of his own conception of phenomenology. His analysis into the *a priori* structures of intentionality led the Husserl of *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) to reject Hume's nominalism and sensualism, and to criticize Hume's naturalistic psychologism and fictionalism. Already at this point, however, Husserl appreciated Hume's metaphysical neutrality as well as his radical starting point in the immediate givenness of consciousness. In the period following Husserl's transcendental turn in *Ideas I* (1913), Hume is gradually re-assessed in the context of Husserl's engagement with Kant as a philosopher who offers important insights concerning concrete problems of transcendental philosophy. For Husserl, Hume ultimately offers the first outline of a pure phenomenology and, indeed, becomes one of the most important forerunners of transcendental philosophy as such.

1. Introduction

The aim of the present article is not to compare Hume's and Husserl's philosophy or to trace Hume's influence on Husserl's phenomenology in detail. Such tasks would clearly exceed the limits of a single article. In the following, our focus is more modest. We wish to present and consider Husserl as a Hume interpreter. More specifically, we wish to trace how Husserl's Hume interpretation changed over a period of almost 50 years. How did Husserl treat Hume's texts and what are the main features of his approach? Such questions have previously been dealt with in only a few scholarly texts. However, past interpreters have usually addressed them selectively or in relation to a specific phase of Husserl's phenomenology.[1] Here we offer an overall presentation of Husserl's changing assessment of Hume's theoretical philosophy.

Husserl engaged with Hume's philosophy throughout his career. Indeed, allusions to Hume's thoughts and concepts are present in Husserl's books, lectures, and manuscripts from the beginning until the very end. Husserl taught his first seminar on Hume already in 1895, and between that time and the winter semester 1926-1927, i.e., shortly before his retirement, Husserl held courses on Hume more than 10 times. There is consequently plenty of evidence to support

1 Richard Murphy's book *Hume and Husserl*, for instance, focuses on the later Husserl.

Husserl's own claim that Hume belonged among the philosophers he had learned most from. As he, for instance, wrote in a letter to Metzger in 1919: 'I have learnt far more from Hume than from Kant' (*Briefwechsel* 4, 412).

Despite this fact, Husserl's interpretation of Hume has received far less attention than his discussion of Kant. This is quite surprising, since Husserl often compared the two thinkers and considered Hume Kant's philosophical counterpart. This comparison was not simply historically based, but also motivated by the very problems Husserl struggled with in his own philosophical project.

Husserl took himself to be explicating and grounding themes already implicitly present in Hume as well as in other great thinkers of the past. In his eyes, such historical reflections could not only shed light on present problems but were also, as Husserl insisted (*First Philosophy* 7), indispensable if phenomenology were fully to understand its own aims and motivations. More than forty German volumes on the history of philosophy in Husserl's private library bear witness to his keen interest in this discipline, which flourished in the German-speaking world throughout the 19th Century.[2] Husserl was also quite aware of some of the methodological challenges involved in understanding cultural works of the past and, despite his respect for the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, he criticised what he saw as the looming danger of historicism in the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) (see Husserl, 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science', 185-8). Turning past philosophical works into mere expressions of changing worldviews misses the main point of philosophy and leads to scepticism. Philosophy is a rigorous science and the decisive question concerning scientific truth always concerns its universal validity. The history of philosophy consequently requires a proper method for the evaluation of its ideas. For Husserl, this method is the method of phenomenology.

The distinct *historical* aspect of the philosophical ideas of the past grew in importance and became an important topic of its own in Husserl's late texts. In these texts, especially in *Crisis*, Husserl viewed his project of transcendental phenomenology as the fulfilment of the European idea of philosophy, and argued that the latter could only fully be grasped if one considered 'the historical movement through which universal reason, inborn in humanity as such, is revealed' (*Crisis*, 15-6). This movement, Husserl maintains, was initiated by the ancient Greeks, most notably by Plato and Aristotle, and received fundamental impulses by thinkers such as Descartes, Leibniz and Kant. And while Husserl is remarkably silent about the potential contribution of German idealism, he reserved a distinguished place for Hume and the British empiricists.

2 We would like to thank Thomas Vongehr from the Husserl Archives in Leuven for detailed information about the works on Hume and the history of philosophy found in Husserl's private library.

In order better to understand Husserl's reception and evaluation of Hume, let us return to the beginning of Husserl's interest in Hume, and consider the views of Husserl's teacher, Franz Brentano, who exerted a considerable influence on the young Husserl.

2. Brentano on the History of Philosophy

According to Brentano, an engagement with the history of philosophy is necessary if philosophy is to gain a correct understanding of its problems and methods and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Assessing a past idea as mistaken requires some understanding of what a correct approach would look like. Writing a history of philosophy thus involves a normative aspect and this in turn requires that the historian of philosophy is also a competent philosopher:

> Not every philologist will endeavor to exposit a Euclid or Archimedes, but only the one who is also a mathematician. And not every historian will be fortunate enough to venture a historical description of chemistry and physics, except one who is also a natural scientist. Thus a philosopher will likewise be required for the investigation of the history of philosophy, although the most scientific philosophers, occupied again and again with systematic questions, have seldom shown themselves inclined towards far-reaching researches in this domain. (Brentano, *Über Aristoteles*, 10)[3]

Without such a normative perspective, the history of philosophy will resemble a graveyard with the names of philosophical systems written on its tombstones. If the history of philosophy is to be more than a history of errors, which are to be repeated in future by people who simply ignore the past, the goals and methods of the past theories must be presented and evaluated. Often these goals and methods will be more 'felt' than known by the philosophers under consideration and their results will be beset with errors and misunderstandings. However, according to Brentano, we should still praise them if we find them heading in the 'right direction' (*Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*, 3; *Die vier Phasen*, 26-8).

Brentano and his students, Husserl included, rejected the speculative Hegelian notion of a necessary and progressive historical development of philosophical systems. They also rejected a merely historical and philological reconstruction of the philosophical ideas devoid of any concern with their truth, just as they rejected all kinds of historical relativism.[4]

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3 Quote translated by Robin Rollinger.

4 See Mulligan, 'Sur l'histoire de l'approche analytique', for a detailed discussion of these points in Brentano and for a bibliography of the Austrian tradition of historiography. For Husserl's rejection of the speculative philosophy of history, see Casement, 'Husserl and the Philosophy of History'.

Indeed, Brentano's approach to the history of philosophy clearly presupposes a conception of what the proper task, motives and methods of philosophy amount to. Philosophy, Brentano contends, is flourishing when it grows from purely theoretical interests and uses a 'natural method' (Brentano, *Die Vier Phasen*, 8). Such a method is based on meticulous observations and descriptions of facts and employs sound logic – both inductive and deductive – to develop its hypotheses, broaden its research, and form new questions. Moreover, Brentano sees philosophy as moving through history in cyclical phases of flourishing followed by three consecutive stages of decline. The proper theoretical attitude of the first stage slowly declines into a practical one in which philosophy is understood merely as a means for living a happy life. Such a practical view of philosophy leads to a subsequent stage of scepticism. The restrictions of scepticism finally provoke a rebellion that culminates in leading into a stage of mysticism where privileged and illusionary roads to truth are invented.

Since the decline of philosophy is not necessary, knowing its empirical causes can prevent future crisis and provide a cure for what Brentano viewed as the sorry state of the philosophy of his day. Brentano therefore consequently introduced his students to the philosophy of the history of philosophy, where this is understood to his students as a discipline investigating the cultural and psychological laws governing the periodic decline of philosophy in history (Brentano, *Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie,* 14-5). In fact, this therapeutic concept of the history of philosophy appears already at the very beginning of Brentano's teaching activity (see Gilson, *Franz Brentano's Interpretation,* 2*).*[5]

Given that the proper method of philosophy, according to Brentano, does not differ from those of the natural sciences, it is hardly surprising that Brentano found Kant's transcendental philosophy responsible for initiating a decline in German philosophy; a decline which, in his view, reached its most degenerative mystical stage in the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel. As Carl Stumpf, a student of Brentano, remarked:

> [Brentano] came to view these [Schelling and Hegel] as the last stage of a period of decline, analogous to the period of decline that ended the ancient period and ushered in the Middle Ages. With that, he regained his nearly extinguished trust in philosophy, philosophy that had to return from this mistaken train of thought to empirically based research. (Stumpf, 'Franz Brentano', 68, quoted from Schaffer, *Madness of Brentano,* 542)

[5] For details and further literature, see Cesalli, 'Brentano, Historian of Philosophy'.

This wholesale dismissal of German idealism characterized most of the Brentano school. By contrast, Brentano and his students, including the young Husserl, had a far more positive view of British empiricism and its empirically oriented methods. This also holds true of their assessment of Hume.

3. Husserl's First Reception of Hume

Husserl was first introduced to Hume by Thomas Masaryk when Husserl was still studying natural science and mathematics in Leipzig in 1877-1878 (Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik*, 4-5). Masaryk, who had just finished his doctoral studies with Brentano in Vienna, had a critical but in general positive view of Mill, Comte and especially Hume, whose *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* he translated into German shortly after he met Husserl. Masaryk fully sympathized with Brentano's rejection of Kant and German idealism and introduced Husserl to philosophy by recommending works of Descartes, Leibniz and the British empiricists. Masaryk also discussed his own and Brentano's criticism of Hume and Kant with the young Husserl.

As Masaryk explains to Husserl, for Hume all knowledge of facts is based on induction. But Hume's ingenious analysis ultimately leads to a reduction of all factual knowledge to blind and contingent habits: 'the whole field of inductive sciences is, if Hume is right, nothing but a manifold of accidentally ordered experiences, for which there is no further warranty – and this is the main point of Hume's scepticism' (Husserl, *Briefwechsel* 2, 102). For Masaryk – and later for Husserl as well – the problem with Hume's analysis is not so much that it rejects all knowledge of an absolute reality behind appearances, but that it makes a rational foundation of the natural sciences impossible. Kant tried to address this problem, but, according to Masaryk, his attempt is 'void and futile. He simply states that we have a concept of cause *a priori*. His doctrine of the synthetic cognitions *a priori* is the most lamentable one ever formulated … There is no synthetic knowledge *a priori*' (Husserl, *Briefwechsel* 2, 102).

After having received his doctorate in mathematics in 1881, Husserl was encouraged by Masaryk to go to Vienna to study philosophy with Brentano. In Vienna, he attended Brentano's seminar on Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* in 1884 and, in 1885, his seminar on the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Kraus, *Franz Brentano*, 155). Moreover, discussion of Hume's moral philosophy was part of Brentano's courses on practical philosophy, which Husserl also attended. These encounters with Hume's philosophy made a lasting impression on Husserl, who always assessed Hume's *Treatise* as a philosophical masterpiece.

This assessment was strengthened further by Brentano's anti-Kantian views. Brentano and his students aimed to show the experiential origins of not merely our psychological concepts, but

also of all the main concepts of metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. Brentano consequently denied the existence of *a priori* concepts: 'not a single concept is to be discovered which is not made up of elements with a perceptual basis in our own experience. We possess none without abstraction that we ourselves have undertaken' (Brentano, *Foundation*, 52). Brentano also argued that Kant's distinction between synthetic and analytic knowledge *a priori* is fundamentally confused. Knowledge, in the strict sense, is either immediately self-evident or based on self-evident propositions, from which it can be proved. Furthermore, if knowledge is to be *a priori*, its negation is not simply untrue, but inconceivable.

Now Kant, according to Brentano, gives two kinds of examples of synthetic *a priori* propositions. The examples of the first kind are *not* self-evident and their negation *is* thinkable. 'Take the proposition, "Every change presupposes something permanent". It may be true, but it is so little evident that even today many people believe the contrary, and their view is certainly not downright absurd' (Brentano, *Foundation*, 52). The examples of the second kind *are* self-evident. But they are so precisely because they are analytic. As Brentano writes, Kant 'always looked for the predicate in the concept of the subject, and if he failed to find it he declared the judgment in question to be synthetic. In the proposition, "2 is less than 3", the predicate is not included in the concept of the subject; nevertheless, it is analytic, for this relation between their sizes is clearly to be seen in the concepts of 2 and 3' (Brentano, *Foundation*, 52)

A priori knowledge is based on our intuition of the *relations of ideas* (concepts). Furthermore, *a priori* relations are not imposed on ideas from an outside source but necessarily flow from the nature of ideas. Negating an *a priori* relation therefore implies negation of related ideas. This, of course, is Hume's doctrine as well (Hume, *An Enquiry*, 25-6).[6] Thus, for Brentano, it was Kant who was mistaken, when he claimed that Hume mistook truths of mathematics for analytic truths and thus overlooked their proper synthetic character.

These discussions were of immediate interest to the young Husserl, who, as a trained mathematician, was drawn to philosophy of mathematics. In his first work, the *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891), Husserl followed the Brentanian-Humean interpretation of *a priori* knowledge and lamented Kant's failure to see the proper analytic character of arithmetical propositions (Husserl, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, 194).[7]

To sum up, Husserl was strongly influenced by the Austrian reception of Hume found in Brentano and his school (see also Kuehn, 'The Reception', 134-37) and by their evaluation of the contribution of past thinkers to the descriptive and experiential grounding of universally valid

[6] Page numbers from Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and from his *Treatise of Human nature* give the pages of the L.A. Selby-Bigge's and P.H. Nidditch's edition of Hume's works.

[7] The best phenomenological discussion of Hume's relations of ideas and its reception by Kant is provided by Adolf Reinach (Reinach, 'Kant's Interpretation of Hume's Problem').

philosophy. This approach differed significantly from the preceding one which was indebted to Hegel's treatment of Hume (Hegel, *Lectures*, 369-74) and which portrayed Hume's scepticism as a mere stepping stone towards Kant's critical philosophy. The main question for this traditional German interpretation of Hume was whether the proper refutation of Hume was already to be found in Kant or rather first in the works of his successors (cf. Fischer, *Geschichte*, V, 100-17). This view received strong support from the English side as well. In 1874 and 1875 T. H. Green and T. H. Grose published a standard two volume edition of Hume's *Treatise* of which Husserl had a copy. In its influential introduction written by a representative of British Hegelianism, T.H. Green claimed that

> It was because Kant, reading Hume with the eyes of Leibnitz and Leibnitz with the eyes of Hume, was able to a great extent to rid himself of the presuppositions of both, that he started that new method of philosophy which, as elaborated by Hegel, claims to set man free [...] Thus the 'Treatise of Human Nature' and the 'Critic of Pure Reason,' taken together, form the real bridge between the old world of philosophy and the new. (Green, 'Introduction', 3)

Brentano disagreed.[8] He maintained that Kant had failed to solve Hume's doubts, that Hume's scepticism had to be addressed in a different fashion, and that Hume's positive views were to be studied independently of German idealism: 'Hume [is] one of the most refined minds. Of all the philosophers of the age of decline [he is] the one most worthy of study' (Brentano, *Geschichte*, 47). Especially Alexius Meinong, a former student of Brentano, followed this advice and produced two widely read volumes of *Hume Studies* in 1878 and 1882.

In Halle, where Husserl spent fourteen years after his habilitation in 1887, Carl Stumpf, a student of Brentano, Benno Erdmann and later Alois Riehl, both neo-Kantian philosophers,[9] were also interested in Hume, as is attested by a number of dissertations on Hume at the University of Halle from that period.[10] These addressed such topics as Hume's nominalism (Grube, *Nominalismus*), his theory of causality (Richter, *Hume's Käusalitätstheorie*), his philosophy of mathematics (Meyer, *Humes und Berkeleys Philosophie*) and the difference between Hume's *Treatise* and his *Enquiry* (Brede, *Der Unterschied*). Husserl himself was also occupied with 'Hume, and again and again with Hume' (Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik*, 25). Husserl's Hume studies were fuelled by his interest in the nature of mathematical propositions, and in the relation of logical

[8] Unsurprisingly, in his lectures, Brentano neither used nor discussed the views found in the contemporary German introductions to the history of modern philosophy.

[9] With their 'return to Kant', German Neo-Kantians became gradually interested in Hume as well. In comparison to the previous Hegelian reading, they treated Hume with a fairly open mind (see Kuehn, 'The Reception', 134-135).

[10] Husserl owned copies of dissertations on Hume defended in Halle by Carl Grube (1889), Paul Richter (1893), Wilhelm Brede (1896), Eugen Meyer (1896) and Richard Hönigswald (1904).

calculus to logic and mathematics, for which 'Bolzano, Lotze and Hume were of great help' (Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik*, 26).

Soon, however, Husserl also became interested in the consequences of Hume's nominalism for the theory of relations, abstraction, and meaning.

4. *Logical Investigations* and the manuscript on Hume and Kant

In the first volume of *Logical Investigations* that contains Husserl's famous rejection of psychologism, we also find Husserl engaging in a more substantial criticism of Hume, since he claims that Hume's naturalistic interpretation of the *a priori* foundations of science leads to a self-defeating scepticism (Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, I, 59-61). In the second volume of the work, Husserl further targets Hume's nominalism and sensualism, but also notes his appreciation of Hume's starting point in the immanent contents of consciousness. As Husserl remarks in an important manuscript from 1903 entitled '*Hume and Kant, Objections against Kant's problem of synthetic judgments a priori and against the basic scheme of its solution*' (Husserl, *Erste Philosophie*, I, 350-6),[11] Hume is 'by and large ruled by right tendencies and walks on right paths, though with his eyes half-covered' (*Erste Philosophie*, 352).

Hume, as Husserl further states in the 1903 manuscript (*Erste Philosophie*, 350), accepts as unproblematic both (a) immediate knowledge about what is given as the content of sensory perception, memory or imagination, and (b) judgments about 'given contents of ideas' (relations of ideas). However, he sees as problematic any *mediated* empirical knowledge, and famously argues that neither reason nor senses can justify our belief in the existence of mind-independent objects (Hume, *Treatise*, 188-93). Moreover, any empirical knowledge that goes beyond immediate perception makes use of causal reasoning, which again is something that cannot be rationally justified. All knowledge concerning *matters of facts* is ultimately based on the associative tendencies and inclinations at work in human imagination, i.e., on contingent features of human nature. Insofar as Hume argues that mediated judgments of fact 'never permit of rational justification, but only of psychological explanation' (Husserl, *Logical Investigation*, I, 60), the findings of natural science are at most true *for us*.[12] But given that Hume's own theory of human cognition is itself an empirical science based on experience and observation (*Treatise*, xv-vii) or mediated judgments of fact, the end result, according to Husserl, is a self-defeating scepticism (*Logical Investigations*, I, 60-1; *First Philosophy*, 354).

[11] The text is not included in the English translation of the lectures. Quotes from this volume and from the Husserliana volume *Natur und Geist* are translated by Robin Rollinger.

[12] As Husserl points out (*Logical Investigations*, I, 60; *Erste Philosophie*, I, 355), Hume's clear awareness of the *a priori* character of logic and mathematics does not in any way change the outcome (Husserl, *First Philosophy*, 183).

Husserl also rejects Hume's attempt to save the science of human nature from the sceptical results of his own analysis by stressing its suitability for 'common practice and experience' and the satisfaction science brings to the human mind (Hume, *Treatise*, 272-3). This, as Husserl later puts it, turns science, into 'a self-delusion of subjectivity, or an art of expediently organizing fictions for the purposes of life' (*First Philosophy*, 164). Husserl is aware of the difficulty of reconciling such a strong fictionalist interpretation of Hume with Hume's agnosticism, which does not deny the existence of external reality behind appearances, but simply regards the idea as empty rather than nonsensical (Hume, *Treatise*, 68). Husserl's solution to the problem is to argue that Hume's agnosticism is but a wink to 'prevailing views safeguarded by the Church' (Husserl, *First Philosophy*, 185). Furthermore, Hume's acquiescence in the sceptical results of his theory is, for Husserl, a sign of an intellectual dishonesty. Thus, as Husserl complains in *Crisis* (88) it is regrettable that Hume's astounding genius did not go hand in hand with a correspondingly great philosophical ethos.

It is in the second volume of *Logical Investigations* that we find what is arguably Husserl's most well-known engagement with Hume, namely his discussion of Hume's nominalism. The 2nd *Logical Investigation* contains a 30-page long discussion of Hume's theory of abstraction. Hume's nominalism, as is generally acknowledged, wants to reduce general ideas to classes of particular ideas related to each other by similarity and associated with the same name. Instead of presenting a general idea, we present a particular one, but since we learn to apply the same name to similar particular ideas, hearing or recalling that name puts the presentation of the other ideas, with which it is associated, at our disposal. These ideas are 'not in fact present to the mind, but only in power; nor do we draw them all out distinctly in the imagination, but keep ourselves in a readiness to survey any of them' (Hume, *Treatise*, 20-1). Due to this associative structure, the particular idea functions 'generally' as a proxy for the remaining dispositionally present members of the class. In his assessment of this account, Husserl objects that,

> whenever things are 'alike', an identity in the strict and true sense is also present. We cannot predicate exact likeness of two things, without stating the respect in which they are thus alike. Each exact likeness relates to a Species, under which the objects compared are subsumed. Similarity is a similarity of a certain kind and this kind cannot be once again reduced to similarity without an infinite regress (Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, I, 242).[13]

[13] For an evaluation of Husserl's argument, see Butts, 'Husserl's Critique' and Rocknak, 'Husserl's Phenomenologization of Hume', 28-31.

More generally speaking, and this would be in line with his criticism of psychologism, Husserl argues that Hume's radical empiricism in its rejection of ideality and its attempts to reduce everything to impressions and associative concatenations of ideas leads to a self-refuting scepticism. Yet, Husserl does not simply reject Hume's descriptions of abstraction. Even if Hume completely misunderstands the logical content of abstractive acts, he nevertheless, according to Husserl, provides interesting and partially correct insights into their psychological genesis (Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, I, 292). When it comes to the psychological side of matters, Husserl consequently concludes that 'Hume's thoughts, suitably modified, provide a basis on which a workable theory may very well be built' (*Logical Investigations*, I, 295).

Logical Investigations contains Husserl's first proper presentation and development of a descriptive phenomenological method, and it is in this context and in connection with his extensive analysis of intentional consciousness, that Husserl also starts to discuss features of Hume's thought that are directly related to Husserl's own phenomenological project. It is here that Husserl commences what ultimately turns into his distinct *phenomenological* interpretation of Hume.

In *Logical Investigations* Husserl conceived of phenomenology as a metaphysically neutral enterprise. For Husserl, the task of phenomenology is to establish a new foundation for pure logic and epistemology (*Logical Investigations*, I, 2), i.e., to determine the conditions of possibility for objective knowledge in general, and that includes knowledge claims made by ideal sciences such as mathematics, which are disinterested in questions concerning existence (*Logical Investigations*, I, 16). The task of epistemology is not to determine whether consciousness can attain knowledge of mind-independent reality, since that very question, as well as the question of whether there is an external reality in the first place, are metaphysical questions that fall outside the domain of epistemology (*Logical Investigations*, I, 177). Husserl consequently insists that the six Logical Investigations do not make any metaphysical assumptions (*Logical Investigations*, I, 179). They are disinterested in questions concerning the existence of real, external and mind-independent objects, and instead simply focus on the structure of givenness.

Hume, according to Husserl, shares the view that 'All epistemology must start with the given, and this, quite simply, is the immediate experiences exclusively' (Husserl, *Erste Philosophie*, 352). Although Husserl rejects Hume's scepticism as the philosophical end station, he welcomes it as a methodological starting point:

> Though Hume's theory of the things may be sceptical, unclear, untenable, scepticism is absolutely indispensable for the beginning of epistemology. It must restrict itself to the phenomenologically given. (*Erste Philosophie*, 353)

Husserl further suggests that Hume's metaphysical neutrality helps him avoid the dogmatic objectivism at the heart of Kant's analysis of knowledge.

> Hume does not begin, as Kant and Locke do, with the subject's being affected by objects. There is for him no duality between self and things, and thus there are not for him all the difficulties and contradictions with which people have again and again reproached Kant: without the assumption of things in themselves they cannot enter the system, and with this assumption they cannot remain in it. (*Erste Philosophie*, 352)

> What does *a priori* mean for him [for Hume]? Nothing innate, nothing factually belonging to the original endowment of the human mind, just as *a posteriori* does not mean for him: coming from outside, from the stimulation of intellect by external realities, instead of coming from the intellect. According to Hume, innate ideas are metaphysical fictions. And we don't know anything about the 'outside'. (*Erste Philosophie*, 351)

Although Hume takes the correct methodological starting point, he is, according to Husserl, quickly led astray by his division of all conscious contents into impressions and ideas conceived as weaker copies of impressions. Husserl criticizes Hume for failing to recognize the true nature of consciousness, its self-transcending object-directedness, its intentionality. For Husserl, objects of consciousness (except for special cases of reflection) are utterly unlike consciousness itself. The objects of everyday perception (a bird, a tree, a table, etc.) are not reducible to intra-mental content:

> Objects of intuitive presentation, animals, trees etc., conceived as they appear to us […] cannot be allowed by us to be complexes of 'ideas', and therefore themselves 'ideas'. They are not objects of possible 'interior perception', as if they constituted a complex phenomenological content in consciousness, in which they could be picked out as real data (*Logical Investigations*, I, 252).

> However we may decide the question of the existence or non-existence of phenomenal external things, we cannot doubt that the reality of each such perceived thing cannot be understood as

> the reality of a perceived complex of sensations in a perceiving consciousness (*Logical Investigations*, II, 342).[14]

Husserl, however, blames Hume (and Berkeley) for reducing the world and its objects to bundles of sensations:

> It is the fundamental defect of phenomenalistic theories [such as Hume's] that they draw no distinction between appearance [*Erscheinung*] as intentional experience, and the apparent object (the subject of the objective predicates), and therefore identify the experienced complex of sensations with the complex of objective features. (*Logical Investigations*, II, 90)

As Husserl is aware, however, Hume is far from claiming that we in everyday life believe that external objects are nothing but bundles of sensations. In fact, Husserl stresses the novelty and the phenomenological value of Hume's project in that the latter precisely seeks to account for our everyday belief in the existence of a mind-independent world filled with objects (Husserl, *First Philosophy,* 179-80). Hume, however, repeatedly calls the objects of such a belief 'fictions' and Husserl considers such fictionalism absurd. As Husserl would write a decade later in 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science':

> Had [Hume's] sensualism not blinded him to the whole sphere of intentionality, of 'consciousness-of,' had he grasped it in an investigation of essence, he would not have become the great sceptic, but instead the founder of a truly 'positive' theory of reason. ('Philosophy as Rigorous Science', 182)

5. Husserl's Transcendental Turn

One of the marked differences between *Logical Investigations* and Husserl's later writings is his belief in the increasing significance and scope of phenomenology. His next major work from 1913, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, first book* (commonly referred to as *Ideas I*) involved an endorsement of transcendental philosophy and was seen by many of Husserl's early followers as a betrayal of the core ideas of phenomenology. Husserl, on his side, complained that their reluctance to follow his transcendental turn simply meant

[14] To read Husserl himself as a phenomenalist or subjective idealist is consequently a serious misinterpretation. For an extensive discussion, see Zahavi, *Husserl's Legacy*.

that they had failed to really understand his philosophical project, had failed to fully grasp what phenomenology is all about. Indeed, soon after the publication of *Logical Investigations*, Husserl was himself to complain about the shortcomings of his purely descriptive phenomenology. As he points out in the lecture course *Introduction to logic and theory of knowledge* (1906–1907), if one really wishes to understand the relation between act, meaning, and object, one must leave descriptive phenomenology behind in favour of transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, *Introduction to Logic*, 428-31).

Rather than merely amounting to a limited exploration of the psychological domain, for Husserl an in-depth investigation of intentionality paves the way for a proper engagement with all the philosophical core questions, including questions concerning the being and nature of reality and objectivity. This is why transcendental phenomenology should not be conceived merely as a theory about the structure of subjectivity, nor is it merely a theory about how *we* understand and perceive the world. To construe Husserlian phenomenology in such a way that being and reality are topics left for other disciplines, would neither respect nor reflect Husserl's own assertions on the matter. As he declares in § 23 of *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), the topics of existence and non-existence, of being and non-being, are all-embracing themes for phenomenology, themes addressed under the broadly understood titles of reason and unreason (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 56-7). Husserl's investigations of intentionality, his exploration of the correlation between experiential acts and objects of experience, ultimately led him to embrace a form of transcendental idealism that insisted on the essential interconnection between reason, truth and being, and on the for-us-ness of any coherent notion of reality. We are consequently quickly moving away from the metaphysical neutrality of *Logical Investigations*:

> [T]ranscendental phenomenology in the sense I conceive of it does in fact encompass the universal horizon of the problems of philosophy […] including as well all so-called metaphysical questions, insofar as they have possible sense in the first place. (Husserl, *Ideen III*, 141)

> Phenomenology is anti-metaphysical insofar as it rejects every metaphysics concerned with the construction of purely formal hypotheses. But like all genuine philosophical problems, all metaphysical problems return to a phenomenological base, where they find their genuine transcendental form and method, fashioned from intuition. (Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, 253)

For Husserl, consciousness must be appreciated in its *transcendental* role as that which grounds the appearing of all *transcendent* objectivity. Existing reality is by no means doubted or excluded from phenomenological research. Quite to the contrary, its constitution becomes one of the leading questions. How is it that the shared, common, world of everyday experience can be subjectively constituted by pure consciousness? As R.A. Mall has convincingly shown (Mall, *Experience and Reason*, 29-37, 64-78, see also Husserl, *Natur und Geist*, 146), this brings Husserl's project close to Hume's task of describing the constitution of our 'vulgar consciousness' of the external world (see also Hume, *Treatise*, 201-2).

In the first period following his transcendental turn, however, Husserl almost completely reverses his prior assessment of the historical significance of Hume and Kant for the phenomenological project. After all, when Husserl decided to designate his own phenomenology as *transcendental*, he was precisely making use of a Kantian concept (Husserl, *Kant and the Idea*, 9). As Husserl writes:

> His [Kant's] significance for all time, therefore, lies in the much discussed but little understood 'Copernican' turn to an interpretation of the sense of the world that was new in principle and yet rigorously scientific, but at the same time his significance lies in the first grounding of the 'completely new' science belonging thereto – i.e. the transcendental. (*Kant and the Idea*, 17; translation modified).

So in clear contrast to Brentano's assessment, for Husserl, Kant's philosophy does not initiate a decline in philosophy but starts a new and productive beginning of phenomenological inquiries:

> The striving toward phenomenology was present already in the wonderfully profound Cartesian fundamental considerations; then, again, in the psychologism of the Lockean school; Hume almost set foot upon its domain, but with blinded eyes. And then the first to correctly see it was Kant, whose greatest intuitions become wholly understandable to us only when we had obtained by hard work a fully clear awareness of the peculiarity of the province belonging to phenomenology. It then becomes evident to us that Kant's mental regard was resting on that field, although he was still unable to appropriate it or recognize it as a field of work pertaining to a strict eidetic science proper. Thus, for example, the transcendental deduction in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* was actually operating inside the realm of phenomenology, but Kant misinterpreted that realm as psychological and therefore he himself abandoned it. (Husserl, *Ideas I*, 142)

Despite this reorientation towards Kant – which is also partially to be explained as a result of Husserl's ongoing conversation with neo-Kantians like Natorp – Husserl still favours Hume on several important points. As he writes, Kant's philosophy would have been much enhanced if only Kant had been awoken from his dogmatic slumber by Hume's *Treatise* rather than by his *Enquiry* (Husserl, *First Philosophy*, 203-4). Husserl's claim that Kant read the wrong book and that Hume's greatest contribution to philosophy is his *Treatise of Human Nature* is closely related to Husserl's attempt to read the works of the past with a view to how they might have prepared or anticipated his own transcendental phenomenology. And for Husserl, Hume's *Treatise* has surprisingly much to offer. Husserl's particular interest concerns Hume's detailed description (excluded from the *Enquiry*) of the constitution of our belief in the external and independent reality of the world. (*Treatise, 187-219*). In Part IV of the first book of the *Treatise*, Hume tries to show how different features of our consciousness of external reality arise solely from our perceptions and the operating principles of the human mind. This topic comes close to one of the central goals of Husserl's pure phenomenology, which was to describe how the objectivity of the world and worldly objects is constituted in intentional acts.

> In that case one can say that D. Hume's 'Treatise' is the first systematic sketch of a pure, though not eidetic phenomenology, and especially its first volume the first draft of a closed phenomenology of knowledge. However, the Humean designation as psychology concealed the fact that Hume was not at all a psychologist in the usual sense, that his 'Treatise' was rather an actually 'transcendental' phenomenology, though with a sensualistic twist. (Husserl, *Ideen III*, 155)15

Husserl was not alone in his effort to reassess Hume's philosophy from a transcendental standpoint. Already in 1904, Richard Hönigswald published his neo-Kantian interpretation of Hume – *Über die Lehre Hume's von der Realität der Aussendinge* – of which Husserl had a copy.[16] In his book, Hönigswald offers a very strong Kantian reading of the very same passages of *Treatise*, and argues that Hume's central task was to describe the subjective foundation of our (unjustifiable) belief in the external things. According to Hönigswald, however, Hume overlooks to what extent our subjective contribution is underpinned by universal structures that can guarantee the general validity of our knowledge – a task which is famously taken up by Kant in his deduction of the categories.

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15 Hume's analysis of our belief in the continued external existence of perceived objects, received a detailed phenomenological interpretation in the dissertation *The Central Problem of David Hume's Philosophy* (1929) by Husserl's pupil Christopher V. Salmon.

16 Husserl mentions Hönigswald's works as being intelligent but as losing themselves in subtleties (Husserl, *Briefwechsel*, Teil V, 128).

As we have seen, Husserl also criticized Hume for being blind to the rational foundation of our knowledge concerning matters of facts. However, for Husserl, Hönigswald's Neo-Kantian critique misses the phenomenological value of Hume's descriptive work. Kant's transcendental philosophy, as it is usually understood, is concerned with a principled investigation of the very conditions of the possibility of experience. By necessity, it must go beyond experience in pursuing this endeavour, since the conditions in question can only be unearthed regressively by a transcendental deduction. In one of his longest texts on Kant, entitled 'Kant und die Idee der Transzendentalphilosophie' (*Erste Philosophie*, 230-87), Husserl, however, writes that transcendental philosophy should be based upon a systematic description and analysis of consciousness in all of its modalities and Husserl doesn't consider Kant's method suitable for such a task. As Husserl also remarks, 'Kant's deduction is a masterpiece of top-down transcendental reasoning. It remains far removed from all phenomenological analyses' (quoted in Kern, *Husserl und Kant,* 104). Some years later, Husserl expands on this remark, and writes that a transcendental deduction of the a priori structures of the world can take two paths. There is the direct way from below, which takes its point of departure in the concrete pre-predicative experience of the world, and then there is the way from above, which takes its point of departure in logic. The first way is the phenomenological way, the second the Kantian way (Husserl, *Natur und Geist*, 103, 112). Due to his fear of psychologizing the transcendental, Kant renounced the attempt to base his investigation on experiential evidence and instead resorted to a regressive procedure. But the end result, according to Husserl, is that Kant's analysis remained too dependent on construction and left the transcendental concepts fundamentally unclear (Husserl, *Crisis,* 103-4, 115).

For Husserl, Kant's deductive method lacked an intuitive basis and was unable to provide a proper account of consciousness.[17] By contrast, a phenomenological transcendental philosophy is committed to the idea that the structures of transcendental, constituting, consciousness must be brought to intuitive givenness, i.e., they must be experientially accessible. This is precisely why Hume's *Treatise* is 'highly valuable to any phenomenologist, since it contains numerous phenomenological motives and an uncommon amount of phenomenological content, though mixed with other concerns and quite misinterpreted by the author himself' (Husserl, *Einführung*, 4). Hume was not the only one to misinterpret his own endeavour. For Husserl, Kant had also overlooked the true insights of Hume, and had not fully grasped Hume's real problem: 'Hume, as he is understood by Kant, is not the real Hume' (Husserl, *Crisis*, 95). Hume did in fact question something that Kant took for granted, namely the status of science. Furthermore, Hume did not simply seek to restore the legitimacy of the life-world, but he also went further and took the pre-given life-world itself as a

[17] It is consequently no coincidence that Husserl preferred the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the second (Husserl, *Ideas I*, 142).

constitutive achievement of experiencing prescientific life.[18] Hume's real problem concerned the question of how the world – a world whose being is a being through subjective accomplishments – can obtain and sustain its status as objective. Importantly, Hume sought to address this question using only 'experience and observation' and stayed far away from any regressive or abductive line of reasoning (Hume, *Treatise*, xvi-vii):

> Hume's greatness (a greatness still unrecognized in this, its most important aspect) lies in the fact that, despite all that, he was the first to grasp the universal *concrete problem* of transcendental philosophy. In the concreteness of purely egological internality, as he saw, everything Objective becomes intended to (and, in favourable cases, perceived), thanks to a subjective genesis. Hume was the first to see the necessity of investigating the Objective itself as a product of its genesis from that concreteness, in order to make the legitimate being-sense of everything that exists for us intelligible through its ultimate origins. Stated more precisely: The real world and the categories of reality, which are its fundamental forms, became for him a problem in a new fashion. (Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 256).

The distinctive feature of Husserl's Hume interpretation is consequently that he reads Hume as a transcendental philosopher *avant la lettre*.[19]

6. Hume and Genetic Phenomenology

The moment Husserl started to take Kant seriously, his appreciation of Hume seems somewhat paradoxically to have increased. When Husserl in the later phase of his work also started to engage in what is known as *genetic phenomenology*, he became even more appreciative of some of Hume's central ideas.

Husserl's early analyses of intentionality studied the intentional correlation with no regard for genesis and historicity. The type of object and the type of intentional act were both considered readily available. Subsequently, however, Husserl came to realize that the subject of intentionality is not merely a formal principle of constitution, not 'a dead pole of identity', as he puts it (Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology*, 159), and that the same holds true on the object side. Through a passive process of habitual sedimentation, our experiences leave their trace in us and thereby

[18] For a detailed comparison of pre-predicative anticipation in Hume and Husserl, see Mall, 'Der Induktionsbegriff'.

[19] In a late letter to Baumgarten from 1936 (Husserl, *Briefwechsel* 7, 26-7), Husserl explicitly emphasizes the novelty of his own Hume interpretation.

contribute to the formation of cognitive schemas and forms of apprehension and expectations that guide and motivate subsequent experiences. Certain types of intentionality (pre-linguistic experiences, for example) condition later and more complex types of intentionality (conceptual judgments, for instance).

The process of sedimentation is an associative process, and association for Husserl, is 'one of the most important of all and completely universal functioning form of passive genesis' (Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, 76). It operates, according to Husserl, 'by itself' already at the lowest levels of consciousness. It is among the basic principles securing the unity of the stream of consciousness (Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, 207), and is indispensable not only for the pre-predicative constitution of lower order objects, but is also one of the necessary conditions for the genesis of higher order forms of objectivity.[20]

Husserl took the task of genetic phenomenology to involve the examination of the temporal becoming of these different forms of intentionality, one that traced higher-order forms of objectivity back to lower-order forms. And Husserl saw a clear parallel in Hume, who also sought to ground scientific rationality and logic in more passive forms of associative processes, which do not presuppose, as Kant thought, a higher order form of objectifying apperception, but are themselves its presupposition. According to Husserl, Hume was the first to become aware of the tremendous constitutive importance of association, but Husserl then quickly added his standard charge – Hume overlooked the intentional character of association and treated it as a blind 'force of nature'. His laws of associations are only 'naturalistic distortions of the corresponding genuine, intentional concepts' (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 80):

> Habit, as Hume correctly teaches, is not only our nurse, but the function of consciousness that as such shapes and persistently continues shaping the world, indeed all objectivity. 'Habit' is the original source of all giving of sense. … Not as if I, also following Hume, wanted to speak in favour of a 'mechanism' of blind associations. (Husserl, *Natur und Geist*, 32, 146)

7. Conclusion

In *Crisis*, Husserl describes phenomenology as the final gestalt of transcendental philosophy. When accounting for the history of transcendental philosophy, however, it quickly becomes apparent that Husserl is operating with a broader conception of transcendental philosophy than Kant was, namely

20 For a rich discussion of Husserl's concept of association, including its relation to Hume, see Holenstein, *Phänomenologie der Assoziation.*

as referring to a fundamental reflective inquiry into the first-personal basis of all knowledge formations (*Crisis*, 97-8). Husserl also writes that transcendental philosophy is characterized by its criticism of objectivism and by its elucidation of subjectivity as the locus of all objective formations of sense and validity (*Crisis*, 99). It is on the basis of such a general definition that Husserl then counts not only Kant but also Descartes, Berkeley, and Hume as transcendental philosophers (*Crisis*, 337-8). Even if Descartes's insistence on the importance of first-person reflection is what makes Husserl consider Descartes the true innovator, the first to introduce the transcendental motive into modern philosophy (*Crisis*, 97), Husserl also makes it clear that Hume, in his view, radicalised Descartes's fundamental project and that his genuine philosophical merit is to be found in his rejection of dogmatic objectivism (*Crisis*, 90).

As said, Husserl was very critical of Hume's empiricism, phenomenalism and fictionalism. He also considered Hume a self-defeating sceptic. But Husserl throughout appreciated the radicality of Hume's position. By challenging objectivism the way he did, Hume outshone both Descartes and Kant, and Husserl even went so far as to argue that Hume had delivered '*the first systematic attempt at a science of what is purely given in consciousness*' for which reason he considered Hume's *Treatise* 'the first outline of a pure phenomenology' (*First Philosophy*, 203-4).[21]

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[21] Hynek Janoušek's contribution to this article is based on a project funded by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic entitled *On the Limits of Reason in the Age of Reason: Disputes in the 18th Century Philosophy (*grant number 17-06904S).

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