

The Internal-External Divide and Husserl's Phenomenology¹

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Various interpretations of Husserl have been presented in relation to the internalism-externalism debate. The debate concerns the question whether linguistic and mental content can be determined by features that are not only internal but also external to the subject. Besides different internalist and externalist interpretations of Husserl, there are interpretations that reject both internalism and externalism as frameworks for understanding Husserl. The main reason not to commit to either externalist or internalist interpretations seems to be that the internal-external divide, which is pertinent to internalism and externalism, is purportedly inapplicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology. Yet, it is not obvious how the concepts of internality and externality are understood when they are deemed inapplicable in this context, which reflects the ambiguity of the concepts in the internalism-externalism debate itself. The aim of this article is to clarify the internal-external divide and its rejection in these interpretations of Husserl. The reason why the internal-external divide has been deemed inapplicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology is first located to a spatial sense in which the concepts of internality and externality are usually understood. It is then argued that the internal-external divide can be rendered applicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology by reconfiguring internality and externality in relation to the subject's point of view. In addition to Farkas' proposal that conceives the internal-external divide in phenomenal terms, two phenomenological ways of understanding internality and externality are considered. The main problem in both Farkas' proposal and the two phenomenological proposals is that they preclude some forms of externalism. This

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article solves the problem by using the two phenomenological proposals to modify Farkas' proposal so that a broader range of externalism is enabled.

1. Introduction

There have been various attempts to understand Husserl in relation to the internalism-externalism debate in philosophy of mind and language. The debate typically concerns the question whether the meaning or content of the subject's linguistic expressions and mental states may depend on features that are external to the subject. Traditionally, Husserl has been interpreted as an internalist within this debate (see e.g., McIntyre 1984; 1986; Dreyfus & Hall 1984; Keller 1999, pp. 3–9; Carman 2003, pp. 83–84ff.; Spear 2013). Although many contemporary Husserl scholars have abandoned the internalist interpretation, they remain divided when it comes to the question whether Husserl is then better understood as a kind of externalist (Beyer 2000; 2013; Smith 2008; Crowell 2008; 2013) or as a philosopher whose thinking cannot be understood within the internalism-externalism framework (Zahavi 2004; 2008; 2017, pp. 115–120; Murchadha 2003; 2008; Man-To 2014). The main reason for endorsing the latter alternative rather than committing to either internalist or externalist interpretations seems to be the idea that the internal-external divide, which is pertinent to the internalism-externalism framework, cannot be applied to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology. Yet, it is not clear what is meant by the notions of internality and externality when they are abandoned in this context. This unclarity seems to reflect the ambiguity of the internal-external divide in the internalism-externalism debate itself (see Farkas 2003; 2008; Gertler 2012; Gomes & Parrott 2021; Bruckner 2022). The aim of this article is to first identify the reason why the internal-external divide has been deemed inapplicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology and then clarify the internal-external divide for both Husserl's phenomenology and the internalism-externalism debate. The reason for rejecting the internal-external divide is located to a spatial sense in which the internal-external divide has usually been understood. It is then proposed that to be rendered applicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology the divide should rather be understood in a sense that reconfigures internality and externality in relation to the subject's point of view. After introducing Farkas' (2003; 2008) proposal that conceives the internal-external divide in relation to the subject's point of view, two phenomenological ways of understanding internality and externality are considered (Smith 2008; Crowell

2008; 2013). The key problem in both Farkas' proposal and the two phenomenological proposals is that they preclude some forms of externalism, indicating that they cannot provide general criteria for the internal-external divide in the internalism-externalism debate. To solve this problem, the two phenomenological ways of understanding the internal-external divide are used to modify Farkas' proposal. As a result, this article introduces a modified proposal for defining the internal-external divide that enables a broader range of externalism than the two phenomenological proposals and Farkas' proposal.

2. Internalism and Externalism

Internalism and externalism designate many different views in philosophy. In this article, they are understood in the context of philosophy of language and mind as opposing views about meaning or content. The reason is that these are the kinds of internalism and externalism mainly under discussion in the literature about Husserl's relation to the internalism-externalism debate (see e.g., McIntyre 1984; 1986; Keller 1999; Beyer 2000; 2013; Murchadha 2003; 2008; Zahavi 2004; 2008; 2017; Rowlands 2003, pp. 56–63; Crowell 2008; 2013; Smith 2008; Alweiss 2009; Spear 2013). Most importantly, the argument that Husserl cannot be understood within the internalism-externalism framework is primarily directed at these forms of internalism and externalism (Zahavi 2017, pp. 115–119).

At its heart, the internalism-externalism debate about content is a philosophical disagreement about individuation (see e.g., Kallestrup 2012, p. 60; Woodfield 1982, p. v; McGinn 1989, pp. 9–11; Boghossian 1997, p. 163). Internalism and externalism are sometimes defined as opposing views about the determination of meaning or content, but talk about determination can be misleading because it might give the false impression that externalism is a claim about causation (see Kallestrup 2012, p. 60), while causal theories of reference only make up one portion of externalism (see e.g., Kripke 1972; Donnellan 1972). The internalism-externalism debate is therefore better framed more generally in terms of individuation. Where internalism claims that meaning or content can be solely individuated by features internal to the subject, externalism claims that sometimes meaning or content can be individuated not only by features internal but also external to the subject².

² I am aware that this is not the only way to define internalism and externalism. An anonymous referee noted that perhaps internalism should be rather defined as the view that content is *generally*

The classic arguments for such externalism come from Putnam (1975) who makes two important claims. First, Putnam claims that even if I was not able to distinguish between two kinds of trees, elms and beeches, the meanings of the terms “elm” and “beech” would differ in my usage of the terms insofar as there were people in my linguistic community who could draw the distinction (Putnam 1975, pp. 143–145). “Thus the way of recognizing possessed by these ‘expert’ speakers,” Putnam writes, is “possessed by the collective linguistic body, even though it is not possessed by each individual member of the body” (ibid., p. 145). This “way of recognizing” can determine the meaning of a word “while being unknown to almost all speakers who acquire the word” (ibid., p. 145). This idea is known as the division of linguistic labor.

Second, Putnam makes the Twin Earth argument. Putnam asks us to imagine a planet called Twin Earth, a nearly exact atom-by-atom copy of Earth, which also includes a twin for every inhabitant of Earth. Twin Earth is a “nearly exact” replica of Earth because there is one subtle yet crucial difference between the two seemingly identical planets. Where the molecules that make up the water that fills the lakes and falls from the sky on Earth are H₂O, the molecules that make up a qualitatively identical kind of liquid that fills the lakes and falls from the sky on Twin Earth are different. Call them XYZ. Although the same word “water” is used

individuated by internal features. However, since this definition would require me to elaborate in which cases (that are not “general”) internalism would maintain that content is not individuated solely by internal features, I have decided to maintain the stricter definition of internalism. This way of distinguishing externalism from internalism also exemplifies at least one commonly accepted view in the literature. For example, in his book *Semantic Externalism*, Kallestrup characterizes internalism as the view that “meaning is fully determined by features that are internal to the speaker” and externalism as the view that “meaning is determined at least in part by features that are external to the speaker” (Kallestrup 2012, p. 2). More precisely, externalism is defined as the view “that such content is in part determined or individuated by features external to the individuals who are in states with that content, i.e. that such content supervenes on the conjunction of internal features (intrinsic physical, experiential, psychological properties) and external features” (ibid., p. 62), whereas internalism is defined as “the negation of semantic externalism,” namely “the view that propositional content does supervene on internal features (intrinsic physical, experiential, psychological properties) – or that such content is fully determined by such internal features” (ibid., p. 63). For other examples of defining internalism more strictly than externalism, see e.g., Brown (2007, p. 17) and Wikforss (2008, p. 161). This kind of “uncompromisingly internalist conception” is supported for example by Farkas (2008, p. vii). It is of course possible to be, say, an internalist about natural kind terms while accepting externalism about indexical terms (see e.g., Segal 2000, p. 19), but if one tries to define internalism and externalism generally, I think this way of defining them is more helpful. Furthermore, this stricter way of understanding internalism (as the view that content or meaning is never individuated by anything external to the subject) is also emblematic of how internalism is understood when it is attributed to Husserl (e.g., McIntyre 1986, p. 102; Carman 2003, p. 83; see also Smith & McIntyre 1982, pp. 225–226).

on both planets to refer to the two kinds of liquid, the liquids are distinct: on Earth, it is water; on Twin Earth, it is twin water. Due to this difference, Putnam argues, the meaning of the term “water” is different when I use the word “water” on Earth and when my twin uses the word on Twin Earth. They are different even if neither my twin nor I had any knowledge of the molecules that differentiate (i.e., individuate) water from twin water. (Ibid., pp. 139–142.) In fact, Putnam goes as far as claiming that the meanings of “water” would differ even in the year 1750 when no one knew anything about molecules (ibid., p. 141).

Both of Putnam’s arguments reach the same conclusion that the meaning of a word is not only individuated by “the psychological state of the individual speaker” (ibid., p. 192). Yet, where the argument for the division of linguistic labor maintains that meaning can also be individuated by “the way of recognizing” possessed by other people, the Twin Earth argument yields the idea that meaning can also be individuated by hidden structures of the real world. “Traditional philosophy of language, like much traditional philosophy,” Putnam claims, “leaves out other people and the world” (ibid., p. 193), but externalism tries to encompass both.

While Putnam’s arguments concern the meaning of natural kind terms (e.g., “water,” “gold,” “elm” etc.), the externalist thesis has since then been extended to the meaning of non-natural terms (Burge 1979) as well as the content of mental states (see e.g., McGinn 1977; 1989; Burge 1979; 1982; Davidson 1987; McDowell 1992). The reasoning behind this extension from language to the content of mental states is based on the idea that the meaning of what the subject says (e.g., “water is wet”) is the content of the subject’s belief (e.g., that water is wet). If the content of what the subject says can change due to changes in the subject’s environment, then the content of the subject’s belief seems to be able to change as well. (See e.g., Segal 2000, p. 24; Farkas 2006, p. 328; Kallestrup 2012, pp. 70–71.) It is sometimes customary to reserve the term “meaning” for the meaning of linguistic expressions and the term “content” for the content of mental states in the literature, but in this article both terms are used interchangeably. Although the distinction between meaning and content is philosophically significant, it is not relevant for the purposes of this article, in which internalism and externalism are discussed broadly as opposing views about the individuation of content.

The central conceptual distinction employed in internalism and externalism is the division between internality and externality. Although Putnam does not use

the terms “internal” and “external” in his first papers on the topic, the wording of his famous slogan “‘meanings’ just ain’t in the head” (Putnam 1975, p. 144) exemplifies a division between what is in the head and what is not. Despite its wording, the slogan is not meant to imply that internalism, contra Putnam’s externalism, conceived meanings as entities located inside the head (see *ibid.*, p. 138); rather, the point is that where internalism maintains that meanings are only individuated by features that are located inside the head, externalism claims that meanings can also be individuated by features that are located outside the head. For example, reflecting on his slogan many years later, Putnam writes that “[m]eanings aren’t in the head’ does not mean that the brain has nothing to do with semantic competence. But what fixes the meanings of a speaker’s words is not just the state of her brain; the reference of our terms is generally fixed by two things that classical philosophy of language either ignores or mentions only as an afterthought: *other people and the world*” (Putnam 2013, p. 197). Although Putnam does not describe internalism as the view that meanings are located inside the head, Putnam thus describes internalism as the view that meaning is individuated, determined, or fixed by features that are located inside the head.

Contributions to the internalism-externalism debate after Putnam have often either taken up this division between what is inside the head and what is outside the head or elaborated it further into a slightly broader division between what is inside the subject’s body and what is outside the subject’s body. For example, Burge describes the twin thought experiments in which the subject’s “bodily motion, surface stimulations, and internal chemistry” remain the same but “the environment” is changed (Burge 1988, p. 650) or in which the twins’ “internal physical occurrences” (Burge 1979, p. 76) and “internal qualitative experiences” (*ibid.*, p. 79) remain the same while “the differences [in content] seem to stem from differences ‘outside’” (*ibid.*, p. 79). Furthermore, externalism has been described as “the view that facts external to a thinker’s skin are relevant to the individuation of (certain of) his mental content” (Boghossian 1997, p. 163), whereas internalism has been described as the view according to which “content is not relational, does not depend on anything outside the subject” (Segal 2000, p. 12). “Clearly enough,” McCulloch writes, “the ‘external’ means *external to the human individual*, so that anything beyond the skin is external in this sense” (McCulloch 1995, p. 189).

The sense in which the terms “internal” and “external” are used in these familiar descriptions of internalism and externalism seem to denote concepts

understood in a spatial sense. What is located inside the subject's body is internal, whereas what is located outside their body is external. This common-sensical idea can be formulated as a general criterion for internality and externality in the following way: *x* is internal if *x* is spatially inside the subject's body, whereas *x* is external if *x* is spatially outside the subject's body. I call this *the spatial criterion*. If internalism and externalism are defined according to the spatial criterion, we acquire the following definitions: internalism is the view that content can only be individuated by what is inside the subject's body, whereas externalism is the view that content can also be individuated by what is outside the subject's body. Among things outside the subject's body are typically features in the subject's social and physical environment, such as social practices, the beliefs of other people, as well as e.g., molecular structures of physical reality, whereas among features inside the subject's body are typically brain states and bodily functions.

Although the spatial criterion might remain the accepted notion in the internalism-externalism debate to this day, it has also been heavily criticized. One of the main criticisms against the spatial criterion stems from the rather simple observation that there is water inside the human body, which seems to undermine the argument based on the Twin Earth thought experiment. Putnam writes that the twin is "an identical copy" (Putnam 1975, p. 139) that is "molecule for molecule 'identical' with me (in the sense in which two neckties can be 'identical')" (ibid., p. 144), but if water consists of different molecules on Earth and Twin Earth, the twins cannot be "molecule for molecule" identical with one another because the water inside their bodies has different molecules (see e.g., Farkas 2003, pp. 188–193; 2008, p. 77; Wikforss 2008, pp. 161–162; Gertler 2012, p. 54ff.; Jacquette 2013, pp. 69–70; Gomes & Parrott 2021, p. 321). One might at first think of responding to this objection by saying that maybe Putnam's example of water was just a bad example, but if the Twin Earth thought experiment is supposed to drive home the externalist thesis about all natural kind terms, and "water" is a natural kind term, then the problem persists.

Farkas writes that the objection that there is water inside the human body has often not been taken very seriously because "the general feeling was that we could find a better example," but Farkas claims that "our willingness to overlook this problem in the original argument is better explained by the fact that the point of externalism is not whether the individuating facts are inside or outside the body" (Farkas 2003, p. 191; 2008, p. 77). To make this argument, Farkas devises her own Twin Earth thought experiment about meningitis. Suppose that while meningitis

is caused by the bacterium meningococcus on Earth, a similar disease called “meningitis” is caused by a different bacterium XYZ on Twin Earth. If I say “meningitis is dangerous” on Earth in 1750 and my twin utters the same sentence on Twin Earth in 1750, our sentences and thoughts seem to have different contents, according to externalism. (Farkas 2003, pp. 190–191, 2008, p. 76.) While this conclusion is “very similar in spirit to the externalist thesis, (...) the relevant individuating facts in this case are inside the body” (Farkas 2008, p. 76) because meningitis is a disease of the brain.

Following Farkas’ meningitis argument, some philosophers have gone as far as claiming that the internalism-externalism debate cannot be understood in an intelligible way at all (Gertler 2012), while others have kept a more ambivalent relation to precise definitions of the internal-external divide (see e.g., Kallestrup 2012, pp. 62–63, 230–231n10; Williamson 2006, p. 292; Raatikainen 2020, p. 60). On the other hand, some philosophers have, like Farkas (2008, pp. 80–99), sought alternative ways of drawing the distinction between internality and externality (see Gomes & Parrott 2021; Bruckner 2022; see also Wikforss 2008, pp. 161–162). The research concerning Husserl’s relation to the internalism-externalism debate exemplifies these different strategies: where some abandon both internalism and externalism as unintelligible, others seek alternative ways of understanding these positions. In the next section, I show how the former strategy, that is, the rejection of the internalism-externalism framework when it comes to understanding Husserl, evokes this problem concerning the internal-external divide.

3. Husserl on the Internal-External Divide

Although many Husserl scholars have rejected internalist ways of reading Husserl, some remain suspicious about the plausibility of providing an externalist interpretation as well. Zahavi claims that “[t]he very alternative between internalism and externalism remains bound to a Cartesian inner/outer division, but this division is precisely one with which phenomenology plays havoc” (Zahavi 2017, p. 118). Zahavi cites three sources from Husserl to support this claim (ibid., p. 119). First, in *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl refers to “[a]ntiquated talk of external and internal senses” which is “plainly stemming from the naïve metaphysic and anthropology of daily life” (Husserl 1984, pp. 673/281–282)³.

³ References to Husserl include both the German text and its English translation, if such a translation is available (the translated edition can be found after the German edition in the list of

Second, in an unpublished manuscript which Zahavi cites, Husserl writes that “[t]he transcendental ego is neither in the world nor outside it, and the world, in turn, is neither in it nor outside of it” (quoted in Zahavi 2017, p. 119). Third, in a text from 1921 published posthumously in the collection *Transzendentaler Idealismus*, Husserl writes that “[t]he transcendental I has no exterior; that is completely senseless” (Husserl 2003, p. 179). Therefore, Zahavi concludes:

Given the transcendental framework of Husserl's thinking, the internalism/externalism divide loses its relevance. Indeed, one might say that the main lesson of the reduction is the rejection of the dualism between a self-enclosed mind and a mindless world. Ultimately, we should appreciate that the phenomenological investigations of the structure of phenomenality are antecedent to any divide between psychical interiority and physical exteriority, since they are investigations of the very dimension in which any object – be it external or internal – manifests itself (Zahavi 2017, pp. 119–120).

I think Zahavi correctly uncovers a problem with applying the internalism-externalism framework to Husserl. Where internalism and externalism seem to be bound to the internal-external divide, Husserl rejects it. However, I think the sense in which the concepts of internality and externality are understood here is somewhat ambiguous. Zahavi talks about the “Cartesian inner/outer division” as well as the “divide between psychical interiority and physical exteriority,” which seems to designate the Cartesian divide. The divide is not defined, but it seems to express the equation of internality with the psychical or mental and the equation of externality with the physical. Although Zahavi of course rejects this Cartesian divide, the psychical-physical divide seems to be how he understands the internal-external divide. Yet, this way of drawing the line between internality and externality does not seem to work within the internalism-externalism debate for at least two reasons. First, some psychical features might be physical if one, for example, identified psychical states with neural states. This would mean that some internal features can be physical, that is, external. Second, Putnam's division of linguistic labor appeals to the possession of concepts by other people as an external

references). The first pagination refers to the German text, the second refers to the English translation. In case no second pagination is given, then there is no English translation available, and the translation is my own.

factor, which can individuate meaning, but the possession of concepts by other people might be nonphysical (e.g., that some experts could possess the concept of elm even if I did not). This would mean that some external features may be non-physical, that is, not external. Given these problems with drawing the line between internality and externality in psychical and physical terms, a more plausible way of understanding the internal-external divide along traditional lines is to see it as a spatial divide irrespective of the physical-psychical divide (see Gertler 2012, pp. 55–58), i.e., according to the spatial criterion defined in the previous section. In the end, I think this is what Zahavi has in mind, as he talks about how, for Husserl, it would be misleading “to conceive of consciousness as somehow *located inside* an interior sphere” (Zahavi 2017, p. 119, my italics).

In fact, the spatial criterion seems to exemplify how Husserl uses the internal-external divide in the passages from the textual material that Zahavi cites. Husserl’s distinction between external and internal perception in *Logische Untersuchungen* is a distinction between sensory experiences of spatially external stimuli and reflective experiences of one’s own experiences. Husserl might not consider experiences to be within the skin or the physical body of the subject, but this distinction is precisely one that he faults, as deriving from “naïve metaphysic.” The claim that “the transcendental I has no exterior” is different in the sense that it concerns the I as conceived of within the transcendental attitude. Briefly put, the transcendental attitude is the attitude in which the world and the objects of experience “become our focus in a new way” in contrast to the common way in which they are for us in the so-called natural attitude of ordinary experience (Husserl 1989, p. 173/494). The shift of attitude from the natural to the transcendental attitude “does not at all signify a turning away from the world or a transition into a theoretical area of speciality that is estranged from the world and of no interest,” but rather, “it is this turn that makes possible a really radical investigation into the world” (Husserl 1989, p. 178/497). “What we have renounced, then,” Husserl writes, “is only the naivete by which we allow the common experience of the world to be already given to us” (Husserl 1989, p. 173/494). The I grasped within this transcendental attitude, that is, the transcendental I, is not ontologically distinct from the I grasped within the natural attitude, the empirical I. “As transcendental ego, after all,” Husserl claims, “I am the same ego that in the worldly sphere is a human ego” (Husserl 1976b, pp. 267–268/264). The distinction between the transcendental I and the empirical I is rather, as Carr puts it, “a distinction between two ways of considering one and the same

self” (Carr 2003, p. 183). In light of this distinction, I would suggest reading Husserl’s statement that “the transcendental I has no exterior” as claiming that there is no sense in conceiving anything external to the transcendental I because the transcendental I is not spatial; it is, as Husserl says in the unpublished manuscript that Zahavi cites, “not in the world nor outside it.” In other words, given that the transcendental I does not designate a separate entity from the empirical I but a different way of considering the same self, the statement that the transcendental I has no exterior could be formulated as claiming that within the transcendental way of considering the self, there is no sense in conceiving anything external to the self because the transcendental way of considering the self is not concerned with spatial distinctions. That Husserl rejects the internal-external divide according to the spatial criterion is even more evident in *Ideen I* §49 where Husserl writes that “consciousness, considered in ‘purity,’ has to hold as (...) a context that has no spatiotemporal outside” (Husserl 1976a, p. 105/90). Therefore, the spatial internal-external divide seems to be inapplicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl’s phenomenology, making the internalism–externalism debate irrelevant for Husserl. If there is nothing spatially inside or outside consciousness, then it does not make sense to inquire whether content can be individuated by features that are spatially outside consciousness.

Since Husserl rejects the internal-external divide, understood according to the spatial criterion, whereas internalists and externalists employ the divide according to the spatial criterion, there lacks a common measure for understanding Husserl in relation to internalism and externalism. This suggests that Zahavi’s argument against internalist and externalist Husserl interpretations might be best understood as an argument about incommensurability. Where some internalist interpretations of Husserl seem to call attention to an incompatibility between externalism and Husserl’s phenomenology, stemming from a contradiction between disparate metaphysical commitments⁴, Zahavi’s argument seems to call attention to the difficulties of putting together disparate theoretical frameworks. However, since Husserl rejects the internal-external divide specifically according

⁴ For example, Dreyfus and Hall claim that “[s]ince the conditions of satisfaction of an intentional state are internal to the intentional state they define, phenomenological analysis need not concern itself with whether or not the object aimed at by the intentional state exists” (Dreyfus & Hall 1984, pp. 6–7). This aspect of Husserl’s account of intentionality is what Smith and McIntyre designate by calling intentional relations “existence-independent” (Smith & McIntyre 1982, p. 90). They too rule out externalist interpretations of Husserl by arguing that “the ‘transcendental’ foundation of Husserl’s phenomenology (...) is incompatible with letting the object of perception, or any other part of the external world, play a role in perceptual intention” (ibid., pp. 225–226).

to the spatial criterion, then Zahavi's argument should be framed in the following way: the internalism-externalism framework and the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology are incommensurable because the internal-external divide, understood according to the spatial criterion, cannot be applied to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology.

The above analysis has revealed that while Husserl rejects the internal-external divide, he only rejects it in the specific sense of the spatial criterion. This suggests that it might be possible to render the internal-external divide applicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology if the internal-external divide is defined in an alternative way. If the concepts of internality and externality are understood in a different, non-spatial way, then the issue of incommensurability between the internalism-externalism framework and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology might be resolved, meaning that Husserl could be understood within the internalism-externalism debate. Existing externalist interpretations of Husserl have at least indirectly employed alternative definitions of internality and externality, but an alternative to the spatial criterion can also be discovered within the internalism-externalism debate itself. Before analyzing the budding definitions of the internal-external divide in the externalist interpretations of Husserl in Section 5, I will first look at this alternative definition from the internalism-externalism debate proposed by Farkas (2003; 2008).

4. Internality and Externality in Relation to the Subject's Point of View

As said in Section 2, Farkas' meningitis argument shows that the spatial criterion is an inadequate way of drawing the line between internality and externality in the internalism-externalism debate. Rejecting the spatial criterion, Farkas sets out to seek another criterion based on what the twins have in common in the Twin Earth thought experiment. Farkas suggests that the twins' common factor is the "subjective indistinguishability of their situations" (Farkas 2003, p. 196). My twin and I could not distinguish water and twin water from one another if we were to switch places. The features that individuate the meanings of our terms and the contents of our mental states about water and twin water are subjectively indistinguishable; they are "external to the subject's point of view" (Farkas 2008, p. 82).

Farkas explains the subjective indistinguishability of the twins' situations in terms of "the sameness of the phenomenal character of all their conscious thought and experience" (Farkas 2008, p. 91). What the twins share is "that things appear

(look, taste, smell, sound) the same for them; or the world is (and has always been) the same from their subjective viewpoint” (ibid., p. 82). Since things appear the same for the twins, the phenomenal properties of the twins’ intentional states are the same. For example, even if the meanings of the twins’ judgments about the stuff that they call “water” were different, as externalism claims, the phenomenal characters of their intentional states would nevertheless be identical, according to this way of understanding externalism.

Farkas’ proposal of first identifying the common factor between the twins as the subjective indistinguishability of their situations and then explaining it in terms of the sameness of their phenomenal properties can be captured in the following criterion for internality and externality: *x* is internal if *x* either appears or has appeared to the subject, whereas *x* is external if *x* does not appear and has not appeared to the subject. I call this *the phenomenal criterion*. The phenomenal criterion understands internality and externality in relation to the subject’s point of view. What appears and has appeared to the subject is within their point of view, while what does not appear and has not appeared to the subject falls outside their point of view. Farkas writes that “facts individuate mental content contents only insofar as they *make a difference* to the way things appear to us”, meaning “that any difference in the content of thoughts should be distinguishable from the subject’s point of view” (Farkas 2003, p. 203). If a change in an object’s properties is subjectively distinguishable, then those properties are apparent and thus internal to the subject’s point of view. If a change in an object’s properties is conversely subjectively indistinguishable, then those properties are not apparent and thus external to the subject’s point of view (Farkas 2003, pp. 196–198). Based on the phenomenal criterion, “the internalism/externalism controversy should be formulated with reference to the relation of things appearing the same, or situations being indistinguishable” (Farkas 2008, p. 84). Thus, internalism becomes the view that meaning or content is individuated by features that appear or have appeared to the subject, whereas externalism becomes the view that meaning or content can be individuated not only by features that appear or have appeared to the subject but also features that do not appear and have not appeared to the subject.

If internalism and externalism are understood according to the phenomenal criterion, the issue of incommensurability between the transcendental framework of Husserl’s phenomenology and the internalism-externalism framework is dissolved because the phenomenal criterion removes the internal-external divide

from the spatial framework, in which Husserl rejects the divide, and reconfigures the internal-external divide in relation to the subject's point of view. It thus renders the internal-external divide applicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl's phenomenology and hence makes it possible to understand Husserl in relation to the internalism-externalism debate. Given that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology investigates the structure of phenomenality from the first-person perspective, the conclusion seems almost self-evident. The phenomenal criterion brings the philosophical question at stake in the internalism-externalism debate back to the subject's perspective, as "externality" is understood in the sense of "external to the subject's point of view" (Farkas 2008, p. 82). Even though Husserl rejects the idea of something spatially external to consciousness, he still must deal with the distinction between what is subjectively distinguishable and what is not or between what appears to the subject and what does not.

5. Phenomenological Ways to Understand the Internal-External Divide

The phenomenal criterion thus makes it possible to understand Husserl in relation to the internalism-externalism debate. However, the understanding of Husserl in relation to the internalism-externalism debate remains difficult even with this new criterion. It seems that Husserl, to borrow Zahavi's phrase, also "plays havoc" with the internal-external divide according to the phenomenal criterion as Husserl seems to reject the idea of something completely external to the subject's point of view. For example, consider the following passage from Husserl's *Cartesianische Meditationen*:

Every conceivable sense, every conceivable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being. The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence, the two being related to one another merely externally by a rigid law, is nonsensical. (...) If transcendental subjectivity is the universe of possible sense, then an outside is precisely – nonsense. (Husserl 1973, p. 117/84, translation modified)

There are two important claims in this passage. First, Husserl claims that "[e]very conceivable [*erdenkliche*] sense, every conceivable being" is "within the domain

[*Bereich*] of transcendental subjectivity” or “the universe of possible sense” [*das Universum möglichen Sinnes*]. Second, Husserl claims that there is no sense in conceiving anything “outside” [*außerhalb*] or external to the domain of transcendental subjectivity or the universe of possible sense. In a word, Husserl claims that everything conceivable is within the domain of transcendental subjectivity and hence there is nothing conceivable outside that domain. If everything conceivable falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity or the universe of possible sense, then there is no sense in conceiving anything outside such a domain. In the rest of this article, I use the term “transcendental domain” to designate this all-encompassing dimension that Husserl describes.

The passage from *Cartesianische Meditationen* quoted above is somewhat similar to Husserl’s assertion that “the transcendental I has no exterior” because in the passage Husserl seems to reject the notion of externality in the spatial sense; the transcendental domain is not spatial. However, this spatial reading does not hold up for the passage in its entirety. Even if the term “outside” in the claim that there is no sense in conceiving anything outside the transcendental domain could be understood according to the spatial criterion (i.e., that Husserl rejected the idea of something spatially external to the transcendental domain), the “within” in the claim that everything conceivable is within the transcendental domain could not be understood according to the spatial criterion (i.e., that Husserl would suggest that everything conceivable is spatially inside the transcendental domain). As said, the transcendental domain is not spatial. However, it also does not seem to make sense to understand the “within” in this claim according to the phenomenal criterion. The phenomenal criterion would make the claim that everything conceivable is within the transcendental domain into the claim that everything conceivable appears or has appeared to transcendental subjectivity, but clearly everything conceivable does not and has not appeared to transcendental subjectivity. The phenomenal criterion would also render the claim that there is no sense in conceiving anything outside the transcendental domain into the absurd claim that everything conceivable, which has not yet appeared to the subject, is beyond the universe of possible sense (i.e., “nonsensical”).

Given these complexities, the passage from *Cartesianische Meditationen* seems to engender a challenge for understanding Husserl in relation to the internalism-externalism debate. Although the phenomenal criterion makes it possible to understand Husserl as an internalist or an externalist, the internal-external divide should be drawn within the transcendental domain, meaning that

even features that are external should be within this transcendental domain. The aim should be to redefine the notions of internality and externality in this way without rendering any forms of either internalist or externalist theories of content incoherent. That is to say, a successful criterion for the internal-external divide in this context should, on the one hand, redefine the notions of internality and externality so that both internal and external things are within the transcendental domain and, on the other, this redefinition should not render theories of internalism and externalism incoherent.

In this section, I show how two externalist interpretations of Husserl, by Smith (2008) and Crowell (2008), introduce phenomenological criteria for the internal-external divide. They redefine “internality” and “externality” so that both internal and external things remain within the transcendental domain. It is important to emphasize, however, that Smith and Crowell are not primarily interested in proposing alternative criteria for the internal-external divide; rather, they are interested in presenting plausible interpretations of Husserl. Nevertheless, in interpreting Husserl as a kind of externalist, both interpretations end up proposing useful ways of thinking about the internal-external divide in a phenomenological context.

To reconcile externalism with Husserl, Smith (2008) proposes to “construe externalism as dealing with what is external to any *individual* consciousness” (Smith 2008, p. 317). This in itself might not sound that different from the spatial criterion, but Smith elaborates by stating that even if “the physical world may ultimately ‘reduce’ to consciousness, your consciousness cannot be reduced to mine, or mine to yours” and “[e]ach individual consciousness, therefore, is ‘external’ to every other” (ibid.). Furthermore, Smith remarks that “everything, the constitution of which involves other consciousnesses, will also count as external to any given consciousness” (ibid.). “In particular,” Smith writes, “real, objective elements of the physical world count as external to any individual consciousness, because they have an essentially inter-subjective constitution” (ibid.).

The key concept in Smith’s proposal is the constitution which “involves other consciousnesses,” i.e., intersubjective constitution. There are many ways to understand Husserl’s concept of constitution, but one somewhat common way to understand it is as a process in which something is enabled to manifest as something (see e.g., Zahavi 2003, p. 73; Ströker 1993, pp. 104–107). If something is constituted by consciousness, it is enabled to manifest as something to

consciousness. For example, material things around us are constituted as real. As intersubjective, this process involves other consciousnesses. Husserl writes that “everything else that is also called transcendent, such as the objective world, rests upon the transcendence of foreign subjectivity” (Husserl 1959, p. 495). The idea is that things are enabled to manifest as real due to the subject’s “experience of the transcendence (and inaccessibility) of foreign subjectivity” (Zahavi 2003, p. 115). Since the subject encounters other people who also have their own experiences of the world and the things around them, the subject experiences the world and the things around them as exceeding their subjective point of view. The constitutive significance of other consciousnesses stems from the idea that “objects cannot be reduced to being merely my intentional correlates if they can be experienced by Others as well” (Zahavi 2003, p. 115). The table that I see before me is external to my perspective because it is not a private object; others can see it too. Given this “intersubjective experienceability of the object” (ibid., p. 115) and the inaccessibility of others’ experiences of the object for me, the object is constituted by intersubjective consciousness. Thus other consciousnesses are also a part of the transcendental domain.

Smith understands the internal-external divide in relation to constitution. Smith does not explicitly define how he uses the terms “internal” and “external,” but he says that in addition to “other consciousnesses,” all things “the constitution of which involves other consciousnesses” are external; they are external “because they have an essentially inter-subjective constitution” (Smith 2008, p. 317). This seems to yield a starting point for redefining the internal-external divide in terms of intersubjective constitution. Based on Smith’s proposal, one can derive the following criterion for internality and externality: x is internal if the constitution of x does not involve other consciousnesses, whereas x is external if the constitution of x does involve other consciousnesses. Since the constitution of tables involves other consciousnesses, for example, they are external. I call this *the constitution criterion*. According to the constitution criterion, we acquire the following definitions of internalism and externalism: internalism becomes the view that content or meaning is solely individuated by features whose constitution does not involve other consciousnesses, whereas externalism becomes the view that the individuation of content or meaning may sometimes require features whose constitution involves other consciousnesses.

The constitution criterion differs from both the spatial and the phenomenal criterion. For example, the constitution of my body as a physical body with neural

and biological processes involves other consciousnesses: there are aspects of my body that I cannot experience but others can. The physical features inside my body, for example, are therefore external according to the constitution criterion. Although the constitution criterion seems to exemplify a similar attempt to reconfigure the internal-external divide in relation to the subject's point of view as the phenomenal criterion, the constitution criterion also differs from the phenomenal criterion. Some features of physical things spatially outside my body are internal according to the phenomenal criterion, insofar as any changes in those features would be subjectively distinguishable (e.g., the shape of the table in front of me), but those features would count as external according to the constitution criterion because their constitution involves other consciousnesses.

The main difference between the constitution criterion and the spatial and the phenomenal criteria is that the constitution criterion defines externality so that external things are within the transcendental domain. Although things such as the table in front of me are external according to the constitution criterion, Smith's emphasis that they are external only to an "individual consciousness" (Smith 2008, p. 317) seems to imply that they are nevertheless internal to what might be called intersubjective consciousness.

The constitution criterion inevitably brings forth questions about the conditions for something to be intersubjectively constituted (or "external," according to the constitution criterion). The way of framing the internal-external divide according to the constitution criterion works well enough for Smith's interpretation that Husserl is a disjunctivist, but the constitution criterion loses some of its strength when it is more broadly employed. To Smith, Husserl is a disjunctivist in the sense that veridical perceptions and hallucinations are different kinds of experiences because their horizons are different. The horizon is something that all experiences have (Husserl 1973, p. 82/44), and it designates how experiences extend beyond what is immediately given. "For example," Husserl writes in *Cartesianische Meditationen*, "there belongs to every external perception its reference from the 'genuinely perceived' sides of the object of perception to the sides 'also meant' – not yet perceived, but only anticipated and, at first, with a non-intuitional emptiness" (Husserl 1973, p. 82/44). For example, my perceptual experience of a house extends beyond the side of the house before me to encompass other sides of the house currently unseen. Smith claims that veridical perceptions and hallucinations have different horizons because hallucinations have disharmonious horizons, which include an experience that eventually discloses the

object of the hallucinatory experience as unreal, whereas veridical perceptions have harmonious horizons, which contain no such experiences that would reveal the object of experience as unreal (Smith 2008, pp. 329–330). Since the reality of the object is, at least partly, intersubjectively constituted to Husserl (1959, pp. 495n2/619n2), something “external” (i.e., the reality of the object), according to the constitution criterion, individuates veridical perceptions from hallucinations, making Husserl an externalist in this sense (of disjunctivism). However, when it comes to twin cases, where two veridical experiences seemingly intend the same object but actually intend different objects (e.g., distinct kinds of liquids), the reality of the objects cannot individuate the experiences because the objects of both experiences are real. If confronted with twin cases, the question for the constitution criterion is whether something like molecules could be intersubjectively constituted, even if the subject was not aware of molecules. This question cannot be answered without defining the conditions for something to be intersubjectively constituted more precisely.

Another phenomenological way of understanding the internal-external divide can be derived from Crowell’s (2008) externalist interpretation of Husserl, which conceives the internal-external divide with Husserl’s concepts of intentional immanence and transcendence. Husserl uses these concepts in various ways (see e.g., Husserl 1976a, pp. 78/66, 87–94/74–80, 96–98/82–83), but here I am concerned with how Husserl uses them in the text *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* where he introduces them for the first time. In *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, Husserl introduces first a basic distinction between real or genuine immanence and transcendence, which is then complicated by a further distinction between intentional immanence and transcendence (also called “phenomenological” immanence and transcendence). The former seems to coincide with the spatial internal-external divide, as Husserl for example writes “[t]he immanent is in me (...) and the transcendent is outside of me” (Husserl 1950, pp. 5/62–63), but the latter distinction concerns the way something is given. Intentional immanence is “absolute and clear givenness, self-givenness in the absolute sense,” whereas intentional transcendence is givenness in which “we go beyond what is *given in the genuine sense*, beyond *what can be directly seen and apprehended*” (ibid., pp. 35/27–28). Although the profile of a house in front of me is transcendent in the real or genuine sense, it is immanent in this intentional sense because it appears to me absolutely and clearly. The further profiles of the house, currently unseen by me, are transcendent in the intentional sense. In his interpretation, Crowell claims

that “[intentional] immanence does not invoke an ontological distinction between regions – between a *forum internum* and an external world – but a normative relation between presence and absence” (Crowell 2008, p. 346). The gist of Crowell’s interpretation is that the normative links between the subject’s intentional implications (e.g., expectations about further, currently unseen aspects of the object) and the object determine content. However, the details of Crowell’s interpretation are not important in this article as I am mainly interested in the incipient idea in the interpretation that the internal-external divide could be understood with the distinction between intentional immanence and transcendence.

Based on the intentional distinction between immanence and transcendence, one can derive the following criterion for internality and externality: *x* is internal if *x* is given in intentional immanence, whereas *x* is external if *x* is given in intentional transcendence. I call this *the givenness criterion*. According to the givenness criterion, the two kinds of liquid that my twin and I perceive are “internal” in the sense of intentional immanence (they are present, they appear directly and clearly), but the two kinds of liquid have further unknown properties that are not self-given and thus “external” in the sense of intentional transcendence (they are absent, they do not appear directly and clearly). According to the givenness criterion, we acquire the following definitions of internalism and externalism: internalism becomes the view that content or meaning can only be individuated by features that are intentionally immanent, whereas externalism becomes the view that content or meaning can also be individuated by features that are intentionally transcendent.

Although Farkas’ phenomenal criterion might seem to fit Husserl’s phenomenology perfectly at first glance, there is a simplicity to the criterion that does not capture the more complex structure of phenomenality in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. The phenomenal criterion understands the internal-external divide in terms of what appears to the subject and what does not, but this distinction seems too simplistic within Husserl’s phenomenology whose concept of appearance includes an interplay between presence and absence, i.e., what appears directly in intentional immanence and what co-appears indirectly in intentional transcendence. The givenness criterion takes this richer concept of appearance into account by understanding the internal-external divide as a distinction between two modes of givenness, intentional immanence and transcendence.

Like the constitution criterion, the givenness criterion redefines “externality” so that external things are within the transcendental domain. This is evident, for example, in Crowell’s claim that in the year 1750 “neither H₂O nor XYZ are even phenomenologically [i.e., intentionally] transcendent” because they do not belong to the “evidential horizon of phenomenological [i.e., intentional] immanence” (Crowell 2008, p. 346). Yet, in the course of time, they will become intentionally, or phenomenologically, transcendent. “[B]ecause the water I perceive is not an inert datum but an element within a normative space of intentional implications (teleological interconnections),” Crowell writes, “it adumbrates avenues along which further aspects can become given – if/then structures that indicate a course of possible empirical investigation that could eventually disclose something like molecular structure” (ibid., p. 346). The intentional implications (i.e., expectations about the object) available to my twin and I in 1750 “will be the same,” but “[w]hen molecular theory develops, together with the relevant technology and practices, more of those aspects will be available,” and then our intentional implications will be different (ibid., pp. 346–347). These statements make clear that, in contrast to the spatial criterion and the phenomenal criterion, the givenness criterion redefines “externality” so that external things are retained within the transcendental domain. Unlike the constitution criterion, the givenness criterion seems to provide at least a provisional characterization of the conditions for something to be intentionally transcendent: it needs to be available. Given Crowell’s references to scientific, technological, and practical advancements, this notion of availability seems to be understood in the sense that such advancements enable the intentional transcendence of e.g., molecular structures.

The givenness criterion seems to run into a problem similar to the constitution criterion. Construed according to the givenness criterion, the internalism-externalism debate would become a dispute about the question whether content or meaning can be determined by intentionally transcendent factors. However, this might not be that helpful when it comes to framing the debate. Husserl has many remarks about intentional implications being co-meant. For example, Husserl talks about “sides which were co-meant in a more or less indeterminate way” (1952, p. 35/38), “sides ‘also meant’” (1973, p. 82/44), and how “non-visible sides are certainly also there somehow for consciousness, ‘co-meant’ as co-present” (1966, p. 4/40). Since these unknown intentionally transcendent aspects are co-meant in experience, they seem to determine meaning

or content. In fact, Husserl writes about how intentional implications make experience go “beyond what is at any given time grasped in singularity and relative determinateness and accepted as such” and how, therefore, intentional implications engender “a transcendence of sense” that “clings to every particular apperception, to every complex of particular apperceptions” (Husserl 1939, p. 30/34). If sense or meaning becomes partly transcendent by means of the intentional implications co-meant, then meaning is individuated by external factors, understood according to the givenness criterion. Given Husserl’s remarks about intentional implications being co-meant and them engendering a transcendence to sense, it would seem self-evident that, according to the givenness criterion, Husserl is an externalist.

Yet, this way of framing the debate gives a false sense of simplicity because even if meaning was transcendent, it remains debatable whether “the transcendence of sense” designates just a general openness of meaning rather than a more specific relation of individuation dependence that externalists have in mind. For this general openness of meaning might also be just as akin to the internalist idea, sometimes called the common concept strategy, according to which the twins in the Twin Earth thought experiment share the same concept of water and therefore the meaning of the term “water” can mean the same thing on Earth and Twin Earth; that is, the meaning of the term includes both H₂O and XYZ (see e.g., Zemach 1976, p. 118; Mellor 1977, p. 303; Segal 2000, p. 19; Jackson 2003, p. 61). Even if one employed the givenness criterion, the seemingly externalist statement that meaning is individuated by intentionally transcendent features thus remains open to both internalist and externalist readings. It remains open whether those intentionally transcendent features that individuate meaning are in turn determined by the expectations and hypothetical beliefs of the subject’s cognitive community (where there might be uncertainty whether the molecular structure of water is H₂O or something else) or real-world structures despite how things seem to the community. This remains ambiguous due to a similar shortcoming as in the constitution criterion: the conditions for something to be intentionally transcendent are unclear.

As said, Crowell’s reference to availability can be understood as an attempt at clarifying those conditions. Due to scientific and technological advancements, for example, molecules can become available and thus intentionally transcendent. However, consider a situation where such scientific and technological advancements have been made that the molecular structure of water can be

discovered, but people have not yet made the discovery. The question is whether H₂O would then be intentionally transcendent. This is basically the internalism-externalism question just about intentionally transcendent features. Rather than asking whether the term “water” means different things on Earth and Twin Earth, one ends up inquiring what determines intentional transcendence. Neither of these questions can be answered unless the conditions for intentional transcendence are more specifically defined.

Furthermore, even if these questions about the conditions for something to be intentionally transcendent were adequately answered, Crowell’s proposal seems to be committed to the idea that the meaning of the term “water” changes when molecular theory and scientific technology develop. This is of course one possible conception, but if this conception is written into the very criterion for the internal-external divide, then some basic forms of externalism are precluded at the outset by the criterion. For one, Putnam’s semantic externalism maintains that the meaning of scientific terms such as “atom” and “kinetic energy” retain the same meaning despite historically changing definitions (see Putnam 2013, p. 194). The reason is that the meaning of these terms is externally individuated by the stuff that is there in the real world.

6. Reconfiguring the Internal-External Divide

The main issue in these two phenomenological ways of understanding the internal-external divide is that in redefining the internal-external divide so that external things are within the transcendental domain they end up precluding some forms of externalism. Namely, the givenness criterion seems to rule out Putnam’s externalism, which is a problem if one wants to use the criterion as a general way of construing the internalism-externalism debate. The same problem seems to emerge for the constitution criterion because if externality is associated with intersubjectivity, then forms of externalism that refer to external things beyond the community of subjects seem to be precluded. Yet, whether this problem emerges for the constitution criterion is somewhat difficult to decide without defining the conditions for something to be intersubjectively constituted. Regardless of these issues, I think both the constitution criterion and the givenness criterion provide useful concepts for improving the phenomenal criterion so that the phenomenal criterion could be adjusted to take the transcendental domain into account.

When it comes to the constitution criterion, the main takeaway is the role of intersubjectivity. By combining the constitution criterion with the phenomenal

criterion, one can derive the notion of intersubjective distinguishability rather than constitution that involves other consciousnesses. Something that Farkas does not discuss, but which seems important for defining externalism, is that some changes might be subjectively indistinguishable yet intersubjectively distinguishable. Some forms of externalism appeal to subjectively indistinguishable changes in the real world that are also intersubjectively indistinguishable. For example, in the year 1750, nobody could distinguish water and twin water. In turn, other forms of externalism might appeal only to subjectively indistinguishable changes in the real world which are nevertheless intersubjectively distinguishable. For example, there are experts in botany who can tell elms and beeches apart. Based on the phenomenal criterion, the question between internalism and externalism becomes the question whether content can only be individuated by features whose changes are subjectively distinguishable or also features whose changes are subjectively indistinguishable. If one opts for the latter, that is, externalist, position, then the following question is whether content can be individuated by features whose changes are subjectively indistinguishable but still intersubjectively distinguishable or whether content can also be individuated by features whose changes are not even intersubjectively distinguishable (e.g., the individuating features between water and twin water in the year 1750).

Where the constitution criterion can be used to complement the phenomenal criterion with the notion of intersubjective distinguishability, the givenness criterion can be used to improve the phenomenal criterion by introducing a more nuanced conception of appearance. Rather than simply operating with a distinction between what appears and what does not, the givenness criterion introduces a phenomenologically richer distinction between what appears clearly and directly (in intentional immanence) and what co-appears unclearly and indirectly (in intentional transcendence). With this more nuanced conception of appearance, I think the givenness criterion can be used to solve a problem in the phenomenal criterion. The solution to this problem is also helpful in spelling out a better criterion that eludes many of these problems.

One of the criticisms against the phenomenal criterion is that it seems to make a view known as phenomenal externalism incoherent (see Gertler 2012, p. 61; Gomes & Parrott 2021, pp. 323–324). This is a problem insofar as a successful criterion should provide definitional criteria for “internality” and “externality” that can be employed in plausible definitions of internalism and externalism without precluding any forms of them. Phenomenal externalism is a view that extends the

externalist thesis about the content of judgments and beliefs to the character or qualia of perceptual experiences (Dretske 1996; Lycan 2001). Although judgments, beliefs, and sensory experiences might be (spatially) internal to the subject, phenomenal externalism maintains that the facts that can individuate them are (spatially) external to the subject. These individuating facts are phenomenal characters or qualia. According to phenomenal externalism, not only are beliefs and judgments about water and twin water different judgments and beliefs (because they have different contents) but also sensory experiences about water and twin water are different sensory experiences (because they have different phenomenal characters or qualia). This means that, unlike it is conventionally presumed, water and twin water do not even appear the same to the twins.

Dretske has an example that is useful in illustrating phenomenal externalism (Dretske 1996, pp. 153–154). Suppose my friend and I are going to listen to a symphony. I am musically ignorant, but my friend is more familiar with music. When my friend hears a change of key in the symphony, he turns to me and asks whether I heard it. Given my lack of musical expertise, I would not be able to distinguish between series of sounds with changes of key and without them. Regardless of whether there was a change of key or not, I would not notice it. In one sense of “appearance” (which Dretske calls “doxastic”), the change of key, if there was one, does not therefore appear to me. In another sense of “appearance” (which Dretske calls “phenomenal”), however, the change of key seems to appear to me. Yet, even if it did appear to me, Dretske claims, I could not be made aware of this fact because I lack the concept for change of key (*ibid.*, p. 154).

Although phenomenal externalism seems to be a coherent view when understood according to the spatial criterion, phenomenal externalism seems to become incoherent if it is formulated according to the phenomenal criterion. If externality is understood according to the phenomenal criterion, then phenomenal characters or qualia could not be external, unlike phenomenal externalism claims; they are, by definition, phenomenal, that is, apparent to the subject and therefore internal. According to the phenomenal criterion, internal factors are those that “make a difference” to the way things appear (Farkas 2003, p. 203). Phenomenal characters seem to be internal in this sense as they make a difference to the way things appear. If there was a change in the phenomenal characters of the subject’s intentional states, the subject would notice it and be able to distinguish between the intentional states. Phenomenal externalism, construed according to the phenomenal criterion, becomes incoherent because phenomenal characters or

qualia – the ways things appear – cannot be external according to the criterion (i.e., features that do not appear or have not appeared to the subject).

One solution to this problem is to refrain from giving the subjective indistinguishability of the twins' situation the explanation that Farkas does; that is, the explanation that the twins have the same phenomenal properties. If one rather just says that the twins are similar in the sense that their situations are subjectively indistinguishable, one can avoid this problem (see Gomes & Parrott 2021, p. 325). The problem stems from claiming that the twins are phenomenally identical, which is something phenomenal externalism denies. The fact that the problem can be solved this easily might imply that it is not a very serious problem in the first place. In Dretske's example, the symphony with the change of key is for me subjectively indistinguishable from the symphony without the change of key. It is external to the subject's point of view. In this sense, phenomenal externalism seems coherent when formulated with the phenomenal criterion; phenomenal externalism maintains that sensory experiences can be individuated by something external and the term "external" can be understood here in the general sense that Farkas proposes (that changes in *x* would be subjectively indistinguishable). The problem only emerges when one adds the explanation that equates subjective indistinguishability with phenomenal identity.

Therefore, the natural solution is to either refrain from making this further explanation, as Gomes and Parrott (2021) do, or modify the explanation. I think the givenness criterion provides an avenue for modifying the explanation so that phenomenal externalism remains coherent. If internality is understood as intentional immanence and externality as intentional transcendence, then phenomenal externalism becomes the view that sensory experiences can be individuated not only by intentionally immanent but also intentionally transcendent characters. Phenomenal characters can be (partially) something that do not appear clearly and directly but co-appear unclearly and indirectly. In the sense of intentional immanence, the change of key does not appear to me. It is not given clearly and directly to me. The change between a change of key and its absence would be subjectively indistinguishable to me. On the other hand, in the sense of intentional transcendence, the change of key does co-appear to me. It is given indirectly and unclearly. Even though I may not be aware of it, the change of key is there, and I could notice it. As a result, phenomenal externalism remains a coherent view when construed according to the givenness criterion: the

phenomenal characters of sensory experiences can be individuated by features that do not appear in one sense but appear in another sense (that is, they co-appear).

Although the givenness criterion solves an issue in the phenomenal criterion, it has its own problems. As said, the givenness criterion, like the constitution criterion, is more restricting than the phenomenal criterion. While the givenness criterion can allow phenomenal externalism, it seems to preclude other forms of externalism. Namely, if molecular structures are not even intentionally transcendent in the year 1750, as Crowell claims, then Putnam's externalist claim that the meaning of "water" is different on Earth and Twin Earth in the year 1750 is ruled out. In this sense, Putnam's externalist claim would be appealing to features that are not even external; they are beyond the internal-external divide as it is understood according to the givenness criterion.

However, I think this problem can be solved by looking at the solution to the issue of phenomenal externalism and the phenomenal criterion above. One crucial aspect in regard to Dretske's symphony example is that the change of key *could* appear to me in intentional immanence. It could appear to me directly and clearly if conditions were altered. It could appear to me thus if, for example, I were to study music so that I could distinguish series of sounds with and without changes of keys. In fact, one way to understand intentionally transcendent features is to understand them as potentially apparent. They are of course "apparent" in the sense that they co-appear with what appears in intentional immanence, but as such they are also not "apparent" in the sense of intentional immanence. Nevertheless, they *may* appear in intentional immanence if conditions were altered.

In order for the concept of potential appearance not to run into the same problem of ambiguity as intentional transcendence, however, its conditions must be clear. I think potential appearance is best understood as not just determined by my capabilities and the capabilities of others but also how things are in the real world. In order for the change of key to be even potentially apparent to me, I of course need to have the capabilities to discover it, the possibilities for acquiring such capabilities, or at least someone else needs to have such capabilities or possibilities of acquiring such capabilities, but the symphony also needs to have a change of key so that it can become apparent. Viewed this way, it seems plausible to understand Husserl's claim in *Cartesianische Meditationen* that there is nothing external to the transcendental domain as the claim that it is nonsensical to postulate

entities that are not even potentially apparent⁵. In fact, in the passage from *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Husserl talks about how there is no sense in postulating anything “outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence” (Husserl 1973, p. 117/84). The insight taken from this quote is that perhaps “externality” should be redefined so that external things are nevertheless within the transcendental domain as they are potentially apparent.

I am using the notion of potential appearance in the broad sense that it also encompasses indirect observations such as seeing entities under a microscope or seeing evidence of subatomic particles in empirical measurements. All these are instances where something “appears” in one sense of the term. Even though people in the year 1750 might have lacked the capabilities (that is, the scientific instruments and the know-how to employ them) to distinguish between water and twin water, water still was water (rather than twin water) and therefore its nature as water (its molecular structure) was potentially apparent. It was possible for people, in the long run, to acquire the capabilities needed for water as H₂O to become apparent to them.

Combining these two takeaways from the givenness criterion (potential appearance) and the constitution criterion (intersubjective distinguishability), the phenomenal criterion can be modified in the following way: x is internal if x either appears or has appeared to the subject, whereas x is external if x does not appear and has not appeared to the subject but is potentially apparent to a subject. I call this *the modified phenomenal criterion*. Based on the modified phenomenal criterion, we acquire the following definitions of internalism and externalism. Internalism becomes the view that meaning or content can only be individuated by features that either appear or have appeared to the subject, whereas externalism becomes the view that meaning or content can be individuated not only by features that either appear or have appeared to the subject but also features that might appear to the subject or someone else.

The modified phenomenal criterion is very similar to the phenomenal criterion, but it adds the phenomenological condition on externality: in order for an external feature to be individuating, it must be potentially apparent to a subject,

⁵ This seems to be how Ameriks, for example, reads the passage about “the universe of possible sense”. He says that to Husserl it is “‘absurd’ though not necessarily logically contradictory to posit beings which are in principle uncognizable by any mind” (Ameriks 1977, p. 510). Although Ameriks is initially talking about another passage from Husserl, he then says that “[p]recisely the same point is expressed in the claim (...) that it is ‘nonsense’ to speak of something outside ‘transcendental subjectivity.’” (ibid.)

i.e., either the subject or someone else at some point in time. Although intersubjectivity plays a role in the criterion, the modified phenomenal criterion does not require that changes in external features need to be actually intersubjectively distinguishable so that the features qualify as external. Changes can be intersubjectively indistinguishable as long as they are potentially intersubjectively distinguishable.

The modified phenomenal criterion fulfils both requirements set for a successful criterion: it redefines “externality” within the transcendental domain without rendering forms of internalism and externalism incoherent. Unlike the constitution and the givenness criterion, the modified phenomenal criterion enables Putnam’s externalist claim: in the year 1750, the difference between water and twin water would not be subjectively nor intersubjectively distinguishable but it would be potentially subjectively and intersubjectively distinguishable. The features of water that individuate it from twin water would be potentially apparent even in the year 1750. Unlike the phenomenal criterion, the modified phenomenal criterion enables phenomenal externalism. The presence or absence of the change of key in the symphony is potentially apparent to the subject as are the individuating features of water. Construed according to the modified phenomenal criterion, phenomenal externalism becomes the view that phenomenal characters or qualia can be features that do not appear to the subject insofar as they are potentially apparent.

7. Conclusion

Some have argued that Husserl cannot be understood within the internalism-externalism framework. In this article, I have identified the motivation for this argument in a spatial way of understanding the internal-external divide, which is pertinent to internalism and externalism but rejected by Husserl. I have argued that the internal-external divide can be rendered applicable to the transcendental framework of Husserl’s phenomenology if the internal-external divide is understood alternatively in relation to the subject’s point of view. In addition to Farkas’ attempt to reconfigure the internal-external divide in phenomenal terms (i.e., the phenomenal criterion), I have investigated two phenomenological ways of understanding the internal-external divide: the constitution and the givenness criterion. These phenomenological ways of understanding differ from the phenomenal criterion mainly by redefining the internal-external divide within the so-called transcendental domain. The problem with these two phenomenological

criteria is that, on the one hand, they leave the conditions for something to be “external” (either in the sense of intersubjective constitution or intentional transcendence) somewhat ambiguous and, on the other, they preclude some forms of externalism, but I have claimed that they can nevertheless be used to improve the phenomenal criterion. Where the constitution criterion can be used to derive the notion of intersubjective distinguishability, the givenness criterion can be used to introduce a more nuanced conception of appearance for the purposes of modifying the phenomenal criterion. The upshot is a modified phenomenal criterion for the internal-external divide, which both redefines the internal-external divide within the transcendental domain and enables forms of externalism that the other criteria preclude.

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