

Phenomenology as Critique: Teleological–Historical Reflection and Husserl’s Transcendental Eidetics

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Abstract Many have deemed ineluctable the tension between Husserl’s transcendental eidetics and his *Crisis* method of historical reflection. In this paper, I argue that this tension is an apparent one. I contend that dissolving this tension and showing not only the possibility, but also the necessity of the successful collaboration between these two apparently irreconcilable methods guarantees the very freedom of inquiry Husserl so emphatically stressed. To make this case, I draw from Husserl’s synthetic analyses of type and concept constitution as well as his later work on sedimentation and streaming-in and develop a richer modal taxonomy than the one Husserl proposed. I employ this taxonomy in an examination of the structures and conditions for the possibility of transcendental eidetic variation in order to show this method’s reliance on historically sedimented epistemic and normative resources. This reliance brings to light the necessity for a methodological *critique*, which is precisely what I take to be the work of teleological–historical reflection as Husserl comes to conceive it in the *Crisis*.

1 Introduction

“The work that I am beginning with the present essay, and shall complete in a series of further articles in *Philosophia*, makes the attempt, by way of teleological–historical reflection upon the origins of our critical scientific and philosophical situation, to establish the unavoidable necessity of a transcendental–phenomenological *reorientation* of philosophy. Accordingly, it becomes, in its own right, an *introduction* to transcendental phenomenology” (Hua VI, p. xiv/3; italics mine).

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“This manner of clarifying history by inquiring back into the primal establishment of the goals which bind together the chain of future generations, insofar as these goals live on in sedimented forms yet can be reawakened again and again and, in their new vitality, be criticized [...] this, I say, is nothing other than the philosopher’s genuine self-reflection on what they are **truly seeking** [...] *It is to make vital again, in its concealed historical meaning, the sedimented conceptual system which, as taken for granted, serves as the ground of their private and non-historical work.*” (Hua VI, pp. 72–73/71; translation modified; Husserl’s emphasis; italics mine).

In his final work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl announces a radical goal: to “reorient” phenomenology in light of considerable and sustained historical reflections on “our critical scientific and philosophical situation.” This crisis refers, according to Husserl, to the impasse that theoretical thought finds itself in: its alienation from the world it studies and the pervasive loss of faith in reason’s ability to perform the scientific-philosophical task of attaining universal knowledge with respect to the “totality of what is” (Hua VI, §5). What Husserl hopes to accomplish in the *Crisis* is nothing short of the renewal of trust in the task and methods of theoretical inquiry—scientific and philosophical. This project is an ambitious one, not in the least given the puzzling path Husserl proposes we take.

This reorientation of phenomenological inquiry is to be performed through historical reflection, aiming to expose the origins and hidden motivations of the processes leading to this crisis. Husserl’s call to free ourselves from covert epistemic and normative commitments—from presuppositions (*Selbsterständlichkeiten*)—fits squarely within his philosophical program. Yet here we learn: not only should we take “our” history seriously; we are to view the engagement of our history, especially our theoretical history, as the path that is alone able to secure the possibility of transcendental phenomenology. However, if the latter, as Husserl still holds in the *Crisis* (Hua VI, §52), is fundamentally eidetic, we are faced with a non-negligible tension at the very heart of Husserl’s mature philosophical project. This tension did not go unnoticed. As David Carr stresses, Husserl had long banned historical genesis from phenomenology (Carr, 1970, p. xxxv). Many, like Merleau-Ponty (1945, pp. 76, fn. 1), considered a historical–philosophical approach and the transcendental eidetic program (with its commitment to the successful grasp of the a priori universal structures of experience) to be mutually exclusive. And so we are left with a difficult question: How can we maintain a commitment to eidetic inquiry *and* take our history seriously?

It is in this context that Husserl introduces his paradoxical notion of the *historical* a priori (Hua VI, p. 383/374). What this notion captures, as I shall argue below, is the critical import of thinking “through the crust” of sedimented meanings, values, and commitments (Hua VI, p. 16/18) in the attempt to grasp the necessary and universal structures of meaning-constitution. Precisely because *the* a priori *of correlation* remains Husserl’s framework for all phenomenological analyses, as his *Crisis* discussion of the paradox of subjectivity clearly shows (Hua VI, §53, esp. p. 184/181), the *historical* a priori does not refer, as some may be tempted to think,

solely to the structures of consciousness; it refers to the entire noetic–noematic complex. We can draw a distinction between these two aspects only abstractively, for explicative purposes. Any attempt to set apart as self-standing what Husserl occasionally refers to as the “a priori of history” (Hua VI, p. 362/349), as opposed to the “historical a priori,” is thus unphenomenological by Husserlian standards.¹ Thus, whether we place the emphasis on the structures of consciousness or the structures of its correlate, the question remains: How can we maintain a commitment to eidetic inquiry *and* take our history seriously?

In what follows, I argue that the above tension—between the historical and eidetic aspects of Husserl’s mature method of phenomenological inquiry—is an apparent one. Not only is the collaboration between Husserl’s teleological–historical reflection and his method of eidetic variation (i.e., the core of his eidetic method) structurally possible; the critical core of Husserl’s mature transcendental idealism depends on the success of this collaboration. Paradoxes such as the historical a priori are precisely what the critical philosopher must render intelligible. In Husserl’s own words: “[phenomenology’s] fate (understood subsequently, to be sure, as an essentially necessary one) is to become involved again and again in paradoxes, which, arising out of uninvestigated and even unnoticed horizons, remain functional and announce themselves as incomprehensibilities” (Hua VI, p. 185/181).

To make this case, I will draw both from Husserl’s genetic–synthetic analyses of type and concept constitution and from his later, historical discussions of meaning sedimentation. I will argue that transcendental eidetic inquiry necessarily relies on historically embedded types and concepts, which I unpack here as organizers of modal systems (i.e., systems of possibility pertaining to different attitudes and spheres of experience). Processes such as eidetic variation, which engage possibilities rather than actualities, rely on this modal potency.² Such dependence poses, *prima facie*, a crippling problem for securing the theoretical freedom Husserl deemed necessary for the neutral and presuppositionless stance of phenomenological inquiry. However, the difficult question regarding the role played by types and concepts in phenomenology also offers the solution to our tension and helps shed light on Husserl’s critical reorientation of phenomenology. I contend that the analysis of Husserl’s late critical method of inquiry—in both its historical and eidetic aspects—requires that we take a closer look at modality and consider what sets different kinds of possibility apart, their relationship to conceptualization and conceivability, and the role that specific kinds of possibilities play in transcendental eidetics.

While this paper does not seek to show that transcendental eidetic inquiry can be fully free of cultural and scientific dependence (such a claim would be suspicious to all who take Husserl’s claim regarding the infinite character of the

¹ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to the importance of emphasizing the a priori of *correlation* here once more.

² Lohmar rightly points out the import of the conceptual bedrock—especially typification—that phenomenology relies on in its eidetic investigations (Lohmar 2005, pp. 77ff.). However, more needs to be said about the relationship between this bedrock and the engagement of possibilities at work in eidetic variation, especially in light of Husserl’s analyses of sedimentation and streaming-in.

phenomenological task seriously), it nevertheless strives to propose a potent understanding of phenomenological critique: one better able to negotiate the culturally relative in its pursuit of necessary universality. Let us begin by taking a closer look at Husserl's proposed method of historical reflection as it relates to his important 1930s notion of the *lifeworld* understood as the correlate of our everyday, natural attitude.

2 Teleological–Historical Reflection: A Transcendental Critique

In *Ideas I*, we learn that the suspension of the natural thesis is a radical change in attitude (Hua III/1, §31). It is Husserl's intention here to show that this shift, though artificial, is something we are able to perform given a structural possibility (*ibid.*). To do so, we must put out of play both our ontic commitments and our epistemic motivation toward factual evidence (cf., Hua III/1, §31 and Hua V, pp. 145–146). Natural consciousness and phenomenological inquiry are thus non-coordinate. The latter is essentially without positing (*ohne Setzung*)—not driven toward verifying and establishing the veracity of factual reality. For Husserl, we perform this shift away from the positional under the aegis of complete freedom (Hua III/1, p. 63).

In the *Crisis*, given his discoveries with respect to the historically-informed character of the natural attitude, Husserl reconsiders the scope as well as the quality of this freedom. Earlier, he painted the natural attitude and its correlate as easily mappable; the result of this view was his commitment to an unproblematic bracketing. The lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of the *Crisis* is a much more complex affair. It is, rather, a historically dynamic world constituted through inter-subjective endeavors and permeated by socio-cultural and political conceptualizations, valuations, and accomplishments (Hua VI, §§28, 34e; cf., also Hua XXXIX, Nr.4).³ Husserl did indeed hold, in *Ideas I*, that the world, understood as the correlate of the natural attitude, included socio-cultural objects (Hua III/1, p. 59), however, it would take his extensive work in the phenomenology of constitution and his synthetic–genetic analyses of the 1920s for his rich notion of lifeworld to emerge. This being said, as both David Carr (2014) and Rochus Sowa (2008) have shown, while Husserl's notion of world underwent substantial enrichment, it remained, from his *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Hua XIII, Nr.6, 1910/11) onward, the correlate of the natural attitude (i.e., the non-theoretical, pre-scientific attitude).

Importantly, the lifeworld also exhibits historically *sedimented* beliefs resulting from scientific work, as Husserl's discussion of the Galilean outlook shows (Hua VI, §§9, 33). These deeply ingrained beliefs determine entire systems of validities (Hua VI, pp. 154–155/151–152). They affect how we constitute meaning and acquire knowledge in both the theoretical and non-theoretical attitudes. They also delineate what we deem knowable. Thus, while all scientific claims have the power to reshape our epistemic presuppositions regarding the lifeworld, these endeavors are themselves grounded in and conditioned by the lifeworld and our experience of it.

³ For an incisive discussion of the historical character of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology see Carr (1974, 1987, 2010).

Such a convoluted dynamic is bound to render entering the phenomenological attitude difficult. The phenomenologist needs to be able to teleologically (i.e., normatively and motivationally) track down the overt as well as covert trajectories and sources of these presuppositions.⁴ Despite this difficult task, Husserl's trust in our ability to secure the requisite disinterested freedom did not stagger: "[...] it is through this abstention that the gaze of the philosopher in truth first becomes fully free: above all, free of the strongest and most universal, and at the same time most hidden, internal bond, namely, of the pregivenness of the world" (Hua VI, p. 154/151). In fact, according to him, not only can we free ourselves from these covert epistemic and normative commitments; we can also successfully grasp the apodictic structures of the consciousness at work in constituting and sustaining them. The work of the *epochê* is to bracket these beliefs (Hua VI, pp. 37–40/38–41), and lay the ground for transcendental eidetic inquiry, which works to uncover the a priori universal structures of meaning constitution (Hua VI, §52). This, according to Husserl, is the task of transcendental phenomenology despite the historically volatile character of its starting point (Hua VI, pp. 357–364/343–351).

Nevertheless, laying the ground for transcendental eidetic inquiry depends on our exposing these beliefs precisely in their historically dynamic, systemic organization, which remains for the most part covert (Hua VI, §§15, 26, 34). Unlike the bold, sweeping gesture of the reductions,⁵ this task requires what I would refer to as "hermeneutical patience."⁶ This is the task of Husserl's teleological–historical reflection. Thus, gaining phenomenological evidence depends on the historical examination of the incomprehensibilities hidden in the background of theoretical endeavors (Hua VI, pp. 192–193/188–189). Transcendental historical reflection must uncover the dynamic between our non-theoretical experience of the lifeworld and theoretical inquiry—be it scientific or philosophical (Hua VI, §§5–6). Only in doing so can it make room for an eidetic study of *historicity*, the core structures of meaning constitution irrespective of context and motivation. It is in this sense that Husserl claims that evidence without teleological–historical reflection is like "an appeal to an oracle" (Hua VI, p. 192/189).

Scientific endeavors unfold in well-delineated, traditional manners. As such, the tools and principles they inherit (including previous theoretical decisions) *ground* them (Hua VI, pp. 372–373/361–363).⁷ These grounds and origins—by functioning as validity foundations (*Geltungsfundierungen*; Hua VI, p. 191/187)—institute

⁴ For in-depth discussions of the teleological dimension of Husserl's historical reflection, see Aldea and Allen (forthcoming).

⁵ By "reductions" I mean the *epochê* as well as the phenomenological, transcendental, and eidetic reductions, which together secure our motivational stance toward grasping the a priori, necessary structures of consciousness as meaning-constituting. Given the scope of this paper, I will not go into further detail regarding the various differences among these reductions. In what follows I will argue that what these reductions accomplish together falls short of a "critical-transcendental" attitude. The collaboration between teleological-historical reflection and eidetic variation alone can supply the "critical" aspect of this stance.

⁶ The hermeneutical dimension of Husserl's transcendental idealism has been interestingly explored by Luft (2011).

⁷ For an interesting discussion of tradition in Husserl's *Crisis*, see Crowell in Aldea and Allen (forthcoming).

comprehensive epistemic styles (Hua VI, §9b).⁸ As Husserl's analyses show, Galilean mathematization of nature touches *all* knowledge acquisition, including the non-theoretical kind. In asking back (*rückfragen*; Hua VI, pp. 100–101, 185/97–98, 181 and Hua XXIX, pp. 362–420), we aim not only at uncovering the hidden layers of meaning built into all epistemic accomplishments, but also their teleologies. Since epistemic grounds are normatively motivated,⁹ they systemically orient knowledge acquisition; they dictate its principles, methods, acknowledged resources, as well as what counts as knowable, valuable, and worthy of epistemic pursuit. This motivational background consists on the one hand in covert assumptions, which are the outcome of passive sedimentation processes. What, at one time, is a novel meaning or way of thinking—including a theoretical-scientific one—becomes a hidden presupposition through synthetic-historical sedimentation and streaming-in (*einströmen*) (Hua VI, pp. 112–115/110–113; also §34e and Beilage XIX). On the other hand, actively acquired knowledge—inter-subjectively consolidated and fixed through concepts—likewise delineates subsequent epistemic endeavors, especially the theoretical kind. Thus, when Husserl calls for an analysis of the *historical* a priori, what he has in mind is eidetic work on whole epistemic contexts and styles of meaning-constitution, critically considered in their historicity.

This analysis must thus also reflect on its own motivational and epistemic background (Hua VI, Beilage XXVIII), by examining what it inherits from previous natural, scientific, as well as phenomenological accomplishments. Teleological-historical reflection is thus a critical reflection back (*Rückbesinnung*) to grounds (Hua VI, pp. 370–371/359–361), depth problems (*Tiefenprobleme*; Hua VI, p. 365/353) and original motivations (Hua VI, pp. 16–17/17–18). In order to be “without ground”—to use Husserl's words—phenomenology must assume a critical self-reflective stance with respect to all systemically potent traditions, including its own. Nevertheless, while “without ground,” phenomenology is “not groundless” (Hua VI, p. 185/181). Like all theoretical inquiry, it, too, draws its sustenance from our everyday experience of the lifeworld—especially, as we shall see, from sedimented conceptual resources and the modal systems they organize and delineate. However, unlike theoretical thought broadly construed, its very possibility depends on an ongoing exercise in steering clear of blind epistemic transfers.

David Carr (2014, pp. 182–184) convincingly argues that Husserl's *natural attitude* developed, from *Ideas I* onward, in a manner that eventually clearly differentiated between the naturalistic, scientific (theoretical) attitude on the one hand and the personalistic, strictly speaking “natural” (i.e., pre-theoretical, pre-methodological) attitude on the other (Hua IV, pp. 180, 183). Whereas in *Ideas I*, the term “natural” entailed, according to Carr, a certain ambiguous collapsing of the two attitudes, later research on constitution clearly brought the distinction to light. With this distinction came Husserl's call for a method of reflecting back (Hua IV, §§5, 8–9, 54), able to unearth the primacy of the pre-scientific attitude and of its

⁸ For an in-depth discussion of tradition, style, and historical critique in Husserl's *Crisis*, see Dodd (2004).

⁹ For an extensive discussion of the normative dimension of Husserl's account of intentionality as well as the epistemic and philosophical implications of this normativity, see Crowell (2013).

correlate, the world of everyday lived experience (Hua IX, pp. 55–56, 64), now understood as the ground for all theoretical inquiries. While I agree with Carr’s account, I would qualify it further by stressing the importance of Husserl’s work on sedimentation and streaming-in. In light of this work, any reflection-back must also strive to uncover the complex ways through which the accomplishments of theoretical endeavors come to shape our natural everyday stance. And it must do so eidetically, with an eye for the a priori structures of this historical dynamic. While motivationally and teleologically it still makes sense to speak of a “pre-” or “non-” theoretical attitude, from an epistemological and normative point of view transcendental phenomenology must strive to challenge a strict delineation between the “theoretical” and “non-theoretical”. It is precisely here, as I argue below, that the critical import of the collaborative work between teleological–historical reflection and transcendental eidetics lies.

3 Husserl’s Eidetic Method: Structural and Epistemic Considerations

Through his analyses Husserl uncovered, beyond sedimentation and streaming-in, that modality is built into all meaning-constitution. In other words, that possibility, more so than actuality, plays a crucial role in how we acquire, evaluate, and consolidate our knowledge. Phenomenology is rigorous precisely because its eidetic analyses take into account the intricate relations between conceptually consolidated accomplishments and the systems of conceivable possibilities they organize. Traditions could not solidify and transform themselves without the latter. Unfortunately, Husserl did not capitalize on this insight and left largely implicit the role of modality in transcendental phenomenological inquiry. I thus turn to eidetic variation and consider its modal conditions for epistemic success as well as what a critical–historical clarification of sedimentations and hidden epistemic transfers amounts to in the transcendental-eidetic context. My hope here is to build on Husserl’s work and further develop his insight in a manner that does not depart from his overall philosophical project.

Husserl had much to say about possibilities, especially the free-imaginative kind, in his lectures on the imagination (Hua XXIII). He relied on these analyses in order to unpack the structure of eidetic variation, which he viewed as an engagement of free possibilities. However, despite numerous discussions, how we are to understand the freedom of these possibilities, especially in their relationship to actuality and conceivability remains largely unclear.

In *Experience and Judgment* (Husserl 1948, §87), *Phenomenological Psychology* (Hua IX, §9), and *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Hua XVIII, §97), we learn that eidetic variation begins with an original example (*Ausgangsexempel*, Hua IX, p. 86; cf., also Hua XLI, No.5). This example functions as model (*Vorbild*) for the constitution of all engaged variants understood both as free imaginative possibilities and as arbitrary copies of this model. The total experience of the variants entails, through the gradual identification of shared determinations, a synthesis of coincidence (*Deckung*), which facilitates the grasp of that which is the same across variations. Husserl stresses both the significance of the arbitrary (*beliebig*) character

of these variants and of conflict in the process of attaining the synthesis of identity across variants (*Deckung im Widerstreit*). Through conflict, we identify limit determinations that cannot be varied away (i.e., are necessary, their opposite is inconceivable, *undenkbar*) (Hua IX, p. 72). According to Husserl, once the varying process is triggered, the variants emerge as each other's other while also sharing something in common. This relation between each variant and that which is in common exposes each variant as an *instance* of the ideal invariant (i.e., the universal structure of meaning constitution pertaining to the experience under investigation).¹⁰ The varying process also entails infinite openness. It does so in principle by exhibiting an "and so on..." character. In other words, without its motivated commitment toward attaining the grasp of the invariant, this process of variation could, in principle, continue indefinitely. However, eidetic variation is, according to Husserl, able to zero in on the invariant without having to run through an infinite series of instantiations.¹¹

Many questions concerning the fulfillment of eidetic variation will be set aside here.¹² Given the scope of this paper, I will instead focus on issues able to show that transcendental eidetics must be historical if it is to succeed epistemically, and that, in its turn, eidetic variation solidifies the critical character of phenomenological inquiry. In other words, eidetically grasping the universal structures of meaning-constitution requires that *we think through* the historical layers of meaning sedimentation. The following questions will thus take precedence here: How does the non-theoretical attitude inform the transcendental? What is the specific relation between non-theoretical conceptualization and phenomenological inquiry? How are we to understand the *arbitrariness*, *freedom*, and *exemplarity* of the variants?

In raising these questions I am interested in clarifying the structure of the initial stages of transcendental eidetic variation (i.e., eidetic variation unfolding under the aegis the phenomenological reductions). The residuum of this radical shift in attitude—from *living through experience* to *viewing experience as meaning constituting*—is what eidetic variation must work with. For instance, in studying perception, the phenomenologist is after the universal structures of this kind of presentation (*Vorstellung*) as well as the universal features of the ways in which it gives access to specific kinds of objects (i.e., actualities). But what could qualify as a satisfactory, doxically neutral starting point for such an eidetic endeavor,

¹⁰ Sowa (2010) offers an account of essences and eidetic variation that departs from Husserl's view of the universal as "what is in common." Mohanty (1985, pp. 209ff) argues that eidetic variation is "genesis of meanings" rather than "discovery of eide" (see also Sowa 2007, pp. 103–104). While I agree that eidetic variation unfolds as an examination of concepts (Sowa 2007, p. 89), I will argue for the importance of critically qualifying the freedom and neutrality of this "purification" (Sowa 2007, pp. 95, 100). Because of this, eidetic variation is neither mere falsification (Sowa 2007, p. 102), nor solely fixation of concepts (Mohanty 1985, p. 202). Its critical engagement of concepts is a condition for the possibility of its intuition of (necessary) ideals.

¹¹ For questions regarding how eidetic variation is able to successfully terminate despite its infinite structure see Lohmar (2005, pp. 77, 79ff).

¹² For discussions of the conditions for the epistemic success of eidetic variation, see Sowa (2010, 2007), Lohmar (2005), and Mohanty (1985). Given my argument here, a comprehensive account of these conditions must also include historical-critical reflection. I am currently in the process of developing such an account.

especially given the morass of meaning sedimentation across theoretical and non-theoretical boundaries? Is not the very possibility of performing the reductions precisely precluded by this? Only by clarifying how Husserl's notions of theoretical freedom, imaginative possibility, and neutrality are able to negotiate covert epistemic and normative transfers can we address these methodological concerns.

Husserl's mention of original examples functioning as guides, or models for subsequent productions of variants does little to disambiguate what this residuum is. We must examine the dynamic between the original exemplar and the subsequent variants. A most plausible candidate for the initial member of the varying sequence is the particular neutralized experience and its correlate. Having said this, we cannot help but wonder how a neutralized particular is able to guide the varying process. Eidetic variation, like all complex *noeses*, is temporally structured in a manner that projects expectations based on previous experience. As eidetic variation begins, it cannot draw sustenance for its modal projection solely from one neutralized particular. Even if previous phenomenological studies aid the new eidetic endeavor (a more experienced phenomenologist has more extensive—and arguably better—resources than an inexperienced one), more needs to be said about what this residuum consists of. Finally, the motivation toward the ideal could not possibly offer substantial guidance since we have yet to grasp this ideal in eidetic intuition. The initial stages of variation must seek guidance elsewhere if a *petitio* problem is to be avoided. One way to avoid this problem is to see eidetic variation as a form of falsification of “presumed eidetic laws” (Sowa 2007, pp. 102ff. and Sowa 2010). However, not only does this view radically depart from Husserl's (1948, §87); it also fails to account for the methodological impact of historically-embedded conceptual systems pertaining to the noetic–noematic correlation under investigation. As we shall see, the exemplars of eidetic variation are not “freely” construed, nor are they “any whatsoever” in an unqualified sense.

It is my contention that the model of consciousness Husserl proposed in his 1920s work on active and passive synthesis provides the solution to this conundrum. The necessary resources are at our disposal. At the personalistic, positional level of consciousness, factual knowledge is accumulated on a synthetic model: experiences and their correlates are retentionally and memorially embedded in their respective holistic contexts. Objects are given on the background of associational and comparative relations. Retention secures the unity and integrity of the object; recollection is able to refer to the object as distinct in subsequent associations and comparisons (cf., Hua XI, §§2–3, 18–19, 24; also Hua I, §§37–39). As such, the object is recognizable as being of a certain “type.” Empirical concepts—the stewards of non-theoretical habituated knowledge—implicitly dictate our expectations regarding particular objects. They function as organizers of systems of conceivable possibilities: what is deemed epistemically and practically possible with respect to the object in question is delineated by the scope of the relevant concepts. *The reductions do not eliminate this synthetic feature; they translate it.* Thus, Husserl's later claim that the epochê puts out of play not only ontic and doxic commitments, but non-theoretical systems of possibility as well, must be qualified (Hua VI, §53). What we deem conceivable and possible in the natural attitude (more

on this in Sect. 5) is not eliminated in the transcendental one¹³; rather, it is considered analyzable *as being so* in light of the transcendental interest in the a priori kinds of meaning constitution pertaining to distinct attitudes, kinds of experience, and specific motivated endeavors. This body of sedimented knowledge, which is essentially marked by inter-subjectivity, is available to phenomenologists as they commence the process of eidetic variation—with the proviso that they engage it in a historical–critical manner.

4 Types, Non-theoretical Empirical Concepts, and Eidetic Variation

In claiming that empirical concepts prove themselves fruitful guides in eidetic variation, we stay true to Husserl’s genetic–synthetic model of consciousness—a model that clearly stipulates the continuity *across* lower-level passive intentional experiences (such as perception and type constitution), non-theoretical active predicative processes of concept formation, and theoretical methodologies (such as eidetic variation).

There are, according to Husserl, two broad categories of generalities (*Allgemeinheiten*): *empirical* and *essential*. Types and non-theoretical empirical concepts belong to the former class, the concepts of ideation to the latter. Both of these classes of generalities are organized on a scale in a hierarchical manner given different levels of indeterminacy (Husserl 1948, §84). Thus, each generality on either scale is of a higher or lower order (Husserl 1948, §80; Hua III/1, §22; Hua XLI Nos. 2, 4, 6, 7, 8–11, 16–19, and Beilagen 13, 15, 17). What distinguishes these two classes is the process through which they are constituted. *Empirical generalities* are either passively (types) or actively (concepts) constituted through abstractive processes—i.e., processes of simplification and comparison starting from particulars (Husserl 1948, §87d). *Eidetic generalities*, on the other hand, are actively and theoretically constituted through non-abstractive processes such as eidetic variation. Eidetic generalities are free from factual commitments and indifferent to actual particulars; they are our basic resources in the thematization of pure essences (here, the apodictic structures of meaning constitution). Despite this radical difference between them, these two classes of generalities are linked. Husserl’s reason for stressing this link is the founding relationship between passive and active *noeses* and their corresponding *noemata* (1948, pp. 384–385 and §81b). Let us consider the most basic founding level of conceptualization and its potential role in higher order, theoretical–methodological processes such as eidetic variation.

Types and their passive formation exhibit some very interesting features, supporting the claim that eidetic variation necessarily relies on them. We constitute types through a passive associational synthesis of likeness (*Gleichheitssynthese*) that entails sedimentation through memorial modification (Husserl 1948, p. 385). The most basic act providing information for the synthetic sedimentation is external perception (1948, pp. 395–396). This empirical knowledge facilitated through

¹³ Husserl used “possibility” and “conceivability” ambiguously, even interchangeably at times; I will draw some important distinctions between them momentarily.

perceptual experiences of objects can be subsequently taken up in other processes—including higher-order predicative processes (1948, pp. 387–388). According to Husserl, type constitution unfolds as a multi-stage process; objects, once encountered, are subsumed, through the synthesis of likeness, under their type. The correlate of this constitutive process is thus a multiplicity of particulars. The unity behind this multiplicity of real individuals—implicitly understood as instantiations (*Vereinzelungen*) of an empirical universal—gradually comes to the fore through a “colligative running through” of the members of the series motivated by the interest in their similarity and seeking coincidence of the shared moments (Hua XLI, Nos. 1c, 3, 4b, 17, 19 and Beilage 15). This process occurs, for the most part, passively. It is also fundamentally historical. Typification entails sedimentation as Husserl describes it in the *Crisis*. It is thus bound by the epistemic style and motivation of our experience of the lifeworld broadly construed. The streaming-in of previously scientifically acquired knowledge likewise colors type formation. Because of this, types are ideal candidates for examining the collaboration between historical reflection and transcendental eidetics.

This classification of particulars may, however, also unfold actively if motivated by a thematic goal (Husserl 1948, §81b), such as the interest in the class itself. This process explicitly identifies predicates and relations for the main purpose of classification. This is what empirical conceptualization and abstraction broadly construed do. Like type formation, conceptualization proper relies on various associational and memorial syntheses, but unlike it, it is an actively motivated search for the empirical universal (1948, §80).¹⁴ Unlike predicative processes such as abstraction, typification is not explicitly interested in the universal. That being said, the pre-predicative motivation toward maintaining epistemic harmony always already involves classification. Husserl’s emphasis on the importance of coincidence (*Deckung*) across a multiplicity of particulars clearly shows that he viewed pre-predicative processes as implicitly geared toward abstraction and universalization—despite their interest in particulars. Type constitution relies on the synthesis of similarity and on the comparison of like to like. Husserl refers to this process of property analysis as “*Explikation*” (1948, p. 391; also Hua I, pp. 70, 72–73; Ms. AI-9 [1907/08]). The shared features do not come to the fore as determinations of the type until the emphasis is placed on the similarity itself, that is, until we grasp the particulars as *instantiations* of a class and their participation (*Teilhabe*) in the universal becomes our focal point. The typifying structure of presentational acts shares this with higher-order predicative processes interested in the general rather than the particular, which would explain why in his discussion of types and empirical concepts Husserl often blurs the distinction between them (1948, §83a).

As Lohmar rightly points out (2003, pp. 105–115), this “blurring” is problematic since it may lead to overlooking the important difference in motivation between typification and conceptualization. However, it also illuminates Husserl’s important insight into the synthetic–genetic structures of knowledge acquisition across the passive–active divide. Even when we engage particulars, we inevitably acquire

¹⁴ For the purposes of my argument here, I use “conceptualization,” “concept formation,” and “empirical abstraction” interchangeably.

knowledge about classes of objects at various levels of indeterminacy. Thus, the view that there is a *strict delineation* between types and empirical concepts (Lohmar 2005, p. 85) must be qualified.

To return now to our discussion of the incipient stages of eidetic variation, let us consider the potential import of types in guiding the formation of variants.¹⁵ Once the reductions ontically neutralize the initial particular experience and its correlate (e.g., the perception of a large brown dog wagging its tail and approaching me in the park) and locate it in the transcendental, eidetically-motivated context, we are presented with a non-positional noetic–noematic correlation evocative of passively constituted types (i.e., “perception” and “dog” respectively). The types are here engaged without their protodoxic baggage. The artificial non-positional engagement of these types does not, however, constitute the givenness of the first genuine variant in the series; this is so because types are not themselves instantiations of essences¹⁶—which is what the variants are supposed to be, according to Husserl’s account (Hua IX, p. 73); they are empirical generalities stripped of ontic and doxic commitments. While these types cannot themselves function as the first pair of noetic–noematic variants, they nevertheless help constitute it. Something Husserl uncovered about the nature of types makes this claim highly likely.

When a new object is positionally given in perceptual presentation, it becomes known through its typified “location” in the established epistemic system. The synthesis of similarity, with the aid of memorial modification and association, and the ensuing coincidence ensure this recognition (cf., Hua XLI, No. 20 and Beilage 23). Thus, individuation, understood as predicative determination, occurs in the positional attitude through typification, among other passive-synthetic processes (Hua XXIII, p. 548). Yet this is not all that I know through typified experience. According to Husserl, a certain array of attributes and relations also comes to mind (1948, §§67, 83). Expectations based on previously attained knowledge come to the fore.¹⁷ However, types organize more than expectations pertaining to certain specific experiences and their particular correlates. They also project entire systems of conceivable possibilities—here understood as real possibilities within the purview of the types involved—pertaining to particulars insofar as we experience the latter as belonging to certain classes. If types have this ability in the natural attitude (for the most part for practical purposes), why wouldn’t they maintain their modal potency as *residua* of the reductions?¹⁸ It is precisely this modal potency that renders types indispensable for eidetic variation. Thus, to know X is not only to be able to expect it within the limited scope of any one experience of X, but also *to be able to locate X in the modal system pertaining to the motivated experience in question and its respective epistemic style*. This holds broadly for all knowledge

¹⁵ I focus here primarily on types rather than empirical concepts since the former are more pervasive and basic and since what we show about them holds in the case of concepts as well.

¹⁶ This is because, according to Husserl, empirical and eidetic scales of universals are parallel and thus cannot be placed in an instantiation–participation relationship.

¹⁷ Cf., Sokolowski (1974, §65); Drummond (1990, pp. 68, 71–72, 156, 160–162, 189ff., 212); Held (2003a, pp. 17–25, and 2003b); Lohmar (2003, pp. 106ff).

¹⁸ I use “modalization” to refer to any process of variation across a system of conceivable possibilities.

acquisition and narrowly for phenomenology. However, the latter must, unlike all other forms of knowledge acquisition, “locate” its objects critically and transcendently.

The initial givenness of types at the non-positional level (evoked by the neutralized particular experience and its correlate) is modally potent in a *systemic* manner. Husserl implicitly assumed this potency in his discussions of eidetic variation. Viewing neutralized types as guiding the initial stages of eidetic variation has its advantages: they can sustain the formation of variants *as instances* of a universal (here understood as essence rather than empirical class). They also help further unpack Husserl’s “synthesis in conflict.” This conflict is more than a mere disappointment of specific expectations. It is also a *modal conflict*, challenging what is conceived as possible given the epistemic style(s) and motivation(s) of the experience under investigation (in our example, external perception). However, non-negligible worries ensue on this model: How are we to understand the *arbitrariness* of the variants given their reliance on types pertaining to the natural attitude? Doesn’t the translation of positional typical/conceptual knowledge inadvertently limit transcendental ideation, irrevocably binding it to the scope of real possibilities? To address these questions we must take a closer look at possibility and conceivability.

5 Possibility and Conceivability

In research manuscripts dated around 1918 Husserl stresses that eidetic variation is a non-positional process (Hua XLI, Nos. 9–10, 11, 14) involving *free imaginative* possibilities (cf., Hua XLI, No.14a, 183ff., Beilage 21, No.16; also, Mss. AIII-5 [1932], AIV-11 [1934]). This emphasis is, not surprisingly, contemporaneous with his analyses of *freedom*, *neutrality*, and *possibility* as dimensions of the imagination (Hua XXIII, Nos. 18–20). As eidetic inquiry, phenomenology must find a way to expose the essential structures of meaning constitution beyond their instantiations (Ms. D8, 1918). The “distancing” from experiences unfolding in the natural attitude entails more than turning away from actualities and toward free imaginative possibilities; this radical modification in attitude also grants it access to new methodological tools, such as free variation. This does not, however, preclude its reliance on positional conceptual and modal resources. In order to understand how this can be, we must first distinguish among different kinds of possibility and the respective processes through which we constitute them.

Like positional presentations and presentifications, non-positional imaginative presentations entail the intuition of individuals. However, individuation strictly construed (*Vereinzelung*) involves the givenness of the object in question as “actual”—in Husserl’s words, “*in propria persona*” (Hua XXIII, pp. 16–18). Since we intend *free possibilities* non-positionally (i.e., without ontic commitment), they are not, strictly speaking, individuated (Hua XXIII, p. 548); they exhibit higher or lower levels of indeterminacy (Hua XXIII, Nos. 18–19, esp. pp. 550–553, and Appendix LVII). To qualify: all objects of presentation (*Vorstellung*) are indeterminate in some sense: positionally presented objects are indeterminate

insofar as perception gives objects perspectively, without adequate evidence (Hua XVI, pp. 121ff.; also Hua XXIII, p. 523). As such, they are not fully knowable, and are therefore also indeterminate in the sense that our expectations with respect to them can always be disappointed (Hua XI, §22). Non-positionally engaged objects (i.e., free possibilities broadly construed) are *doubly indeterminate*. On the one hand, they, too, if perspectively given (Hua XXIII, Appendix. 9; also Hua XXXVI, pp. 75, 113), can exhibit the indeterminacy stemming from disappointed expectations. On the other, whether spatially determined or not, free possibilities are also indeterminate insofar as they *always already exhibit lower levels of predicative instantiation*, which is not the case with actualities. This latter kind of indeterminacy is qualitatively different from any abstractive indeterminacy positional attitude can afford. It is necessarily paired with the *freedom from* ontic and epistemic commitments. Free possibilities need not exhibit the predicates the positional conceptual system dictates. Thus, they surpass the field of possibilities deemed “conceivable” by this system and by our positional commitment to individuality strictly construed. Thus, while Husserl—and others following his account (cf., Ferencz-Flatz 2011, pp. 276–277)—is right to stress that free, imaginative possibilities can be more or less clear, more or less fluid (Hua XXIII, p. 550), this criterion, reminiscent of a Humean-empirical distinction, fails to capture these possibilities’ predicative (conceptual) indeterminacy, which is structurally linked to their ontic and doxic non-positionality. Let us take a closer look at positional abstractive indeterminacy in order to clearly distinguish it from the non-abstractive indeterminacy structurally pertaining to non-positional, free possibilities.

Take caricature for example—whether pictorial or not.¹⁹ Its indeterminacy relies on eliminatively focusing on core features such as the stern look of eyes, the broadness of forehead, the tightness of lips. This indeterminacy is abstractive, even when the caricature is of a certain individual and not of a class of individuals. When experienced, it carries with it a commitment to the reality of the object(s) in question and to our experiential history of it. Thus, positional abstraction depends on individuality strictly construed (i.e., the actuality and reality of the object(s) in question) as well as the thick epistemic and normative background of the positional attitude. In our positional abstractive efforts, our previous typifications and conceptualizations, as well as motivations and projects, necessarily dictate how we simplify, eliminate, emphasize, compare, and contrast predicates and relations. *Imaginative indeterminacy*, on the other hand, *is not necessarily derivative in this manner*. This is not to say that we cannot abstractively simplify, eliminate, compare, and contrast predicates of free possibilities. We can. The point here is that free possibilities always already exhibit predicative indeterminacy *independent of any initial abstraction*. This essential feature of free possibilities is the structural consequence of what Husserl refers to as the “neutrality” of the non-positional attitude (Hua XXIII, Nos. 19–20; e.g., p. 578). Precisely because we are not

¹⁹ This example may be understood as involving image consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*), but it need not. For the sake of simplicity, I use pictorial caricature here. “Caricature” can also refer to any attempt to capture core features of non-spatially determined objects, for instance, a pedagogical method. To address a concern raised by an anonymous reviewer: for the purposes of illustrating the structure of abstractive indeterminacy, it matters not whether “caricature” here is pictorially or non-pictorially construed.

committed to individuality strictly construed, we are not bound by the epistemic and normative parameters of the everyday, protodoxic attitude. To put it metaphorically, the commitments binding our engagement of free possibilities are both quantitatively and qualitatively “thinner,” even when we constitute free possibilities broadly construed as “individual” (Hua XXIII, pp. 552–553), as opposed to “general” in some non-positional, abstractive sense. Beyond engaging individual imaginative possibilities in this sense, however, we can also “run through” a series of possibilities understood as exemplars representative of a certain class. Not all imaginative possibilities are exemplars, however. As we shall soon see, *fully free possibilities* are not.

In a nutshell: in the non-positional, imagining attitude we can classify beyond previously established, habituated epistemic boundaries and styles. The latter delineate and organize—as we saw in the case of types and empirical concepts—entire systems of conceivable possibilities. The *conceivable*, in this sense, is restricted to what is deemed knowable (or broadly, “experience-able”) within the conceptual parameters of the respective epistemic system. *Positional exemplarity* is bound by previous classifications (via typifications and conceptualizations), by the ontic commitment to individuation strictly construed, and by historically embedded epistemic and normative commitments. *Imaginary exemplarity*, on the other hand, in its non-abstractive indeterminacy, is structurally free from all of these positional demands. We will soon see that teleological–historical reflection enhances this natural imaginative ability. Thus, even a minimal understanding of neutralization as the bracketing of ontic and doxic commitments entails the ability to engage possibilities that exhibit this non-abstractive indeterminacy. It is in this sense that free imaginative variation is different from: (1) positional modalizations such as *vacillation* between real conceivable options, (2) *alterations* of an individual strictly construed, (3) *doubt* regarding an individual’s ontic status or its class appurtenance, and (4) *real variation*, or the “running through” series of real possibilities.

Let me further clarify the freedom of imaginative possibilities through Husserl’s notion of epistemic conflict or disappointment (*Enttäuschung*; cf., Hua XI, §5), before considering the import of imaginary exemplarity in eidetic variation. Any questioning of this assumption is a threat to be dealt with and eliminated. The constitution of reality is a continuous synthetic process aiming at maintaining harmony. Because we constitute reality—the lifeworld—as an ontically coherent whole, expectations with respect to future experiences are possible (Hua XI, p. 25). Order and familiarity are reinforced through fulfillment (*Erfüllung*)—i.e., the confirmation or disconfirmation of habituated expectations (Hua XI, pp. 66–67). Intentional acts are motivated toward this fulfillment (Hua XI, §20). However, order and familiarity—the background for typification and non-theoretical conceptualization—are frequently disrupted through conflict.

Conflict is the main threat to this epistemic balance of the predominant epistemic style because it may disrupt not only the scope of expectations with respect to particulars, as Husserl rightly stresses, but also the modal system organized by the types and concepts in question. The natural attitude seeks to eliminate the uncertainty stemming from the intuition of the unexpected (Hua XI, pp. 83–84). The latter occurs on the coherent background of our past experience of reality. If the

initial unity of reality is disrupted (e.g., the brown dog approaching me starts to meow), positional consciousness attempts to recover the lost balance by seeking satisfaction through confirmation (Husserl 1948, §67). This constant dynamic of replacement (Hua XI, p. 30) is driven by the motivation toward maintaining an epistemic unity of sense, which types and concepts consolidate and sedimentation reinforces. All natural epistemic claims (including previously modified ones) are subject to such revision. Thus, modality modification leads to a continuous enrichment of natural consciousness and of its correlate, the lifeworld. This enrichment, while somewhat elastic, exhibits a high degree of resistance to novelty and change.

Processes such as typification and empirical conceptualization, which solidify the organization of the lifeworld are particularly “voracious”—to use Lohmar’s word—in further mapping and maintaining the *status quo* (Lohmar 2003, p. 117). Conflicts are resolved by confirming the subsumption of individual objects under their class. The modal system of the lifeworld retains its parameters and organization through the continuous self-correction of types and empirical concepts (Husserl 1948, §67a; Hua VI, pp. 166–167/163–164). A stance free of these strong epistemic and conceptual bonds would necessarily also be free of these kinds of conflict (cf., Hua XXIII, p. 534). Positional epistemic conflicts, while informative, can hold no sway at the transcendental phenomenological level, where these conflicts must be self-reflectively analyzed *as* positional. The reductions require the neutralization of positional epistemic commitments. These latter, however, are historically, intersubjectively, and synthetically constituted. They also have a far-reaching normative and modal impact. A critical–transcendental engagement with these dimensions of knowledge acquisition and accumulation must complement the reductions, which alone cannot place us in the position to universalize in a qualitatively different manner, i.e., in a manner radically different from positional abstraction and free from covert epistemic and normative commitments.

I argued above that *imaginative exemplarity* exhibits non-abstractive indeterminacy. This proves helpful if we wish to understand the free possibilities at work in eidetic variation. Broadly, all such free possibilities are non-positional.²⁰ According to some of Husserl’s most incisive analyses, imaginative possibilities are neutral and free (cf., Hua XXIII, Nos. 18–20). This freedom is not solely negative (i.e., freedom from positional commitments); it also represents our natural ability to engage possibilities beyond positional epistemic boundaries (Hua XXIII, pp. 562–563; cf., also Hua IX, p. 74). This is the core of Husserl’s *free variation*. This process need not respect the boundaries of the positional conceivability system, which is motivated toward epistemic verification and confirmation (cf., Hua XXIII, Nos. 10, 15i, 19). This claim requires further clarification beyond Husserl’s analyses. Imagination is “non-motivational” as far as positional ontic and epistemic commitments are concerned. It is in this sense that we must understand Husserl’s claim that free variation is “arbitrary” (Hua XXIII, No. 1, Appendix 1, also Hua

²⁰ I argue elsewhere (Aldea 2012, chapter 2) that all non-positional experience is imaginative, contra the pervasive view that ontic and doxic neutralization can happen independently of imagining consciousness.

XXIII, pp. 535, 561–562; Hua III/1, §4). Its arbitrariness lies in the ability to engage more or less predicatively indeterminate imaginative possibilities irrespective of positional types, concepts, and epistemic styles. Thus, *arbitrariness can only be delineated in light of some conceptual system and one's epistemic and motivational relationship to it.*

When we imagine, we are, more often than not, motivated in some way or another. When reading the Grimm fairy tales, my imaginative experiences are directed toward the intuitive enrichment and harmony of the corresponding objects and their “world(s)” (cf., Hua XXIII, pp. 522, 535–536). Thus, if by “conceivability” we understand that which is knowable within a certain epistemic style, then all motivated endeavors—*be they positional or non-positional*—are going to have corresponding systems of conceivable possibilities—“problematic possibilities” in Husserl’s terms (Husserl 1948, §79)—with more or less elastic boundaries given the concepts organizing them and the epistemic conflicts they are able to sustain.²¹ Let us distinguish, then, between *positional conceivability* and *conceivability kinds pertaining to other motivational endeavors and attitudes*.²² Two points here: first, “the conceivable” is systemically organized in light of the conceptual apparatus employed; and second, some epistemic motivation is necessary for the constitution of any system of conceivable possibilities irrespective of ontic commitments. In short, conceptualization and motivation are necessary conditions for conceivability constitution. Thus we must draw a distinction between *conceivable possibilities* on the one hand (be they positional or not), and *fully free possibilities* on the other. The real possibilities pertaining to our experience of the lifeworld are by definition conceivable. Free possibilities strictly construed—Husserl’s “open possibilities” (Husserl 1948, §67a) or “pure possibilities” (Hua XXIII, p. 553)—are not bound by any established conceptual and epistemic style. As we shall see, *not all imaginative possibilities are “free,” “open,” or “pure” in this strict sense, including the variants of eidetic inquiry.* We must thus disambiguate Husserl’s interchangeable usage of “open,” “free,” and “imaginative.”²³ A note before proceeding: unlike most Analytic approaches (cf., Gendler and Hawthorne 2002), this phenomenological account of modality focuses on the relationship between possibility and conceivability in light of the subjective and historical processes through which they are constituted. On this view, we must raise and answer questions about modality (such as whether conceivability entails possibility; cf., Chalmers 2002) in the transcendental context, which, of course, has tremendous consequences for how we approach metaphysical, epistemological, and normative considerations. How we

²¹ Husserl discussed “problematic possibilities” in the positional context. Their “problematic” status, however, is independent of the positional commitment. What renders these possibilities problematic is their appurtenance to a conceptually organized conceivability system, which may very well be non-positional.

²² Scientific endeavors, which are positional, have their respective conceivability systems. While different in terms of epistemic and normative commitments, both of these classes of conceivable possibilities are ‘problematic’ in Husserl’s sense.

²³ This ambiguity also remains in the literature, which fails to clearly delineate the distinctions among different kinds of possibilities by occasionally collapsing even real and free possibilities (cf. Mohanty 1984).

understand “necessity” and “impossibility” is likewise different in the transcendental sense (i.e., not logically or metaphysically, but structurally and constitutively).

Returning to exemplarity, we must add that it, too, depends on the conceptual apparatus in place and that it only makes sense to speak of “exemplars” in a motivated, epistemic context. *All exemplars belong to some conceptual system.* If systems overlap to some extent, the shared exemplars will mirror this overlap. This is so because exemplarity—as opposed to say, mere illustration (*Veranschaulichung*)—lies in the example’s (*Beispiel*) relationship to a universal, namely, its instantiation (*Vereinzelung*) of it (Hua IX, p. 73).²⁴ The variants of transcendental eidetic variation are exemplars insofar as we engage them *as instances* of the essential structures of the noetic–noematic correlation under investigation (cf. Husserl 1948, p. 413). Furthermore, we constitute exemplars differently in distinct attitudes (the same holds for illustrative examples). In the positional non-theoretical attitude, exemplar constitution necessarily depends on abstractive indeterminacy—passively or actively. In the imaginative non-positional attitude, exemplar constitution may draw from positional conceptual resources—may even be abstractively constituted—but it need not. Further, free variation would count as “variation of exemplars” only in the context of a universalizing motivated endeavor, such as transcendental eidetics. Thus, “free exemplar variation” occurs only if certain concepts, classifications, and principles are in place on a background motivated toward the grasp of universality rather than individuality. Such variation can engage predicates and relations at different indeterminacy levels *without the aid of positional abstractive processes*; this is precisely Husserl’s point when distinguishing between eidetic variation and abstraction (1948, §87d). It will also exhibit epistemic conflicts in virtue of the concepts, rules, and motivations in place. Thus, eidetic variation is not conflict-free, but this conflict does not occur in light of positional epistemic and normative commitments.²⁵ In fact, the epistemic success of ideation depends on the occurrence of conflict (*Deckung im Widerstreit*), which makes possible the intuition of essential structural moments as necessary (i.e., their elimination is inconceivable).

Imagining processes are structurally independent of previous positional typification and conceptualization. Their possibilities may indeed be neutralized real objects or objects that could in principle be positionally experienced. For the most part, Husserl’s analyses and their subsequent treatments in the literature view imagined objects as falling into one of these two categories.²⁶ On this view, the imagination is a kind of “quasi-perception” (Hua XXIII, Nos. 2b, 4)—a givenness

²⁴ For an interesting discussion of exemplarity—albeit one that still falls short of qualifying the “purity” and “freedom” of imaginative possibilities—see Ferencz-Flatz (2011).

²⁵ Husserl himself came close to spelling this out on a couple of occasions in his early 1920 s work on the imagination (cf., Hua XXIII, pp. 547, 563). He could not have taken this thought to fruition, however, without his historical considerations of the 1930s.

²⁶ Viewing the imagination as merely one presentifying act among many is also the dominant view in the literature (for instance: Marbach 1993, 2013; Jansen 2005a, b, 2010; Elliott 2005; Bernet 2002; Volonté 1997). I argue elsewhere (Aldea 2012, Part I) against this view, and for an understanding of the imagination as a level of consciousness able to sustain all acts apart from external perception.

of objects “as if” they were real (Hua XXIII, No.1, pp. 12, 58ff., and §§34–52). Given the modal framework discussed here, however, it is clear that this does not exhaust the intuitional span of imagining consciousness, which can and does surpass the modal framework of perceptual positionality. That this pervasive taxonomy fails to identify other kinds of imaginative possibilities is undoubtedly the case. Non-abstractive imaginative indeterminacy and free variation clearly point beyond what this classification is able to accomplish.

All of this is important in (at least) a threefold way: first, we can now question the widely held view that the imagination is “dependent” on perception, or the *unqualified* view that the imagination plays a role in positional modalizing processes such as real variation (Hua XXIII, No. 20; also Hua XXXI, pp. 10–14); second, and in a related vein, we can explore the ways in which the imagination, unlike imaging consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*), is not bound to solely intending spatially determined objects, as I have argued elsewhere (Aldea 2013); and third, we can analyze the role free imaginative possibilities play in methods such as eidetic variation in a manner that does not simply equate eidetic variation with free variation.

Lingering questions still demand our attention here: How are we to understand Husserl’s discussions of exemplarity, indeterminacy, arbitrariness, neutrality, and freedom in the context of eidetic variation given the distinctions drawn above, and given our previous remarks regarding the role played by types and empirical concepts in eidetic modalization? What guarantees the presuppositionless stance of transcendental eidetic variation, given its reliance on uncritically sedimented knowledge?

6 Eidetic Variation and Teleological–Historical Reflection: A Relation Rethought

The incipient stages of eidetic variation are reliant on types and concepts. The process of eidetic variation cannot commence or sustain its engagement of variants understood as instances of a universal without previous typification and conceptualization. In other words, previous non-theoretical generalization and classification—and their respective positional modal spheres—are conditions for the possibility of eidetic variation. Let us further nuance this claim in light of what we have uncovered with respect to free imaginative possibilities.

According to Husserl, the initial stages of the process of eidetic variation are guided by an original exemplar (*Ausgangsexempel*), which functions as a model (*Vorbild*) for the constitution of subsequent variants. As I argue above, this original exemplar cannot be the ontically and doxically neutralized individual experience and its correlate (cf. Lohmar 2005, p. 86). Individuals strictly construed, independent of any considerations regarding their type, cannot sustain the constitution of eidetic variants as instances of a universal. And yet any phenomenological study begins with individual experience. This latter evokes the relevant types and/or concepts. Types, which organize conceivability systems, carry over their modal potency into the post-reductions phenomenological attitude.

What makes the exemplar “original” is its constitution based on the conceptual background made available by types (and/or respective empirical concepts). This

exemplar, while not itself abstractively constituted, owes its indeterminacy, and consequently its universality-generating potency in the eidetic context, to previous abstractive processes. As such, it is reliant on positional classifying resources as well as sedimented epistemic styles. Due to this reliance, this exemplar is not, strictly speaking, either arbitrary or free. This original exemplar must be modally “heavy” if it is to sustain the constitution of subsequent variants, which in turn is to eventually lead us to a mapping of the essential, structural moments of the meaning-constituting process under investigation. However, while this model informs the constitution of the subsequent variants, it does not bind them. It has, as the starting point of the eidetic process, a solely *suggestive* function.²⁷ The indeterminacy of the eidetic variants is “imaginative” rather than “abstractive” because they are neither committed to individuality strictly construed nor to positional epistemic and normative standards. Imaginative variation is thus a potent tool, one which eidetic variation employs, in identifying, delineating, and surpassing deeply ingrained boundaries that dictate what we deem knowable and worthy of further epistemic pursuit. But how are we to distinguish eidetic variation from free imaginative variation?

All too often, free variation and eidetic variation are conflated. This is not surprising given that Husserl himself rarely attempted to draw a distinction between them and often used them interchangeably. We now have rigorous resources to differentiate between these two processes. First, we should stress that the distinction between free imaginative and eidetic variation is one of motivation and teleology. As Husserl himself shows, free variation is in principle without motivation (although for the most part, free variation unfolds, as we have seen, in a motivated context). Eidetic variation is motivated by its eidetic goal: the grasping of the essential structures of meaning constitution. This being said, what we have uncovered about possibility and conceivability grants further criteria for this important distinction.

As shown above, conceptualization is necessary for organizing any modal system irrespective of ontic commitment. Epistemic motivations necessarily bind conceivability systems. Thus, strictly speaking, a non-motivated free variation would unfold without commitment to any well-delineated conceptual and normative resources. Such a process would be “arbitrary” in the full sense of the term—a veritable “free play” of fully indeterminate possibilities (cf., Hua XXIII, pp. 514, 553). This is what Husserl’s claim regarding the non-teleological, non-motivational character of the imagination implies. However, what we have uncovered about variation—*any variation*—as implicitly relying on some conceptual system (positional or not) makes this claim about the “full arbitrariness” of the imagination suspicious. It challenges Husserl’s claim that free imaginative play is a “variation” at all. Strictly speaking, there is no “fully free” variation.

Imaginative possibilities are “exemplary” only as parts of a broader motivational and conceptual context—whatever that may be. This is precisely the case with the variation at work in eidetic inquiry. As a non-theoretical ability we have, we can

²⁷ While able to guide the formation of variants, the type or concept, through the original example, does not alone suffice for the delineation of necessary as opposed to contingent properties. Variation must thus draw from other resources in order to perform the shift to the invariant.

relocate it in a theoretical–methodological context such as transcendental eidetics. Here, imaginative variation is not fully free or fully arbitrary since it takes up the motivation and principles (i.e., methodological rules) of the eidetic project. This does not solely affect the teleology of the modalizing process, but its structure and resources as well. For instance, in our example of the phenomenological analysis of perception, the process draws not only from natural as well as scientific typification²⁸ and conceptualization, but also from previous phenomenological studies and the concepts they gradually consolidate. The epistemic and normative apparatus at work here (in its overall style), which is responsible for the constitution of the original exemplar and of the incipient stages of the varying process, is thus enhanced and deeply informed by the theoretical as well as non-theoretical background and commitments of the phenomenologist in question. The variants are exemplars insofar as they are intended *as* conceivable instantiations of the essence qua ideal possibility. What is thus deemed conceivable (*denkbar*) here depends on this background.²⁹ The success of eidetic variation—i.e., the intuition of the a priori, necessary structures of the noetic–noematic correlation under investigation through a synthetic coincidence in conflict—depends on critically drawing on this background in a manner able to negotiate the pitfall of blind epistemic borrowing.

The neutralization performed by the reductions, minimally construed as the bracketing of ontic and doxic commitments, is also a shift in modalizing abilities. The freedom attained through the reductions is thus not solely a *negative* freedom from protodoxic binds, but also a *positive* freedom to engage different kinds of possibilities in a radically new manner. A more robust understanding of the reductions (and of the subsequently attained “neutrality”) must include these modal considerations. It must also account for the synthetic-historical processes of conceptualization across the empirical–transcendental divide. Types and concepts play an important role in eidetic variation synthetically construed. Once we bring historical sedimentation into the picture—especially the strong hold of epistemic styles and the wide reach of covert theoretical decisions and interests—the role of conceptualization becomes even more prominent. Such valuable information pertaining to “our history,” to use Husserl’s words, already informs our inquiring practices—be they positive scientific or philosophical. If we are to become aware of that which latently motivates and determines our theoretical work, including what we deem knowable and conceivable, not to mention what we consider appropriate and reliable methodologies, we must self-reflectively tap into this reservoir of knowledge already guiding us.

In his discussion of the presuppositions guiding Galileo’s work Husserl repeatedly uses the language of types and styles in order to emphasize the hidden sediments of meaning motivating this modern quest: “The things of the intuited surrounding world [...] have, so to speak, their ‘habits’—they behave similarly under typically similar circumstances [...] Thus our empirically intuited

²⁸ While Husserl discusses typification in the context of natural external perception, passive processes of conceptual sedimentation occur in the scientific context as well.

²⁹ Because of this, transcendental–phenomenological critique must examine both natural and scientific epistemic styles and sedimentations in their intricate dynamic of transfers across non-theoretical and theoretical boundaries.

surrounding world has an empirical over-all style” (Hua VI, p. 28/31). The method of historically reflecting back is meant help us “strike through the crust of the externalized ‘historical facts’ of philosophical history, interrogating, exhibiting, and testing their inner meaning and hidden teleology” (Hua VI, p. 16/18). This “striking through the crust of historical facts” is as dynamic as sedimentation itself. It requires the zigzag (*Zickzack*) only a hermeneutical method would exhibit. Only a method aiming specifically at unearthing the manner in which sedimented types and concepts have come to delineate what is conceivable and knowable *in the manner that they have* can mitigate the danger of uncritically committing to epistemic, normative, and methodological resources.

According to Husserl, historical reflection is “a looking back and looking forward” able to expose, through historical leaps (*historische Sprünge*), motivational contexts pointing beyond themselves to the a priori structure of meaning constitution itself (Hua VI, p. 59/58). These motivational contexts are veritable depth problems, whose styles covertly determine entire spheres of knowledge acquisition, conceptualization, and conceivability (Hua VI, p. 365/353). Once brought to light, their exemplary meaning (*exemplarische Bedeutung*) suggests itself as potential guide for eidetic inquiries (*ibid.*). Like types, depth problems are not free possibilities; nor are they free variants in a strict eidetic sense. As Carr (1974, p. 120) rightly points out, depth problems are not arbitrary; they belong to a well-delineated historical context. What makes them particularly valuable in the eidetic process is, in my view, their systemic modal potency. Since they (normatively) dictate the standards for conceptualization, and since concepts organize systems of conceivable possibilities, depth problems determine not only these systems’ boundaries of knowability but also their levels of elasticity and resistance when faced with epistemic challenges and conflicts. Thus, once illuminated by historical reflection and neutrally taken up in phenomenological inquiry these depth problems—such as the mathematization of nature—provide valuable contextual information for the constitution of the original exemplar, which jumpstarts the varying process and conditions its epistemic success (i.e., the synthesis in conflict that affords us the eidetic insight).

I argued above that the “original exemplar” is a *model* insofar as it guides the formation of subsequent eidetic variants with the aid of (now neutralized) positional resources. In fact, the only way to stimulate the constitution of the series of variants is to view them as instances of a certain universal, which can only occur at the early stages of the process through previously sedimented concepts. Thus, we have two senses of exemplarity at work here: the exemplarity of the model as *guide* (abstractively indeterminate), and the exemplarity of the variants as *eidetically arbitrary* (non-abstractively indeterminate) instances of an ideal possibility. In constituting the *model*, we are bound by previous positional typification as well as non-theoretical and theoretical conceptualizations. In constituting the *variants*, while structurally guided by the model’s modal potency, we are able to engage predicates and relations outside of the natural and/or scientific conceivability scope it initially suggests. To accomplish this feat, however, imagination alone does not suffice. A clear delineation of the modal boundaries of the epistemic style pertaining to the initial individual experience is also necessary. And this can only occur with

the aid of teleological–historical reflection. To imaginatively grasp the universal essence, we must think through the thick crust of historical sedimentation. Thus, we restrict the “neutrality,” “freedom,” and “arbitrariness” of the transcendental eidetic process. They all depend on the success of this critical reflection.

Successful phenomenological–transcendental inquiry comprehensively works toward mapping how the correlates of our experiences modalize across relevant conceivability systems given sedimented epistemic and normative parameters. In our example, the inquirer focuses on how perception, as distinct kind of presentation, gives access to the kinds of objects that it does (i.e., spatio-temporally determined objects intuited *as* real and actual) in light of the conceivability system delineated by the historically-embedded epistemic style pertaining to embodied experience of factual reality. If critically engaged through teleological–historical reflection, types and concepts thus solidify the transcendental focus on *how* experiences give their objects as well as the modal dimension of meaning constitution itself. The latter is inextricably linked to conceptualization practices and overarching styles. The more we know about these epistemic systems—including the covert transfers across *prima facie* well-defined, impervious boundaries (such as the one separating the theoretical and non-theoretical)—the more potent eidetic variation becomes in identifying, challenging, and surpassing deeply-ingrained beliefs and assumptions. It appears the relationship between teleological–historical reflection and the eidetic method is more hermeneutical than sequential. The former continuously informs and is informed by the eidetic process; it is thus much more than an “introduction” (Hua VI, p. xiv, fn.3/3, fn.1) to transcendental phenomenological inquiry. Together, these methods are able to perform a distinctive phenomenological–transcendental critique of knowledge acquisition, including phenomenology’s own accomplishments.

To access the transcendental attitude critically construed, the reductions alone do not suffice as propaedeutic measure. Beyond immediately bracketing basic attitudinal commitments, the phenomenologist must also critically engage the relevant, yet covert, epistemic and normative practices, in their history of sedimentation. Thus, we attain the *neutrality* and *theoretical freedom* of phenomenology not solely through sweeping bracketings, but through a resolute transcendental self-reflective engagement of “our” epistemic and normative history. Needless to say, this is, as Husserl rightly pointed out, an infinite task (Hua VI, §§8–9). Nevertheless, styles, depth problems, and the very systematicity of knowledge acquisition through conceptual consolidation provide shortcuts able to sustain this inquiry into the universal structures of meaning-constitution. It is in this sense that “exemplary models” are, as Husserl notes, “conceptual intermediaries” in the eidetic process aiming at the a priori of history (Hua VI, p. 132/129). Despite the historical volatility of epistemic accomplishments—be they theoretical or everyday—Husserl never ceased to hold the view that “[t]his world is historically changing in its particular styles but [is] invariant in its invariant structure of generality” (Hua VI, pp. 360–361/347).

Examining the roles played by conceptualization and modalization in Husserl’s transcendental idealism dissolves one of the major tensions that permeate the *Crisis*, namely, the tension between phenomenology as transcendental eidetics and

Husserl's historical reflection. This tension is an apparent one. The collaboration between these methods not only secures the possibility of the phenomenological project; it also safeguards its freedom of inquiry. Finally, this collaboration opens new venues for examining the specific ways in which phenomenology can secure and maintain its relevance for and contributions to contemporary positive scientific studies of consciousness. The openness of phenomenology toward scientific work is thus a structural, necessary, and methodological one. Phenomenology must examine all sedimented and active epistemic styles pertaining to its specific investigations. Current work seeking to show that a dialogue between phenomenology and the positive sciences of consciousness is possible need not view naturalization as *the only way* in which the former could be salvaged as “relevant,” that is, able and willing to contribute to as well as learn from the positive sciences.³⁰ Transcendental phenomenology is always already open in virtue of its method and critical stance.

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³⁰ Cf., Petitot and Varela et al. (1999).

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