

## Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty on the World of Experience

The topic of world is central in phenomenology.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, phenomenology thematizes the world that we straightforwardly experience in everyday life and aims to bring this experience into the philosophical purview. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, phenomenology is “a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ prior to reflection . . . and whose entire effort is to rediscover this naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxx). But despite this shared focus on the world of experience, authors working in the phenomenological tradition make markedly different claims about the world and our experience of it. This chapter discusses a number of divergent claims about the world that can be found in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty and argues that some of Husserl’s claims with which the later phenomenologists take issue are motivated by one of Husserl’s central philosophical preoccupations.

There is much that Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty agree on when it comes to the thematic of world. All three conceive of the world as phenomenon—that is, the world that and as it is disclosed in experience—and maintain that this world is nothing other than the world itself.<sup>2</sup> Further, they all start from our experience of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ferrarin (2015a and b) has recently developed how the world is already prominent in Kant’s work and how both Husserl and Heidegger overlook this due to their focus on the transcendental aesthetic and analytic rather than the dialectic. As he points out, the dialectic and the world as an idea are, however, discussed by Eugen Fink. Patočka (2016: 60–3) also discusses the Kantian notion of the world as regulative idea, while placing it in a broader historical context and contrasting it to the phenomenological treatment of world.

<sup>2</sup> Both Overgaard (2004) and Welton (2000) provide extensive accounts of the similarities and differences between Husserl’s and Heidegger’s notions of the world. The literature on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is somewhat split in that some read Merleau-Ponty as critical of Husserl and others read his phenomenology as a continuation of Husserl’s—especially the so-called later Husserl. The latter approach is taken by Barbaras (1998: 81–94, 124–5), Heinämaa (2002

world with the twofold aim of describing (1) the structure of the experience in which different kinds of worldly entities and the world are disclosed and (2) the structural features of different kinds of worldly entities and the world. In this way, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty all take up and modify the transcendental project inaugurated by Kant, for whom the conditions of possibility of the experience of objects are conditions of possibility of the objects of experience. Signaling this continuity and break with Kant, they all use Kantian language when characterizing their own philosophical projects—specifically, as transcendental phenomenology (Husserl), fundamental ontology or existential analytic of Dasein (Heidegger), and a phenomenology of the transcendental field (Merleau-Ponty).<sup>3</sup>

In order to show how a shared focus on the world and important points of agreement is compatible with different philosophical concerns that inform some striking disagreements about the world, in what follows I focus on how the early Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty criticize Husserl's account of experience and world. Specifically, after providing the general outlines of Husserl's account of experience and world, I discuss how both Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of our experience of the world challenge Husserl's assertion of the possibility of a worldless consciousness in the first book of *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*; how Heidegger's discussion of the world entails a rejection of Husserl's claim that the world is at bottom nature; and how Merleau-Ponty's brief remarks on fact and essence in

---

and 2015), Smith (2004), and Zahavi (2002). Toadvine (2002) provides a very helpful chronological overview of Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Husserl's thought.

<sup>3</sup> There are number of recent edited volumes that focus on the ways in which phenomenology inherits and transforms Kant's transcendental project. See Crowell and Malpas (2007); Gardner and Grist (2015); and Hartimo, Heinämaa, and Miettinen (2015). Jansen (2014 and 2015), Kern (1964), Nenon (2008), and Zahavi (2015) all focus on the similarities and differences between Kant and Husserl. A discussion of the relation between Kant and Heidegger is provided by, for example, Crowell (2015) and Han-Pile (2005). The relation between Kant and Merleau-Ponty is the focus of, for example, Gardner (2007) and Matherne (2016).

*Phenomenology of Perception* put pressure on Husserl's account of the necessary structure of the world. In concluding, and as a propaedeutic to adjudicating these disputes, I aim to show why Husserl makes these contested claims. Specifically, I suggest that it is Husserl's commitment to accounting for the phenomenon of reason—that is, the first-person awareness of the difference between veridical and non-veridical experiences—that motivates him to make the claims about our experience and world with which the later phenomenologists take issue.<sup>4</sup>

## 1 Husserl on the Experience of the World

Husserl brings the world as phenomenon (the world that and how it is experienced) into view by means of the often-discussed method of *epoché* or bracketing. The phenomenological method of bracketing consists in putting out of play the validity of any scientific, philosophical, or everyday convictions about the world and ourselves within it. The first step in the bracketing, which Husserl sometimes calls the “life-world *epoché*” (Husserl 1970: 137), specifically consists in bracketing scientific convictions about the world. Bracketing these kinds of theories, Husserl argues that it is the world itself that appears in perception and that it is this world that is investigated and understood by natural science (e.g., Husserl 1970: 48–53, 127–32; 2012: 262–3; 2014: 94–9). In doing so, he challenges the view that the world that and how it appears to us in everyday life is

---

<sup>4</sup> This is just one way of characterizing the source of the disagreement between these phenomenologists. Bernet (1990) and Moran (2000) focus on the way in which Heidegger radicalizes the problematic of intentionality, and elsewhere Bernet (1988) treats the relation between Husserl and Heidegger from the perspective of the problematic of time. Crowell (2013: 64–77) focuses on the differences in subject matter and method between Husserl and Heidegger and points to Husserl's rationalism as a matter of contention (2013: 68–9). Overgaard (2004: 2) emphasizes their “differences concerning the interpretation of intra-mundane entities,” which is something I consider later in this chapter. And, finally, Tugendhat (1967) focuses on how Husserl and Heidegger differ when it comes to the issue of truth and the idea of critical self-responsibility. On the relation between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Barbaras discusses the critique of Husserl's objectivism in Merleau-Ponty's work (1998: 63–79). Smith (2007: 16–20) argues that despite pervasive agreement, Merleau-Ponty conceives of the body as an existential unity, which he diagnoses as being at the root of a number of differences.

different from the “real world” that causally brings about a representation in us of this world.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of the method of bracketing, however, is not just to bring the world that we experience in everyday life into view; rather, it is to make possible the development of a descriptive science that Husserl calls pure phenomenology. Pure phenomenology describes the necessary structure of our experience of the world, and, as a theory of constitution, it describes *how* a world can appear in these experiences. While in our everyday life we are always already aware of the world (Husserl 1970: 144), according to Husserl, an additional methodological step is required in order to arrive at the point of view from which we can provide a phenomenological account of how this experience is possible. Concretely, after bracketing our everyday beliefs concerning the world that we experience, we are to subsequently engage in what Husserl calls a reduction from this world back to our experience of this world (Husserl 1970: 148–52) to describe how structural features of consciousness such as time-consciousness, kinesthetic awareness, association, recollection, and the awareness of others make possible the appearance of an abiding world to consciousness. What is more, this phenomenology of constitution is in turn a prelude to a phenomenology of reason, or a theory of rational constitution, which uses the phenomenological descriptions of the structure of experience as the basis for an account of the distinction between veridical and non-veridical experiences (e.g., Husserl 1960: 56–7)—a distinction without which one cannot claim to have an experience of a mind-independent, actual (*wirkliche*) world.

---

<sup>5</sup> I have addressed Husserl’s arguments against the distinction between the phenomenal world and the world in itself as presented in the first book of *Ideas* elsewhere (Jacobs 2015). Jansen (2014) has provided an account of Husserl’s non-representationalism in relation to Kant. Patočka (2016: 6–19) places the problem of unity of the world—that is, of the natural or lifeworld and the world of science—in an even broader historical perspective.

Husserl's phenomenological account of how we can experience an actual world begins with an account of perception and how this perception can be veridical or not. He starts with perception and not judgment, because in his view a predicative judgment that is directed at a state of affairs spontaneously determines something that is always already available or received in perceptual experience, which is a pre-predicative experience (e.g., Husserl 1973: 87–91).<sup>6</sup> Further, according to Husserl our concrete perceptions are never just of things with natural properties but always of things that are afforded with evaluative and practical significance, and this evaluative and practical dimension of perception can likewise be veridical or not (e.g., Husserl 2014: 231–4).<sup>7</sup>

According to Husserl, our perceptual experiences are, like all other intentional acts (e.g., judgments, but also emotions and volitions), *takings* (*Stellungnahmen*), which means that they posit (*setzen*) the world being a certain way. Specifically, perceptions always afford something with a certain sense (*Sinn*), where “sense” refers to *how* something is intended (i.e., *as* this or that) (e.g., Husserl 2014: 173–80, 255–8), and this sense can, but need not, be propositionally articulated (e.g., Husserl 2014: 246).<sup>8</sup> Perceptions, insofar as they posit something and, hence, make a claim (i.e., that something is indeed how one takes it to be), can bear out (*ausweisen*) or not. A positing bears out when something manifests itself (*sich gibt*) in person or in the flesh (*leibhaft*) as being how one takes it to be.

---

<sup>6</sup> Staiti (in this volume) elaborates pre-predicative intentionality and its relation to predicative judgment in Husserl's *Experience and Judgment*. Pradelle (2013: 366–7) describes in reverse order the way in which predicative judgment is founded on perception.

<sup>7</sup> Space does not permit me to further elaborate on Husserl's account of the emotions and volitions here. Drummond (2004 and 2013) and Rinofner-Kreidl (2013) provide compelling renderings of Husserl's account of the emotions. Rinofner-Kreidl (2015) and Drummond (this volume) provide an account of Husserl on reason in the cognitive, evaluative, and practical spheres.

<sup>8</sup> Drummond (2003) focuses on perception and categorial articulation. Moran (in this volume) introduces Husserl's distinction of the positing (or quality) and sense (or matter) of intentional acts.

Husserl's introduction of the notion of sense, however, immediately raises a question concerning the origin of sense. That is, what makes it possible that a world can appear to us with a certain sense in perceptual experience? Husserl's talk of "sense bestowal" (*Sinngebung*) (e.g., Husserl 1960: 106; 2014: 102, 174) might seem to suggest that he considers sense to be something actively imposed by a subject on an otherwise unorganized or meaningless manifold of sensuous impressions—hence making possible the experience of something *as* something.<sup>9</sup> However, as his soon-to-be published *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins* show, as early as the time of the first book of *Ideas*, Husserl develops an account of how the perceptual field at any moment is already structured by a passively functioning form of association, which is presupposed for any attentive awareness of worldly things and their subsequent predicative articulation (Husserl 1966: 174–221; 1973, 72–6). Further, Husserl also provides analyses of how one's present experience associatively awakens past experiences (Husserl 1973, 121–4; 2001a: 221–42) and what one has appropriated from others through language, which further accounts for how we can experience something as a certain type of thing and ultimately how we can experience a socio-historical world.<sup>10</sup> It is primarily because sense is afforded in passivity in these ways that it is misguided to understand *Sinngebung* as an active bestowal of sense.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> This is also suggested by Husserl's talk in *Logical Investigations* and other works that sensations or *hyle* are "apprehended" (*aufgefasst*). Moran (in this volume) discusses this further.

<sup>10</sup> I have discussed the way in which our current experience of the world is shaped by our socio-historical context in more detail elsewhere (Jacobs 2016a and 2016b).

<sup>11</sup> Hence, Dahlstrom's translation of *Sinngebung* as "affordance of sense" (Husserl 2014) is preferable to "sense bestowal." Husserl does acknowledge a specific form of activity at work in how something appears in perception insofar as we take what appears to be actual—which is an activity he calls *receptivity* to differentiate it from the passivity that characterizes the affordance of sense and the spontaneity of predicative judgment. I have developed this more fully elsewhere (Jacobs 2016a).

## 2 Husserl's Phenomenological Ontology of the World

While Husserl's phenomenological description of the structures of our experience aims to account for how we can experience an actual world, he regularly declares that he also aims to develop ontologies of different kinds of worldly entities and the world itself from the point of view of his phenomenology—where this ontology would be a science of the necessary structure or essential features of different kinds of objects we experience as well as the world that is experienced. Differently stated, Husserl does not only want to provide an account of the structure of our experience of the world; he also wants to provide an account of the structure of the world of experience from the point of view of his phenomenology. As he writes: “As developed systematically and fully, transcendental phenomenology would be *ipso facto* the true and *genuine universal ontology*” (Husserl 1960: 155). And he claims that phenomenology and ontology taken together constitute the core of a *phenomenological* metaphysics, which, by providing the epistemological and ontological complement to the empirical sciences of the world, would provide a comprehensive account of this world (e.g., Husserl 1956: 367–9; 1960: 155; 2008b, 97–9, 137). That is, Husserl is of the conviction that “genuine philosophy, the idea of which is to realize the idea of absolute knowledge, is rooted in pure phenomenology” (Husserl: 2014: 7).

However, and for a number of reasons, it is not immediately clear how Husserl's phenomenology could also be ontology, or how a philosophy, including ontology, could be rooted in his phenomenology. First, the idea that the development of ontology requires that we take up the phenomenological perspective might seem to be contradicted by Husserl's own explicit bracketing of all ontological considerations under the *epoché*

(Husserl 2014: 109–11). Second, the seeming contingency of association with which Husserl accounts for the genesis of sense in his account of how an experience of the world is possible might seem to pose a problem for the development of an ontology of this world, which, on Husserl's own terms, would describe not the contingent but rather the necessary structures of things and the world. Third, even if we can make sense of such an ontology of the world of experience, Husserl himself on other occasions clearly states that ontology (the science that spells out those features without which certain entities would not be what they are) is to be distinguished from phenomenology (which describes our experience of different kinds of entities) (e.g., Husserl 1980: 65–79; 2008a: 283, 692; 2008b: 428–31, 425; 2014: 308). And fourth, that phenomenology and ontology are different scientific enterprises and that we do not need phenomenology to do ontology is further suggested by the fact that a number of ontological disciplines were readily available, according to Husserl, before the development of pure phenomenology (e.g., formal ontologies such as number theory and material ontologies such as geometry).

Nevertheless, how ontology could in Husserl's view fall within the purview of phenomenology might become clearer if one recalls that for Husserl worldly objects are in principle accessible to veridical experiences of these objects (e.g., Husserl 1960: 83–8; 1970: 165–7; 2006: 54; 2014: 96). More broadly stated, the world is phenomenal for Husserl—not in the sense of being *merely* phenomenal but in the sense of being in principle accessible to consciousness. For this reason, any ontology of this world cannot but be articulated from within our experience of the world, and ontology is always a phenomenological ontology or an ontology of the world of experience (and in this sense



different from the ontologies that were the target of Kant's critique). Thus, even if the development of phenomenology requires an initial bracketing of ontological considerations, phenomenology and ontology are correlative sciences in the sense that the first describes our experience of the world of which the second spells out the necessary structure. What this also means is that the necessary structures of consciousness will correlate to the necessary structures of the world that discloses itself to consciousness. So, concretely, Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness and kinesthetic experience describe how an abiding world can manifest itself to consciousness, and this world that is in principle accessible to a spatio-temporal experience of it is necessarily spatio-temporal (2014: 299).

This, however, leads to the second aforementioned concern: Husserl, in addition to time-consciousness and kinesthetic experience, also calls on association to account for how a world of different kinds of abiding individual entities (e.g., things, organisms, and artworks) discloses itself to us. But the very nature of association—a seemingly empirical mechanism of contingently pairing like with like—seems to be in tension with Husserl's ontological ambitions. That is, even if Husserl's ontology is an ontology of the world of experience, this ontology is not just a description of the actual world that appears but a description of the necessary structures without which a world and specific kinds of objects within it would not be what they are. In other words, for Husserl, ontology is a science of the pure essence of the world and different kinds of entities (Husserl 2014: 20–2). But this claim that the world of experience has necessary structures beyond time and space might seem to be in tension with Husserl having association play the leading role in his account of how a structured world of different kinds of abiding entities appears in

experience. To understand how Husserl's claim that it is association that accounts for how a world appears in perception is compatible with his claim that there are necessary features of the world of experience, it is important to note that, in Husserl's view, association is grounded in the specificity of what appears, and this specificity allows us to understand how Husserl can claim that certain ways that the world appears are necessary.

Consider, for example, the organization of the perceptual field at a given moment. Husserl points out that in order for something in my present perceptual field to inductively associate with something that I have previously experienced, and in this way to appear as such and such, the perceptual field must already have some structure (Husserl 2001a: 166, 505). According to Husserl this structure is made possible by a more original form of association by similarity (*Ähnlichkeit*) within the present (Husserl 2001a: 175, 199, 510). Specifically, he asserts that it is due to fusion (*Verschmelzung*) and saliency (due to *Kontrast*, *Abhebung*, and *Sonderung*) that something in the field of perception can stand out in the first place and associate with something I have experienced in the past. The possibility of fusion and saliency is in turn grounded in the specific characteristics of what appears (e.g., the specific color of what appears allows for something to stand out against a background) (Husserl 2001a: 192, 108–9, 497–8). Now, while the specific features with which something within my perceptual field appears are contingent (e.g., this color rather than another color appears), what appears at the same time also has necessary features (e.g., something extended that appears in my field of perception necessarily appears as colored) (Husserl 2001a: 236–7; 2012: 155).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Jansen (2015) provides a detailed discussion of Husserl's account of the necessary order of what appears in contrast to Kant.

More generally, Husserl identifies an “ontological a priori” (Husserl 2008a: 491), a “concrete logic” (Husserl 2012: 333), “an a priori style” (Husserl 2001c: 118), and an “a priori” of the lifeworld (Husserl 1960: 140). Correspondingly, the ontology of worldly objects and the world is a material ontology that formulates synthetic or material apriori laws (Husserl 1973: 339–40, 352–4; 1980: 29–32; 2001b: 19–22; 2014: 31–2).<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, the material a priori is different from the logical or formal a priori, which applies to anything whatsoever (Husserl 2001c: 103–12, 120; 2012: 42–3, 101). The formal a priori is delimited by the structure of (empty) thought (Husserl 2008b: 290, 327) and, hence, does not in itself require a consideration of the world of experience even though an inquiry into how thought arises from perception would. On the other hand, the ontology of the lifeworld is also different from the material ontological sciences of the world scientifically understood that are historically available to us (e.g., geometry). Unlike geometry, the ontology of the life-world does not describe exact or mathematical essences; it describes inexact essences (Husserl 1970: 25, 139–40) and proceeds from the world of experience instead of idealizations of this world like geometry does (Husserl 1960: 24–8).<sup>14</sup>

Thus far I have elaborated how, for Husserl, an ontology of the world can be developed from within the experience that is described in phenomenology. However, for Husserl, the phenomenological description of our experience of the world also more positively contributes to the development of ontology. There are at least two reasons why Husserl believes that the phenomenological perspective is not just a correlate to but also a prerequisite for the development of an ontology of the world of experience. First, as I

---

<sup>13</sup> Benoist (1995), Drummond (1995), De Palma (2014 and 2015), and Tugendhat (1967: 163–5) discuss Husserl’s notion of material a priori in more detail.

<sup>14</sup> Sowa (2010) provides a detailed reconstruction of Husserl’s ontology of the life-world.

started out discussing, for Husserl the first step of the so-called epoché is to bracket our scientific understanding of reality and in this way to bring into view the world of everyday life. By bracketing our natural-scientific understanding of the world and bringing the world of experience into view, Husserl puts himself into a position to correct a certain ontological myopia that exclusively focuses on material nature (and a specific natural-scientific understanding of it at that). Indeed, the world as we experience it in everyday life is not just an extended nature but a world in which we encounter and interact with objects and individuals with evaluative and practical significance.<sup>15</sup> Second, Husserl believes that his phenomenological descriptions of our experience of the world of everyday life in all its concreteness can also contribute to the development of previously overlooked a priori sciences—specifically, those sciences that spell out the structure of minds and societies, hence providing psychology and the so-called human sciences with insights into their basic concepts and ontological commitments concerning the kind of object they are dealing with (Husserl 2014: 304–5). This shows that a phenomenological description of our experience of the world does indeed have bearing on questions concerning the structure of worldly entities, which is an idea that is taken up and elaborated differently in Heidegger’s early writings that culminate in the publication of *Being and Time*, a work that critically targets Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, or descriptive science of our conscious experience of worldly objects and the world, and the correlated phenomenological ontology, or science of the structure of worldly objects and the world.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> See Staiti’s chapter in this volume for a more elaborate discussion of Husserl’s account of the life-world.

<sup>16</sup> Overgaard (2004: 61–2; 68; 74–7; 79–82; 90–5; 100–3; 205–6), McManus (2012: 11–37), and Zahavi (2003: 43–66) further elaborate on the relation between phenomenology and ontology in Heidegger and/or Husserl.

### 3 Heidegger and Husserl on Experience and World

Husserl's focus is on how a world appears for consciousness, and, insofar as it is the structures of this consciousness that make possible the appearance of a world, this consciousness can be characterized as transcendental consciousness. Further, as was discussed in section 33.2, the world that is disclosed by consciousness comes with its own structure that is described in a phenomenological ontology. Even though on Husserl's account transcendental consciousness is temporal, embodied, personal, and socio-historically embedded, and even though Husserl provides the outlines of an elaborate phenomenological ontology of a spatio-temporal socio-historical world, Heidegger objects in his early work that Husserl never sufficiently addressed the question of the being of this consciousness or the being of the world (e.g., Heidegger 1962: 150–3; 1985: 102–16).<sup>17</sup> Heidegger's analytic of Dasein, or his fundamental ontology, can be understood as redressing this supposed lack.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, Heidegger's fundamental ontology provides an account of the being that experiences the world by way of a description of the structures of Dasein (i.e., the so-called *existentialia*). In providing this account, Heidegger also aims to correct a general misconception of the world and its structure as a spatio-temporal causal nature in the history of modern philosophy up to Husserl.<sup>19</sup> And it is from this vantage point of an account of the structures of Dasein and world that Heidegger comes to criticize Husserl's account of both the subject that experiences the world and the structure of the world that is experienced in everyday life.

---

<sup>17</sup> I have discussed the embodied, personal, and socio-historical character of consciousness elsewhere (Jacobs 2015, 2016a, and 2016b). See, for example, Crowell (2013: 31–57), for an elaboration of a critique of Husserl from a Heideggerian perspective.

<sup>18</sup> Taminiaux (1991: 1–54) traces the transformation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology of consciousness into a fundamental ontology of Dasein.

<sup>19</sup> There is an ongoing and complex debate in the Heidegger scholarship concerning the status of Heidegger's claims about the ontological constitution of beings. See Han-Pile (2005) for an overview.

At least two of Heidegger's characterizations of Dasein can be understood as entailing criticisms of Husserl's account of consciousness and world. First, Heidegger defines Dasein as being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*) (Heidegger 1962: 78–90; 1985: 157–60), and, second, he contends that the fundamental mode of disclosing the world should be characterized in terms of the structure of care (*Sorge*) (Heidegger 1962: 235–44; 1985: 292–303). These claims pertaining to the kind of being that discloses a world respectively challenge Husserl's characterization of a consciousness that would conceivably not disclose a world in the first book of *Ideas* and his claim that the world of experience is at bottom nature.

Specifically, Heidegger's claim that Dasein is being-in-the-world means that it belongs to the being of Dasein to disclose a world (Heidegger 1985: 213–14), which is also why Heidegger speaks of a correlation (Heidegger 1985: 221) or “peculiar union (*Verklammerung*) of the being of the world with the being of Dasein” (Heidegger 1985: 202; see also 1962: 78, 247). Heidegger's characterization of Dasein as being-in-the-world can hence be read as directly challenging Husserl's infamous claim in section 49 of the first book of *Ideas* that, while the world is in principle accessible to consciousness, or in principle a correlate of an experience of this world, consciousness itself is not necessarily an experience of an actual world (Husserl 2014: 88–9). Instead, Husserl concedes the possibility of a consciousness for which no actual world appears—that is, for which the world is annihilated (*vernichtet*), which Husserl at times glosses as the imagined case in which we are confronted with an unorganized chaos of appearances (Husserl 1959: 48, 55, 64–67; Husserl 2008a: 227–8).

One of the things that the thought experiment of the annihilation of the world can be taken to show is that the experience of an actual world in perception amounts to more than the presence of sense-impressions or mere appearances. For a world to appear, the appearances must unfold following a regulated order (Husserl 2014: 88–9). So, for example, my kinesthetic movements would have to, in a reliable and regulated manner, be accompanied by changes in the visual field for me to experience something like an abiding spatio-temporal thing at rest. And it is these kinds of regularities that Husserl asks us to imaginatively vary in section 49, regularities that a phenomenology of our experience of the world would in turn describe. As such, the thought experiment of the annihilation of the world fits into the broader project of accounting for how a world can manifest itself in experience—which is a project that Husserl and Heidegger share. Nevertheless, Husserl’s thought experiment and his characterization of the relation between consciousness and world do indeed appear problematic in a number of respects, one of which is in line with Heidegger’s critique.

First, if anything, the thought experiment seems to describe a case of mental disintegration or death, or at least it appears to be indistinguishable from such cases in which even though my experience of the world has changed the world itself has remained unchanged—hence not warranting the conclusion of a worldless consciousness. At the same time, however, Husserl is adamant that what we are asked to imagine is nothing like a mental disintegration or death (Husserl 1959: 51–64; 2008a: 228; 2012: 358). Mental disintegration and death are worldly events. When considering consciousness as a worldly event, we usually consider our conscious experience to be causally brought about within the world (Husserl 2014: 94). In Husserl’s view, however, this is a

characterization of the relation between consciousness and world that, while perhaps empirically valid, already presupposes the validity of our positing an actual world that is intersubjectively accessible. To account for how such positing is possible and for how it can be valid, however, a transcendental approach is called for. And it is from this transcendental point of view that the thought experiment of the annihilation of the world is to be understood. Specifically, what the thought experiment asks us to imagine is a scenario in which our experience is such that the conditions for an actual world to appear do not obtain. Insofar as Heidegger himself rejects an account of Dasein as something in the world like an object is in the world (Heidegger 1962: 79; 1985: 257–8) and provides an account of how a world and worldly entities can be disclosed to Dasein, it seems that he would be in general agreement with Husserl on the distinction between an empirical and transcendental account of experience.

Another concern that one might have with the thought experiment of the annihilation of the world is that it appears to be in conflict with one of Husserl's own insights—that is, with the very idea of the aforementioned material a priori. For, if, for example, an appearing color is necessarily extended, the very idea of an *entirely* unorganized chaos of appearances would seem to be not even imaginable.<sup>20</sup> Further, Husserl's introduction of the conceivability of an annihilation would also seem to lend credence to understanding *Sinngebung* as an organizing activity that can be present (in the case of the awareness of a structured world) or absent (in the case of an annihilation of the world). However, this suggestion of an active sense-bestowal can be resisted if one addresses the apparent inconsistency by pointing out that one can still imagine a field of

---

<sup>20</sup> Majolino (2010 and 2016) discusses the limits of a variation of the world in more detail in the context of an interpretation of section 49 of the first book of *Ideas*.



appearance that is structured but that nevertheless does not allow for our anticipations pertaining to the actual world to bear out. And this is indeed what Husserl seems to have in mind with his thought experiment, which asks us to imagine a case in which “rough formations of unity would still come to be constituted to some extent—fleeting stopovers from intuitions that would be mere analogues of intuitions of a thing, since such analogues are entirely incapable of constituting sustained ‘realities,’ enduring unities that ‘exist in themselves, whether they are perceived or not’” (Husserl 2014: 88). That is, section 49 of the first book of *Ideas* is concerned with the existence of an actual world and with how its existence is not necessary (even if what appears happens to abide by some material a priori laws) (see also Husserl 1959: 48). And for our experience to be of an existing world, it is not enough that the field of perception appears with *some* order and regularity; it must also display the kind of order that allows us to identify and re-identify spatio-temporally enduring objects. However, understanding the thought experiment of the annihilation of the world in this way leads to another source of concern that also leads to what Heidegger is getting at with his characterization of the world.

By characterizing a situation in which no abiding objects appear as an annihilation of the *world*, Husserl appears to conflate worldly objects with the world, which is a distinction that Heidegger could not be clearer on (Heidegger 1962: 102, 246–7; 1985: 190). That is, while we might be able to imagine how our experience would fail to sustain a positing of abiding things, things whose existence would thus be nullified, it seems to make little sense to state that the world could be nullified in this way, since the world is not an object that I posit in experience in the first place. The idea that Husserl falls prey to confusing the world for a worldly object is further suggested by the way he

characterizes the method of epoché. Specifically, Husserl characterizes the epoché or bracketing in terms of an inhibition of what he calls the general thesis of the world—a thesis or positing of the world as actual or existing (*wirklich*)—that undergirds all our other takings and commitments (Husserl 2014: 52–58). However, to characterize our belief in the actuality of the world in this way is to suggest that this belief is on a par with the belief that is operative in our perception of or judgment concerning individual worldly objects.

Elsewhere, Husserl does, however, clearly differentiate between our experience of the world and of worldly objects respectively: Worldly things are disclosed as things within the horizon of the world, the experience of which is different in kind according to Husserl from the experience of a worldly thing (e.g., Husserl 1970: 143). Further, as Husserl at times states, while my experience of worldly objects is in principle fallible, our experience of a world is not. Specifically, as Husserl points out, while my perceptual anticipations pertaining to a worldly entity can be disappointed, such disappointment is inconceivable with regard to the world since this disappointment is only possible because of our horizontal anticipations of what more there is to be seen. Insofar as the world *is* this horizon of what more there is to be seen, however, this kind of disappointment is inconceivable with regard to the world itself (Husserl 2008a: 236, 256).<sup>21</sup> This way of characterizing the difference between our experience of things and our experience of the world also excludes the possibility of the illusion of a world (Husserl 2008a: 728, 730)—which would be an appearing world that is not actual but merely *appears* to be a world—

---

<sup>21</sup> Patočka (2016: 63–71) describes the horizon further in the context of a discussion of the phenomenological concept of world in a way that draws on elements in both Husserl’s and Heidegger’s analyses.

because to speak of illusion only makes sense with regard to a worldly entity when our perception unfolds and shows that it is different than we took it to be.

In addition, Husserl's descriptions of the intentional implications or horizons (Husserl 1960: 46–9) that inform the sense with which something at present appears to us further indicate that Husserl does not conflate our consciousness of the world with the consciousness of an object.<sup>22</sup> And this account of the horizon is congenial to Heidegger's claim that the worldliness of the world demands its own analysis, apart from the account of the entities we deal with in our daily interactions, which are ready to hand (*zuhanden*) and on rare occasions become present at hand or occurrent (*vorhanden*) in attentive scrutiny (Heidegger 1962: 101).<sup>23</sup> That is, for Heidegger the worldliness of the world resides in the referential totality (*Verweisungsganzheit*) that makes possible that things are afforded *as* something, or with a sense (*Sinn*) (e.g., *as* a certain kind of tool) (Heidegger 1962: 189–92). More concretely, something can show up as something (e.g., as a pen) only in light of that for which (*wofür*) or to what end (*wozu*) it is used (e.g., writing) (Heidegger 1962: 97–8, 114–15; 1985: 187). Similarly, for Husserl, it is the temporal horizon of past and future as well as the inner horizon (including determinations and dimensions of the object of which I am aware but which are currently not visible) and outer horizon (including everything surrounding what I am attentively aware of and everything that falls outside my perceptual field of which I nevertheless have a background awareness) that determines the sense with which something is afforded in perception—the horizon that he denotes as world (Husserl 1960: 158; 2008a: 78, 129).

---

<sup>22</sup> Landgrebe (1963: 44–5) pointed this out.

<sup>23</sup> Overgaard (2004: 109–30) and Welton (2000: 347–70) both provide detailed analyses of the overlap between Husserl's descriptions of the horizon and Heidegger's account of the world.

What Husserl's recognition of the difference of our experience of worldly things and our experience of the world means for his thought experiment of the annihilation of the world is at least that the term *Weltvernichtung* is a misnomer. Indeed, the thought experiment is about imagining a case in which the course of my experience does not warrant me positing abiding actual *things*. However, as I mentioned, this is compatible with some order in the course of experience. And for as long as some order obtains, it seems conceivable that this experience would be accompanied by horizontal anticipations—even if these anticipations would repeatedly be disappointed and the experience would, hence, not be one of actual things. In that sense, then, we would not be dealing with an annihilation of the world.

But even if we can, to some extent, neutralize the concerns that section 49 of *Ideas* raises, and if we can discern parallels between the horizon discussed by Husserl and the referential totality described by Heidegger, Heidegger's conception of world is in an important sense still different from Husserl's. That is, as commentators have not failed to point out, Heidegger's characterization of the being of Dasein as care entails a further critique of Husserl's characterization of our consciousness of the world and, importantly, of the ontological structure of the world of our everyday experience, which Husserl considers to be at bottom nature.

Heidegger considers our basic openness to the world to have the structure of care (*Sorge*). Among other things, this means that Dasein's disclosing (*erschliessen*) of something *as* something (e.g., as a pen for writing) is due to Dasein's projecting (*entwerfen*) itself into the future (e.g., as a writer), which is the for the sake of which (*Worumwillen*) of Dasein (e.g., Heidegger 1962: 182–6, 370–5, 415–16). Or, as

Heidegger more generally puts it, it is our own being that is at stake in our being in the world and that is the condition of possibility of the disclosure of a world (1962: 116, 236). This means that for Heidegger the disclosure of things in a meaningful surrounding world is what he calls a founded presence. That is, “it is not something original but grounded in the presence of that which is placed under care” (Heidegger 1985: 195; see also 1962: 236). Thus, what accounts for how something can appear as something in our everyday dealings is in Heidegger’s view the way we project ourselves into the future. Importantly, Heidegger immediately adds: “If this handily nearest, the handy in concern, is already a founded presence, then this applies even more so to the character of reality which we learned about earlier and which Husserl claims to be the authentic presence of the world” (Heidegger 1985: 195). That is, we can only look at something as a natural entity, and we rarely do so, because we have always already encountered it in the context of our practical activities. What Heidegger targets here and elsewhere is Husserl’s view that the world is at bottom nature (Heidegger 1962: 130–1, 189–91).<sup>24</sup>

Husserl thinks that the world is at bottom nature because in his view all so-called predicates of significance (*Bedeutungsprädikate*) are founded on sense (*Sinn*) (e.g., Husserl 2008a: 327, 341, 427), which in turn is accounted for by means of the aforementioned forms of passivity (time-consciousness and association). More concretely, according to Husserl, something can be afforded as valuable, useful, or worthwhile because it is experienced with natural properties (even if only non-thematically) in virtue of which it is in turn afforded as valuable, useful, or worthwhile (e.g., Husserl 2008a: 33, 288, 291, 297; 2014: 231–4).<sup>25</sup> So, for example, depending on

---

<sup>24</sup> Overgaard (2004: 173–83) provides a nuanced and compelling account of this critique.

<sup>25</sup> Drummond (in this volume) discusses this in more detail.

the kind of project I am engaged in, something can indeed afford itself as a tool for hammering or as something that has an archeological value, but not just anything can be taken in this way (e.g., a curtain or an apple respectively). That evaluative and practical properties are founded on natural properties, however, does not mean that we start out with a cognitive perception of these natural properties to then in turn appraise and want on the basis of this cognitive perception (e.g., Husserl 2008a: 326, 523). For, according to Husserl, to focus on nature and natural properties within the world of everyday life is always an abstraction (e.g., Husserl 2008a: 264, 517, 698), and perception always already entails cognitive, emotive, and practical dimensions (Husserl 2008a: 273, 314–15) due to the way in which the past shapes how we experience something in the future.

Heidegger acknowledges that what we are practically dealing with indeed has certain natural properties (Heidegger 1962: 100; 1985: 193). However, he resists Husserl's characterization of the foundation of practical significance on natural properties (Heidegger 1962: 100–1, 131–2; 245–6; 1985: 198–9).<sup>26</sup> And this disagreement between Husserl and Heidegger ultimately comes down to a quite fundamental difference in the way they think about the ontological structure of the world. For Husserl, the world of everyday life is at bottom a world of things (e.g., Husserl 1973: 132–40), and it is only because the world is a world of things that they can be taken up in a project that affords them with a practical significance in relation to other things. Heidegger, on the contrary, seems to consider the world to be fundamentally relational, where these relations

---

<sup>26</sup> It would take me too far afield to elaborate on the intricacies of Heidegger's own account of the relation between what he calls entities that are ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) and those that are present-to-hand (*vorhanden*). McManus (2012) provides a book-length treatment of the issue.

constitute things in their being such and so (Heidegger 1962: 121–2, 254–5; 1985: 186–90, 200).<sup>27</sup>

As I will elaborate in the conclusion to this chapter, both Husserl's thought experiment of the annihilation of the world and his insistence that the world is at bottom nature can be further understood in light of his specific and lasting concern with reason or rationality. Before doing so, however, I would like to point to an additional critical concern that Merleau-Ponty formulates, albeit not entirely unambiguously, concerning Husserl's account of the world of experience.

## 4 Merleau-Ponty and Husserl on Experience and World

In his early work *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty seems to depart from Husserl's methodological starting point in his treatment of our experience of the world as well as his characterization of the world of experience. Right at the outset of this work, Merleau-Ponty claims that there is no such thing as a complete reduction (Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxvii). The idea of a complete reduction presupposes that everything that appears can be traced back to a constituting consciousness that is transparent to itself and, hence, fully accessible to reflection (Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxiv, 64). Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary claims that the reduction always remains incomplete, because in his view the subject that perceives a world is a body subject, and according to him both this subject and the world that appears for this subject are in a certain sense opaque (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxv, 62, 228, 265, 448). It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty

---

<sup>27</sup> Pointing to the constitutive role of the horizon in Husserl's account of the constitution of objects does not change this. That is, even if my past experiences shape my perception of the practical significance of something (e.g., as a spoon for eating), this significance is founded on this object being afforded with certain natural properties that allow for this object to be taken as having a practical significance in the first place.

characterizes the target of phenomenological description as a transcendental *field*. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “of all philosophies, only phenomenology speaks of a transcendental *field*. This word signifies that reflection never has the entire world and the plurality of monads spread out and objectified before its gaze” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 62).

With his characterization of subject and world, Merleau-Ponty explicitly targets what he calls empiricism and intellectualism. While empiricism considers the relation between world and self in terms of causation, thereby reducing what appears to the transparency of a present stimulus or sensation (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 214), intellectualism considers consciousness to be a form of judgment, thereby making the world transparent insofar as it can be treated as something posited by a consciousness that is transparent to its own operations (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 204). Further, in Merleau-Ponty’s general account, both these positions operate with a conception, or, better, a prejudice, of a determinate world, which is either posited as the cause of our perceptions or posited by consciousness (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 5, 33, 40–1, 53, 286), hence presupposing what must be accounted for—namely, how something like a consciousness of a determinate world is possible in the first place (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 33–4, 48). It is by no means clear, however, whether and to what extent the denial of a complete reduction and the emphasis on the opacity of subject and world constitutes an implicit or explicit criticism of Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy.<sup>28</sup> While Merleau-Ponty at times characterizes Husserl as an intellectualist (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 251n), there are several ways in which his critique of intellectualism does not apply to and is not directed at Husserl. One respect in which Husserl and Merleau-Ponty do part ways,

---

<sup>28</sup> Heinämaa (2002) and Smith (2004) provide a more in-depth discussion of the claim that the reduction remains incomplete, how this statement is tied to the way in which Merleau-Ponty conceives of the subject, and how it is not in conflict with Husserl’s account of the reduction.



however, is in their characterization of the distinction between the contingent and necessary features of the world.

According to Merleau-Ponty, intellectualism accounts for how we can experience a world by appealing to a constituting consciousness (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 148, 452),thetic or positing consciousness (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 453), objectifying function (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 141), judgment (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 34–5), intellectual consciousness (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 223), determining thought (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 95), understanding (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 48), or act of *Sinngebung* (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxv, 453). Merleau-Ponty's intellectualist calls on these subjective activities to account for the organization of a manifold of impressions into an experience of a world—this manifold being a presupposition that intellectualism shares with empiricism in Merleau-Ponty's view.

Against the intellectualist, Merleau-Ponty argues that our experience of an organized natural world is not the result of an activity but rather is preceded and presupposed by any such activity. This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty does not account for *how* this experience is possible. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's description of perception is to provide this account. Merleau-Ponty characterizes our experience of the world as an original intentionality (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 139, 407), an operative intentionality (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxxii, 441, 453), or more generally as existence (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 334), which he characterizes as pre-personal (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 86, 216, 345, 368), anonymous (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 86, 223, 247, 265, 369), and, as previously mentioned, opaque. He calls this form of intentionality original and operative because it is presupposed by any active, egoic, or explicit forms of

intentionality (such as judging in the form of a predication). This intentionality can further also be characterized as pre-personal, anonymous, and non-transparent because it is not a self-conscious I who accomplishes this organization of the field of perception. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty still at times himself speaks of constitution (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 33, 53, 466), *Sinngebung* (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 464), and transcendental subjectivity (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 378), which already by itself suggests that his account can still be inscribed within the transcendental tradition broadly understood (in the sense that a meaningful world manifests itself to a subject that makes possible this manifestation). However, at the same time, Merleau-Ponty uses these terms in a modified sense in that they refer to a more original intentionality than has hitherto been focused on in the transcendental tradition.

Our experience of the world is made possible, according to Merleau-Ponty, by a motor intentionality (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 113, 331). That is, in Merleau-Ponty's view, our bodies make possible that we perceive a world that is organized, and these bodies are organized wholes of parts that only receive their meaning in the context of this whole (e.g., a hand can only perform its function as a hand due to the place it has in the organization of the body as a whole) (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 100–1, 150) and as capable of a range of possible movements (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 142, 260).

In his description of the intentionality that affords a world, Merleau-Ponty at times speaks of a projecting (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 137–9, 300, 407) the world and even of an imposition of sense (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 148), which might seem to suggest that one is dealing with a one-sided organization of what appears by and for the subject—albeit a body subject. But Merleau-Ponty rejects this characterization (e.g., Merleau-

Ponty 2012: 62, 275) and is clear that the world that appears has its own logic (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 50, 326, 341, 427), perceptual syntax (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 38), structure (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 58, 395), or style (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 287, 342) that is articulated and accessed by the body in the way that an answer is formulated in response to a question (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 18, 331). More concretely, the body has a take or hold on something in the field of perception (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 261, 278–9, 288, 334) by means of the movement of one's look, which, insofar as it brings an organization to articulation that is prefigured (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 32) or motivated (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 270, 275, 395), can also be characterized as a taking up (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 265, 331) or as a tracing of the borders and directions in what manifests itself (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 115). So, for example, Merleau-Ponty describes how different colors like blue and red appear to a body that takes up a certain manner of looking (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 217) or a certain attitude or bodily comportment (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 219) and how something is experienced as large when my gaze cannot envelop it (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 317). Hence, the relation between bodily self and world is one that Merleau-Ponty can characterize as communication (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 53, 95, 99, 265, 331), as inseparable (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 430), or, with a nod to Heidegger, as a structure of two abstract moments (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 455).

While it is clear that Merleau-Ponty's account of perception entails a critique of a certain Kantianism, it is not clear to what extent this also entails a critique of Husserl. A first criticism that might be taken to apply to Husserl is Merleau-Ponty's rejection of any talk of sensations (or *hyle* that are in turn apperceived or given form (*morphe*) by a

constituting consciousness (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxv, 154, 253)—a constituting that is in the Kantian tradition mediated by the concepts that, when schematized, allow for the organization of the manifold of appearances according to a rule (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 314–15). However, it is not at all clear that this critique ultimately applies to Husserl. Indeed, as I previously elaborated, and as Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 453), in Husserl’s view the sensuous field is organized both contingently and necessarily.

Even so, Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of the relation of body subject and world as a structure of two abstract moments would seem to directly counter Husserl’s characterization of the relation of consciousness and world in section 49 of *Ideas*. However, Husserl does acknowledge that a *bodily* subject is necessarily one that affords an actual world.<sup>29</sup> As Husserl writes: “However I imagine myself as personal human being, I remain one that has a world and is living in the world in this structure” (Husserl 2008a: 246). A person or human being is a bodily self, and insofar as that person has kinesthetic systems and capabilities it is embodied in the world. That is, what Husserl calls embodiment—which is more than the awareness of fleeting kinesthetic experiences and involves the awareness of an acquired “I can”—is not imaginable outside a spatio-temporal world of things in which kinesthetic systems are maintained and bodily capabilities are exercised in the perception of things.<sup>30</sup> Husserl’s statement that a person always discloses and finds himself or herself in a world, however, is compatible with the possibility of an even more radical variation, where my experiences lose all regularity—which is a case in which worldly objects would not appear and bodily habits would not be

---

<sup>29</sup> Zahavi (2002: 12–14) has discussed this point of convergence between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>30</sup> I have addressed the self-constitution of the embodied perceiver in conjunction with the constitution of the world elsewhere (Jacobs 2014).

maintained. In this case, the variation is not bound to what Husserl sometimes calls “the general form of being a child of the world (*Weltkindheit*),” and the variation yields “knowledge of the absolutely free variability of pure subjectivity without constraint” (Husserl 2012: 353). This pure subjectivity or consciousness is one for which no world would appear: “When I engage in such a free variation, then I immediately recognize: I am, even if a world would not be” (Husserl 2012: 352). Indeed it is the consciousness that we are to imagine in the thought experiment of the annihilation, which is a conceivability that Husserl wants to leave open for reasons I return to in the conclusion to this chapter.

A final noteworthy difference between Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s conceptions of the world of experience is that Merleau-Ponty at one point seems to propose that we give up on the distinction between contingent and necessary features of the world, or the distinction between fact and essence, specifically when he states that “there is no longer any means of distinguishing a level of a priori truths and a level of factual ones, or between what the world ought to be and what the world actually is” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 229), which is a distinction that Husserl presupposes when he distinguishes ontology from empirical science and for the development of an ontology of the lifeworld.<sup>31</sup> But *Phenomenology of Perception* also suggests that Merleau-Ponty thinks he is aligning himself with Husserl in this respect. So, for example, echoing Husserl, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a logic of the factual: “The a priori is the fact as understood, made explicit, and followed through into all of the consequences of its tacit logic; the a posteriori is the isolated and implicit fact” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 230, my emphasis). And he later again mentions the logic of the aesthetic world, this time

---

<sup>31</sup> Barbaras (1998: 67–71; 2004: 71–3) has developed this difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty in more detail.

explicitly referencing Husserl (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 492). Further, Merleau-Ponty commends Husserl for grounding the possible on the real (Merleau-Ponty 2012: lxxxii) and then later claims on his own behalf that “it is nevertheless from the world of perception that I borrow the notion of essence” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 407). And in a certain sense Merleau-Ponty is here indeed in agreement with Husserl. That is, as Husserl himself puts it: “We can hence call pure eidetic concepts, such as color, also ‘a posteriori’” (Husserl 2012: 101, emphasis added). As Husserl points out, only a subject that has color experiences can arrive at the kinds of examples that would in turn allow it to discern the necessities pertaining to color (e.g., it being necessarily extended).<sup>32</sup>

However, it would seem that Merleau-Ponty goes a step too far when he further suggests that the late Husserl breaks with his philosophy of essence (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 51n). For, Husserl always wanted to do more than express mere empirical generalities about the world of experience on the basis of induction. After all, Husserl proposes we use a method of imaginative variation when doing ontology: Necessary characteristics of something cannot be varied in the imagination without destroying the very thing one is imagining (Husserl 1973: 339–49; 2012: 292).<sup>33</sup> Further, as I hope to show in concluding, Husserl’s commitment to and understanding of the phenomenon of reason would be in tension with giving up on the distinction between contingent and necessary features of the world.

---

<sup>32</sup> In line with this, Tengelyi (2015: 51–2) argues for the contingency of the necessity of the structure of the world for Husserl in distinction to Kant.

<sup>33</sup> Smith (2004: 564–8) convincingly shows how Husserl and Merleau-Ponty part ways when Merleau-Ponty characterizes imaginative variation as induction. Of course, whether Husserl is right in insisting on the difference is an altogether different question.

## 5 The Phenomenon of Reason

Thus far I have spelled out some similarities and differences between Husserl's and Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of the world. In concluding, I would like to outline how exactly Husserl's commitment to accounting for the phenomenon of reason, or the first person awareness of the difference between veridical and non-veridical experiences, motivates the three claims with which Heidegger and/or Merleau-Ponty take issue—namely, Husserl's claims concerning the relation between consciousness and world in section 49 of the first book of *Ideas*, the claim that the world is at bottom nature, and the claims pertaining to the distinction between facts and pure essences.

First, how Husserl's assertion of the possibility of a worldless consciousness is motivated by his commitment to accounting for the phenomenon of reason becomes clear when we take note of the fact that this assertion occurs in the context of a discussion of the relation between the essence of consciousness and the essence of world in the first book of *Ideas*. For Husserl, essences can be related in four different ways: mutual independence, mutual dependence, and one-sided dependence (in two ways) (Husserl 2001b: 11–13, 27–28). These different kinds of relations determine how, by necessity, the existence of one thing requires the existence of another thing or not (Husserl 2001b: 6–13). Now, in claiming that the actual world is (in principle) a correlate of a (veridical) conscious experience and that a conscious experience in which no actual world appears is conceivable, Husserl characterizes the relation between world and consciousness as one of one-sided dependence.<sup>34</sup> My suggestion is that Husserl characterizes the relation

---

<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that the functional dependence can occur on different levels of specification. So, for example, in the case of color and extension, the functional dependence is between the species color and extension, which means that no color can exist without it being a color of an extension. However, as Husserl notes (2001b: 18), and as is implied by what follows, the functional dependence can also reign between the lowest specific differences, which

between consciousness and world in terms of a one-sided dependence of the world on consciousness because it is, in his view, the only way of conceiving of the relation between the essence of consciousness and the essence of world that allows for the first-person experience of reason in which we become aware that the actual world does or does not correspond to how we take the world to be in experience, and where this very awareness is indeed the mark of the success or failure of how we take the world to be.

First, thinking of the relation between the essence of consciousness and world in terms of independence would be incompatible with the phenomenon of reason because this way of conceiving the relation between consciousness and world leaves open the possibility that we could have a veridical conscious experience of the world being a certain way without the world actually being that way (e.g., my seeing that the keys are on the table could occur when these keys are in fact not on the table) because the one can exist without the other and vice versa. Second, if we conceive of the essence of consciousness as one-sidedly dependent on the essence of world, all my experiences would in fact correspond to something in the actual world, because while something could exist without there being an experience of it, an experience of something would by necessity correspond to something actually existing. If so, however, we would exclude the possibility of an experience that does not correspond to anything in the actual world, in this way also excluding the possibility of me becoming aware that my experience of something being a certain way does not in fact correspond to what the actual world is like. The same is the case for an account of the relation between consciousness and world that considers them to be mutually dependent. On this view the existence of a certain

---

would be the case for the relation between consciousness and world, where the existence of a determinate (veridical) perception (e.g., a perception of something of having this or that color) is correlated to something determinate in the actual world (e.g., having this or that color).



experience means that something in the world corresponds to it and vice versa, thereby doing away with the possibility of an experience in which I become aware that nothing in fact correlates to how I took the world to be.

Hence, for Husserl, only one option remains—namely, the one in which an actual experience does not necessarily correlate to something in the actual world, but something in the actual world necessarily correlates to an (in principle possible actual) experience of it. As Husserl writes: “the idea of this transcendence [i.e., of things] is thus the eidetic correlate of the pure idea of this identifying (*ausweisenden*) experience” (Husserl 2014: 86). And, on the other hand: “The existence of consciousness is not relative to the existence of an actual reality. Of course, intentionality belongs to the essence of consciousness. However, it does not belong to the essence of intentionality that some transcendent intentional something ‘actually exists’ or, what amounts to the same, that the conscious intentions that posit reality are harmoniously fulfilled. The relativity between the real world and consciousness is hence strictly speaking not a correlativity. The being of a real world is contingent with respect to the being of a consciousness” (Husserl 2006: 79). This way of construing the relation between consciousness and world does allow for the possibility that we have actual experiences that do not correlate with how the world actually is and secures that veridical experiences in which I have evidence for the world being a certain way do—and hence for Husserl it is the only option of conceiving of the relation between the essence of consciousness and the essence of world that preserves the phenomenon of reason.

Second, Husserl’s insistence that the world is at bottom nature can also be understood as motivated by his concern with the phenomenon of reason—albeit in a

different way. Specifically, this claim can be understood as following from the way in which Husserl preserves the intersubjective character of reason in the practical domain. According to Husserl, if something actually exists, then it is (in principle) accessible in experience to any conscious subject. What this means is that disagreement about things and facts is and should be only provisional. And if such disagreement persists, the way to resolve this disagreement is by establishing a distinction between normalcy and abnormalcy (like we do in the cases of colorblindness and deafness).<sup>35</sup> Things are different in the practical realm, however, where certain forms of disagreement can be tolerated and do not need to be resolved in this way. Specifically, even if I am engaged in actions that aim to realize different goals than my fellows, we can still validate one another's practical decisions because validating the practical decisions of others does not entail that I value and decide the same (like in the case of the perception of natural properties and related perceptual judgments) (e.g., Husserl 2008a: 297, 393). This kind of disagreement is possible because part of what happens when I validate someone's practical decisions is that I (can in principle) become aware of the natural properties in virtue of which something is taken as valuable and worth realizing from a certain perspective as well as of the bodily capacities that put someone in a position to bring about what is valued. While both the natural properties and their bodily situation are facts that we should in principle agree on, the difference in our respective situations allows for a certain form of disagreement in the sense that my validating your decisions does not necessarily entail that I, in my situation, should make the same decisions. However, and this is one way of making sense of Husserl's insistence on the world being at bottom nature, if we did not have access to a shared nature, we could not validate or question

---

<sup>35</sup> Zahavi (2003: 133–6), Staiti (2010: 137–8), and Fricke (2012) also point this out.

another's practical decisions in the way we do—namely, by pointing out that they are mistaken about what is being valued or about their own capabilities or situation. Hence, Husserl's insistence on the world being at bottom nature can be understood as guaranteeing the intersubjective nature of practical reason, which allows for different individuals validating and questioning practical decisions of others that are not and never will be their own.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, third, Husserl's concern with the intersubjective dimension of the phenomenon of reason can also be taken as motivating his insistence on the distinction between the contingent and necessary, between fact and pure essence. In Husserl's view, the world is for everyone (Husserl 1960: 92), which is to say that there is only one world (Husserl 2014: 87–8). And Husserl at several points insists that it is the necessary structure of the world that guarantees that despite radical differences in our experience of the world we still experience the same world.<sup>37</sup> That is, the world displays the same necessary structure, form, or style (e.g., Husserl 2008a: 57, 295, 544, 677–8, 691, 712) to different perceivers, which allows for identification of things between perceivers that might very well vastly differ when it comes to the perception of the contingent features of these things (e.g., their specific color).<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that a view like Heidegger's could not in a different way account for this kind of validating. Indeed, several commentators have addressed the challenge of how to think of success and failure or better or worse ways of disclosing the world from within Heidegger's early philosophy. Smith (2007), who traces the challenge back to Tugendhat (1976), critically considers several proposals before formulating his own according to which we are to look at the way that Dasein is beholden to itself in authenticity and resoluteness (which is in line with Crowell 2013: 191–213). Most recently, McKinney (2016) has proposed a competing interpretation arguing that we are beholden to the world itself and that authenticity is to be understood as sustaining our openness to the world. McManus (2015), then again, has elaborated how one, from a Heideggerian perspective, can call into question that the different understandings of Being are like different perspectives that can be better or worse because these different understandings are not rivals in that they are not about the same aspect of the world.

<sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that we need to account for how different embodied perceivers can disclose the same world (1945: 304–5). Barbaras (1998: 161–3; 169–74) elaborates this concern and how Merleau-Ponty addresses it.

<sup>38</sup> Further substantiating Husserl's claim would, however, require that we not only take into account how different perceivers might differ when it comes to the same modality of perception (e.g., visual perception) but also how different perceivers experience the world in different modalities of perception (e.g., some do not have visual perception, others perceive through echolocation). Husserl considers spatial extension but not color (e.g., Husserl 1989:

So, I would like to suggest, in this way the claims that the later phenomenologists take issue with can be understood as motivated by Husserl's conception and commitment to the phenomenon of reason. And, what is more, Husserl's commitment to the phenomenon of reason itself is also not unmotivated. Husserl's insistence that we are aware of the difference between veridical and non-veridical experience from the first-person perspective can be understood as following from his denial that an absolute distinction can be made between a merely phenomenally appearing world and the world itself. For, according to Husserl, once we start doubting that we can draw the distinction between veridical and unveridical experiences from within experience itself, we pave the way to distinguish the world that phenomenally appears from the world as it is in itself, which is a distinction that the three discussed phenomenologists unanimously resist. It would be an altogether different project to show why one should and how one can resist this distinction without having to commit to Husserl's three claims outlined above. I hope to have shown, though, that Husserl can be understood as making these commitments in a way that is motivated by his concern for and specific understanding of the phenomenon of reason.

---

73–7) to be a candidate for a structure that is experienced in different modalities of perception. Hence, perceivers that do not share modalities of perception would nevertheless still experience the same spatial world—extension being indeed a necessary structure of the world.

## References

- Barbaras, R. (1998), *Le tournant de l'expérience. Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: J. Vrin).
- Barbaras, R. (2004), *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).
- Benoist, J. (1995), "La découverte de l'apriori synthétique matériel: au-delà du 'quelque chose,' le tous et les parties (RL III)," *Recherches Husserliennes* 3: 3–22.
- Bernet, R. (1988), "Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Zeit bei Husserl und Heidegger," *Heidegger Studies* 3/4: 89–104.
- Bernet, R. (1990), "Husserl and Heidegger on Intentionality and Being," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 21/2: 136–52.
- Crowell, S. (2013), *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Crowell, S. and Malpas, J. (2007), *Transcendental Heidegger* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- De Palma, V. (2014), "Die Fakta leiten alle Eidetik. Zu Husserls Begriff des materialen Apriori," *Husserl Studies* 30/3: 195–223.
- De Palma, V. (2015), "Der Ursprung des Akts. Husserls Begriff der genetischen Phänomenologie und die Frage nach der Weltkonstitution," *Husserl Studies* 31/3: 189–212.
- Drummond, J. J. (1995), "Synthesis, Identity, and the *A Priori*," *Recherches Husserliennes* 2/4: 27–51.

- Drummond, J. J. (2003), "Pure Logical Grammar: Anticipatory Categoriality and Articulated Categoriality" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 11/2: 125–39.
- Drummond, J. J. (2004), "Cognitive Impenetrability and the Complex Intentionality of the Emotions," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11/10–11: 109–26.
- Drummond, J. J. (2013), "The Intentional Structure of the Emotions," *Logical Analysis and the History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse* 16: 244–63.
- Ferrarin, A. (2015a), *The Powers of Pure Reason: Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).
- Ferrarin, A. (2015b), "From the world to philosophy, and back" in J. Bloechl and N. de Warren (eds), *Phenomenology in a New Key: Between Analysis and History* (Dordrecht: Springer), 63–92.
- Fricke, C. (2012), "Overcoming disagreement—Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl on strategies of justifying descriptive and evaluative judgments," in D. Føllesdal and C. Fricke (eds), *Intersubjectivity and Objectivity in Adam Smith and Edmund Husserl: A Collection of Essays* (Heusenstamm bei Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag), 171–242.
- Gardner, S. (2007), "Merleau-Ponty's transcendental theory of perception," in S. Gardner and M. Grist (eds), *The Transcendental Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 294–323.
- Gardner, S. and Grist, M. (eds) (2015), *The Transcendental Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Han-Pile, B. (2005), "Heidegger's Appropriation of Kant," in H. L. Dreyfus and M. Wrathall (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Heidegger* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), 88–101.
- Hartimo, M., Heinämaa, S., and Miettinen, T. (2015), *Phenomenology and the Transcendental* (London: Routledge).

Heidegger, M. (1962), *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Heidegger, M. (1985), *History of the Concept of Time* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).

Heinämaa, S. (2002), “From decision to passions: Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Husserl’s reduction,” in L. Embree and T. Toadvine (eds), *Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl* (Dordrecht: Springer), 127–46.

Heinämaa, S. (2015), “Anonymity and Personhood: Merleau-Ponty’s Account of the Subject of Perception,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 48: 123–42.

Husserl, E. (1959), *Erste Philosophie (1923–24). Zweiter Teil* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).

Husserl, E. (1960), *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).

Husserl, E. (1970), *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press).

Husserl, E. (1973), *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press).

Husserl, E. (1980), *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Third Book: Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).

- Husserl, E. (1989), *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Dordrecht: Kluwer).
- Husserl, E. (2001a), *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic* (Dordrecht: Kluwer).
- Husserl, E. (2001b), *Logical Investigations, vol. 2* (London: Routledge).
- Husserl, E. (2001c), *Natur und Geist. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1927* (Dordrecht: Kluwer).
- Husserl, E. (2006), *Transzendentaler Idealismus. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908–1922)* (Dordrecht: Kluwer).
- Husserl, E. (2008a), *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916–1937)* (Dordrecht: Springer).
- Husserl, E. (2008b), *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge: Lectures 1906/07* (Dordrecht: Springer).
- Husserl, E. (2012), *Zur Lehre vom Wesen und zur Methode der eidetischen Variation. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1891–1935)* (Dordrecht: Springer).
- Husserl, E. (2014), *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett).
- Jacobs, H. (2014), “Transcendental subjectivity and the human being,” in M. Hartimo, S. Heinämaa, and T. Miettinen (eds), *Phenomenology and the Transcendental* (London: Routledge), 87–105.
- Jacobs, H. (2015), “From psychology to pure phenomenology,” in A. Staiti (ed.), *Commentary on Husserl’s Ideas I* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 95–118.



- Jacobs, H. (2016a), "Husserl on Reason, Reflection, and Attention," *Research in Phenomenology* 46/2: 257–76.
- Jacobs, H. (2016b), "Socialization, reflection, and personhood," in S. Rinofner-Kreidl and H. Wiltsche (eds), *Analytic and Continental Philosophy: Methods and Perspectives. Proceedings of the 37th International Ludwig Wittgenstein Symposium* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 323–35.
- Jansen, J. (2014), "Taking a transcendental stance: Anti-representationalism and direct realism in Kant and Husserl," in F. Fabianielli and S. Luft (eds), *Husserl und die klassische deutsche Philosophie* (Dordrecht: Springer), 79–92.
- Jansen, J. (2015), "Transcendental Philosophy and the Problem of Necessity in a Contingent World," in *Metodo: International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy* 1: 47–80.
- Kern, I. (1964), *Husserl und Kant. Eine Untersuchung über Husserls Verhältnis zu Kant und zum Neukantianismus* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).
- Landgrebe, L. (1963), *Der Weg der Phänomenologie. Das Problem einer ursprünglichen Erfahrung* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn).
- Majolino, C. (2010), "La partition du réel: Remarques sur l'eidos, la phantasia, l'effondrement du monde et l'être absolu de la conscience," in C. Ierna, H. Jacobs, and F. Mattens (eds), *Philosophy, Phenomenology, Sciences* (Dordrecht: Springer), 573–660.
- Majolino, C. (2016), "Until the End of the World: Eidetic Variation and Absolute Being of Consciousness—A Reconsideration," *Research in Phenomenology* 46/2: 157–83.
- Matherne, S. (2016), "Kantian Themes in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of Perception," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 98/2: 193–230.

- McKinney, T. (2016), "Objectivity and Reflection in Heidegger's Theory of Intentionality," *Journal for the American Philosophical Association* 2/1: 111–30.
- McManus, D. (2012), *Heidegger and the Measure of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- McManus, D. (2015), "Heidegger and the Supposition of a Single, Objective World," *European Journal of Philosophy* 23/2: 195–220.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945), *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard).
- Moran, D. (2000), "Heidegger's Critique of Husserl's and Brentano's Accounts of Intentionality," *Inquiry* 43/1: 39–65.
- Nenon, T. (2008), "Some Differences between Kant's and Husserl's Conception of Transcendental Philosophy," *Continental Philosophy Review* 41/4: 427–39.
- Overgaard, S. (2004), *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World* (Dordrecht: Kluwer).
- Patočka, J. (2016), *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press).
- Pradelle, D. (2013), "The phenomenological foundations of predicative structure," in D. Zahavi (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 349–76.
- Rinofner-Kreidl, S. (2013), "Husserl's Fundierungsmodell als Grundlage einer intentionalen Wertungsanalyse," *Metodo* 1/2: 59–82.
- Rinofner-Kreidl, S. (2015), "Husserl's analogical and teleological conception of reason," in A. Staiti (ed.), *Commentary on Husserl's 'Ideas I'* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 287–326.
- Smith, A. D. (2004), "Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenological Reduction," *Inquiry* 48/6: 553–71.

- Smith, A. D. (2007), "The flesh of perception: Merleau-Ponty and Husserl," in T. Baldwin (ed.), *Reading Merleau-Ponty: On Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge), 1–22.
- Smith, W. H. (2007), "Why Tugendhat's Critique of Heidegger's Concept of Truth Remains a Critical Problem," *Inquiry* 50/2: 156–70.
- Staiti, A. (2010), "Different Worlds and Tendency to Concordance," *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 10: 127–43.
- Taminiaux, J. (1991), *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology* (Albany: SUNY).
- Tengelyi, L. (2015), "Categories of experience and the transcendental," in M. Hartimo, S. Heinämaa, and T. Miettinen (eds), *Phenomenology and the Transcendental* (London: Routledge), 49–60.
- Toadvine, T. (2002), "Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl: A chronological overview," in T. Toadvine and L. Embree (eds), *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl* (Dordrecht: Springer), 227–86.
- Tugendhat, E. (1967), *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl and Heidegger* (Berlin: de Gruyter).
- Welton, D. (2000), *The Other Husserl: The Horizons of Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).
- Zahavi, D. (2002), "Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: A Reappraisal," in T. Toadvine and L. Embree (eds), *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl* (Dordrecht: Springer), 3–29.
- Zahavi, D. (2003), *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Zahavi, D. (2015), "Husserl and the transcendental," in S. Gardner and M. Grist (eds), *The Transcendental Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 228–43.