

**Andrea Staiti.** *Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology: Nature, Spirit, and Life.* Cambridge University Press 2014. 313 pp. \$95.00 USD (Hardback ISBN 9781107066304).

Staiti's book is an example of how the history of philosophy should contribute to theoretical philosophy. Its primary goal is to place Husserl's transcendental phenomenology in the context of a particular debate in the German philosophy of his time. This is the dispute about the foundations of the natural and human sciences involving the Southwestern school of Neo-Kantians (Windelband, Rickert, Lask, and Böhm) and the so-called life-philosophers (Simmel and Dilthey). By documenting how Husserl was responding to these philosophers, Staiti intends to show that Husserl's phenomenology cannot be fully understood without reference to the natural/human sciences debate. However, in elucidating that particular debate and Husserl's position in it, Staiti presents Husserl's philosophy as being capable of providing valuable proposals about the foundations of the sciences and the demarcation of their fields of inquiry.

As Staiti admits, the book is no introduction to Husserl. It contains no systematic discussion of the phenomenological epoché(s) and reduction(s), and of the ways Husserl motivates them—a discussion Staiti undertakes in other publications (for example, 'Cartesianischer Weg/Psychologischer Weg/Lebensweltlicher Weg.' In H. Gander (ed.), *Husserl Lexikon*. Darmstadt: WBG, 2010; 'The Pedagogic Impulse of Husserl's Ways into Transcendental Phenomenology: An Alternative Reading of the Erste Philosophie Lecture'. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 33:1 (2012): 39–56; and 'The Melody Unheard. Husserl on the Natural Attitude and its Discontinuation'. In A. Staiti (ed.), *Commentary on Husserl's Ideas I*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). Instead, it is presupposed that the reader is acquainted with Husserl's basic theories, and is even already convinced of their philosophical value. For a reader of this kind, the book does the service of completing the picture by characterizing in what sense Husserl could describe his phenomenology as 'scientific life-philosophy'—a paradoxical expression that indicates the synthesis of Neo-Kantian and life-philosophy motifs. Such a historical-theoretical perspective was much needed as it fills a gap in the literature on Husserl in English. Nonetheless, a reader with little or no background in Husserlian phenomenology should not be discouraged: the book is extremely clear and well written; hence it can be informative and insightful for a wide range of readers.

In chapter 1, Staiti defends the all but obvious claim that the Neo-Kantian treatment of the demarcation of the sciences was oriented toward ontology. At a minimum, Windelband's methodological distinction between sciences seeking general laws (natural sciences) and sciences aiming at the restitution of particular facts (e.g. historical science) implies that objects of the world have a 'formal' component, which makes them instances of a law, and a 'material' component, which makes them unrepeatable historical events (*Ereignisse*). The question about the applicability of the historical method leads Rickert to acknowledge the intrinsic presence of 'value' in cultural objects as opposed to natural objects. Rickert's ontological pluralism is then radicalized by Lask: prior to scientific activity, objects are constituted by a material circumfused with categorial intelligibility, but the categorial aspect receives its differentiation from the material and not vice versa (as in Kantian intellectualism). Thus for Lask, the classification of the sciences depends on a-theoretical differences in what is investigated. Lastly, in Staiti's narrative, Böhm came closer to Husserl's position by identifying pre-theoretical syntheses that structure the material of historical knowledge.

Chapter 2 discusses Simmel and Dilthey's work as aimed at grounding the human sciences on the notion of life. This notion is the one that will be employed by Husserl: life is experiencing subjectivity itself, to the extent that it is dynamic, pre-reflective, pre-conceptual, and world-forming. While Simmel proposes a metaphysical hypothesis concerning the individual nature of

psychic phenomena, Dilthey advocates a descriptive-analytical psychology capable of laying the categorial apparatus for the foundation of the human sciences. Dilthey's psychology comprehends psychic nexuses as they are originally experienced, which excludes naturalistic explanations. Nevertheless, according to Staiti, neither Simmel nor Dilthey were able to guarantee the autonomy of the human sciences as they ended up positing a prominence of nature at the very core of the psyche.

Coming to the relationship between the Neo-Kantians and Husserl, in chapter 3 Staiti compares how they portrayed the role of cognition in shaping the objects of knowledge. Despite the many similarities, Staiti argues for a certain superiority of Husserl's discussion of attitudes (*Einstellungen*) over the Neo-Kantian treatment of standpoints (*Standpunkte*) since the former, but not the latter, accounts for how different perspectives thematize distinct layers of meaning without disavowing the identity of the object under investigation. In chapter 4, Staiti presents the criticism Husserl's *Ideen I* received from the Neo-Kantian camp. Rickert accuses Husserl's intuition of essences of being a fashionable life-philosophical misrepresentation of the processual nature of knowledge and rejects phenomenology's foundational claim because the investigation of 'phenom-ena' necessarily points to something beyond them (the subject). Natorp—the only Marburg school Neo-Kantian deemed relevant for the purposes of the book—reproaches Husserl's eidetic method for petrifying the stream-like character of consciousness. Staiti acknowledges the value of these critiques, and develops responses exploiting Husserlian resources that lie beyond the letter of *Ideen I*. Chapter 5 deals with Husserl's extensive confrontation with Rickert. With remarkable precision, Staiti defines Husserl's formal-classificatory criteria of the sciences and the distinction between a mere mathematical manifold and a world as regulated by material *a priori* laws of coexistence. From the Husserlian point of view, Rickert's failure to do justice to this distinction leads to the uncritical acceptance of the naturalistic paradigm in psychology.

Chapter 6 frames Husserl's interchange with the life-philosophers in terms of the formulation of the *a priori* of the historical world. Staiti examines three *a priori* of history identified by Husserl. First, the experiential nature of empathy makes possible the mutual implication between subjects who are 'there-for-one-another'. Second, the features of spiritual (*geistig*) development confer to historical time 'rigidity' (in a specific sense events can occur only *once*) and 'plasticity' (periods exhibiting typical patterns). Third, Dilthey and Simmel's notion of motivation as an irreducible explanatory principle of psychic phenomena should be extended to include even the most basic and passive dynamics of historical subjects. Overall, the historical world is revealed to be the transcendent achievement of human subjectivity (*Menschheit*). In this regard, Staiti argues a solid foundation of the autonomy of the human sciences requires the rigorous delimitation, or 'closure', of the field of psychology; otherwise psychology is misconstrued as a merely transitional discipline to be resolved in naturalistic explanations. In Staiti's view, the phenomenological reduction realizes the closure of psychology while at the same time transforming psychology into transcendental phenomenology and saving it from Cartesian dualism.

Chapter 7 considers Husserl's late work on the life-world in light of what Staiti calls 'the Kantian liberation narrative'. Both the Neo-Kantians and the life-philosophers read Kant as the first emancipator from modern naturalism in that he relativized nature to the cognitive activity of the subject. Husserl continued this emancipatory project by offering a 'deconstructive genealogy of naturalism'. Following Husserl, Staiti gives a step-by-step analysis of how modern natural science arises as legitimate enterprise aiming at knowledge of the world and distinguishes it from the naturalistic hypostatization of nature as the only real world. Chapter 8 situates Husserl in the dispute involving the Neo-Kantians and the life-philosophers on the relationship between philosophy and

worldview. The phenomenological investigation of the life-world *yields* a worldview. Specifically, it provides not only a dignified sense of self, but shows how the ethical notion of humanity can be formed starting from the restricted perspective of a specific culture (home-world) and describing the concrete encounter with foreign-worlds. Hence Husserl's universalism of shared and pluralistic values is assessed.

A slightly critical remark on the relationship between phenomenology and the human sciences is opportune. Although Staiti's discussion of the phenomenological closure of psychology has many merits and relies on ample resources in Husserl's texts (e.g. in the *Crisis*), it fails to give serious consideration to the possibility that pure phenomenological psychology is a rigorously delimited discipline distinct from transcendental phenomenology—as Husserl himself emphasizes (for example, in *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, in *Ideas II*, and in the *Cartesian Meditations*). The argument (endorsed by Staiti) that the bracketing of the world required by self-enclosed psychology would preclude maintaining the natural attitude is not conclusive. Indeed, bracketing the world concerns the pure psychologist only insofar as she has to describe the authentically inner constituents of consciousness, including the intentionally immanent 'world-in-brackets', but not insofar as she determines the ontological status of consciousness, which remains for her a stratum belonging to a worldly human being. In other words, the psychologist does not accomplish what Husserl indicates as a second 'stage' of the reduction, i.e., bracketing the natural 'mundanization' of consciousness. Even in the *Crisis*, a text dominated by the urgency to justify the transcendental perspective, Husserl recognizes that pure psychology is required for a correct determination of psychophysical regularities (already manifest in pre-scientific experience) and acknowledges the necessity of a psychological 'return to the natural' for which the first stage of the reduction suffices (Husserl, E. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970, 250, 263-4). Consequently, the claim that the historian finds the foundations of its discipline only in the transcendental attitude (implicit in Staiti's claim that the closure of psychology entails transcendental phenomenology) should be softened. Strictly speaking, the categorial foundations demarcating the human sciences lie in the natural attitude ontology of the life-world, of which pure psychology is a part; only out of further philosophical interests does one pursue the foundation of that ontology in transcendental phenomenology (see *Phänomenologische Psychologie*: 217-22).

Staiti's book is valuable to anyone interested in the ontology presupposed by the natural and human sciences. It shows the German philosophers of Husserl's time are worth studying and even leaves one with the hypothesis that they may offer tenable alternatives to contemporary naturalism.

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