Husserl’s motivation and method for phenomenological reconstruction

Matt Bower

Abstract In this paper I present an account of Husserl’s approach to the phenomenological reconstruction of consciousness’s immemorial past, a problem, I suggest, that is quite pertinent for defenders of Lockeian psychological continuity views of personal identity. To begin, I sketch the background of the problem facing the very project of a genetic phenomenology, within which the reconstructive analysis is situated. While the young Husserl took genetic matters to be irrelevant to the main task of phenomenology, he would later come to see their importance and, indeed, centrality as the precursor and subsoil for the rationality of consciousness. I then argue that there is a close connection between reconstruction and genetic phenomenology, such that reconstruction is a necessary component of the program of genetic phenomenology, and I set out Husserl’s argument that compels one to enter into reconstructive territory. With that impetus, I schematically lay out the main contours one finds in Husserl’s practice of reconstructive techniques. We find him taking two distinct approaches, that of the individual viewed egologically (through the abstract lens of a single individual’s consciousness) and as embedded in interpersonal relations. Husserl occasionally calls these the approach “from within” and “from without,” respectively. Ultimately, the two approaches are not only complementary, but require one another. In closing, I argue that these considerations lead to a blurring of lines between the genetic and generative phenomenological registers, which challenges the prevalent view that there is a sharp demarcation of the two.

Keywords Edmund Husserl · Phenomenology · Genetic phenomenology · Reconstruction · Intentionality · Memory

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1 Introduction

Memory typically degrades the further one approaches one’s beginnings, and it stops well short of ever being able to transport one to that bottommost limit, the very onset of experience. Reconstruction, in the sense we are presently interested in, concerns theorizing about the immemorial past of conscious life.\(^1\) The main task of this paper is to present Edmund Husserl’s rationale and methodological guidelines for phenomenological reconstruction. The story I will tell is one emerging primarily from Husserl’s later manuscripts.

It may seem curious that Husserl, who is most well-known in his later work for developing a phenomenology of the *Lebenswelt*, would touch on such an apparently obscure subject, but it will become clear in what follows why the problematic of reconstruction of the immemorial past of conscious life is unavoidable within the parameters of genetic phenomenology and, furthermore, what concrete methodological devices Husserl provides us to carry out the reconstructive project. The problem of reconstruction is, in fact, very important to Husserl’s account of the *Lebenswelt*. Lacking an examination of the forms of consciousness from which developed, “normal” consciousness arises, not only is “the phenomenon ‘world’ not explicated in its full concreteness,”\(^2\) but the full transcendental community has not been accounted for.\(^3\)

While this paper will predominantly focus on the details of why reconstruction is important from Husserl’s perspective, I should pause here at the start to highlight a noteworthy point of contact with another matter of philosophical concern, namely, that of personal identity. One of the most influential approaches to the problem of personal identity in the history of philosophy is the one inaugurated by John Locke. Locke may be credited as a primary instigator of the so-called “psychological continuity” view of personal identity, according to which the criteria for a person’s being the same person over any stretch of time must refer to the relations that hold between that person’s mental (and for Locke, conscious) states over that stretch of time. While Husserl was not especially fond of Locke’s philosophy,\(^4\) I think it is fair to place Husserl roughly within the Lockean tradition of the psychological continuity view of personal identity.\(^5\) To put it quite generally, in Husserl’s view, just as in Locke and his heirs’, personal identity is a matter to be explained within the domain of consciousness.

One serious problem for Locke’s view is its dependence on memory. Let’s consider roughly how memory figures in Locke’s account in order to set up the problem. For Locke, it is a subject’s ability to reflectively think about oneself and

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\(^1\) Reconstruction is actually a broader subject. Here we will only consider one, albeit a fundamental, part of the reconstructive program. Besides inquiring about one’s own (individual) immemorial past, to give just two examples, one could also probe reconstructively into the unconscious or the motivations for a significant socio-historical event (e.g., the emergence of Galilean science, as Husserl treats it in the *1905 Crisis*). For a discussion of the former, see Bernet (2006) (although Bernet is not especially concerned with the problem of method), and, for the latter, see Soffer (1996) and Dodd (2004).

\(^2\) Husserl (2008, p. 485). My translation. All further translations from this text are my own.

\(^3\) Husserl (1973b, p. 612).


\(^5\) See Jacobs (2010, p. 334).
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recall memories at will that establishes a relation of self-identity or sameness as a person over time. In his words:

[S]ince consciousness always accompanies thinking, and ‘tis that, that makes everyone to be, what he calls self; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal Identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational Being: And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person [...].

His view captures a common intuition that, were one, for one fantastical reason or another, to find oneself in another’s body, one’s identity as a person would transfer to that body rather than staying with one’s previous body. That intuition is plausibly explained if it is the case that personal identity does not reside in the physical materials one is composed of, or even the biological organism one is united with, but rather in consciousness in the form of reflective self-awareness.

Now, the problem with this view and the burden it places on memory is that memory, as we human beings typically enjoy it, is limited in scope when compared with any given individual’s actual biography. Memory is finite, and no one is capable of establishing the kind of relation Locke takes to be constitutive of personal identity such that it would extend to the beginning of one’s personal biography. In short, Locke’s theory runs into trouble when another common intuition is brought to the fore, namely, that an individual’s existence as a person outstrips what one can remember of one’s past life.

At this point I think the Husserlian account of phenomenological reconstruction can enter into the discussion and offer support to the (broadly) Lockean position on the nature personal identity. Husserl is quite emphatic about the finitude of memory, but believes nevertheless that one’s immemorial past is accessible in some sense. One will of course never be able to recall particular episodes of one’s past life back to its very beginning, and reconstructing such events is not at all what Husserl ever aimed to do. But one can still, if the story I am about to relate about Husserl’s approach to phenomenological reconstruction is true, find traces of one’s past (besides what is available in episodic memory) that live on into the present, as the past’s “sediment,” a lingering element continuing to shape one’s conscious experience. These traces take the form of one’s stable conscious abilities, beliefs, desires, character, natural inclinations, pathologies, and the like.

Although I will not dwell any longer on the problem of personal identity, and what follows should not be construed as a theory of personal identity, these considerations should suffice to show the broader philosophical import of a theory of phenomenological reconstruction of the immemorial past of an individual’s conscious life. Developing such a theory is potential aid to psychological continuity views of personal identity that falter in the light of deeply entrenched intuitions about the actual extent of personal identity into individuals’ past existence. This potential may thus give a certain urgency to what would otherwise appear a somewhat abstruse or merely academic train of reflection.

6 Locke (1975 [1689], p. 335).
In the remainder of this paper, I will present an account of Husserl’s approach to the phenomenological reconstruction of consciousness’ immemorial past. In Sect. 2, I sketch the background of the problem facing the very project of a genetic phenomenology, within which the reconstructive analysis is situated. While the young Husserl took genetic matters to be irrelevant to the main task of phenomenology, he would later come to see their importance and, indeed, centrality as the precursor and subsoil for the rationality of consciousness. I then argue in Sect. 3 that there is a close connection between reconstruction and genetic phenomenology, such that reconstruction is a necessary component of the program of genetic phenomenology, and I set out Husserl’s argument compels one to enter into reconstructive territory. With that impetus, in Sect. 4 I schematically lay out the main contours one finds in Husserl’s practice of reconstructive techniques. We find him taking two distinct approaches, that of the individual viewed egologically (through the abstract lens of a single individual’s consciousness) and as embedded in interpersonal relations. Husserl occasionally calls these the approach “from within” and “from without,” respectively. Ultimately, the two approaches are not only complementary, but require one another. Section 5 wraps up the paper, and there I argue that these considerations lead to a blurring of lines between the genetic and generative phenomenological registers, challenging the prevalent view that there is a sharp demarcation of the two.

2 The problem of genetic phenomenology

Before directly tackling Husserl’s motivation and method of phenomenological reconstruction, let’s first recall the motivation for genetic phenomenology, the broader analytic framework in which reconstruction is situated. It is, I believe, the genetic turn that ultimately paves the way for phenomenological reconstruction and even necessitates it.

Very early on Husserl shows an interest in the problem of reconstruction. In a manuscript from around 1898, Husserl broaches the issue of our cognitive beginnings, and, although he ventures a speculative guess, he quickly dismisses the problem as belonging to the subject matter of “genetic psychology” and not the descriptive psychology he understood phenomenology to be at that point. Shortly thereafter, in letter from 1906, Husserl goes on to categorically separate genetic psychology from phenomenology.

Clearly, the issue of phenomenological reconstruction stands or falls with the more general issue of genesis in phenomenology.

Husserl marginalizes or outright excludes genetic problems as being fundamentally irrelevant to the essence or validity of any phenomenon. We can grasp that,

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7FL01 Husserl (2004a, p. 204).
8FL01 Husserl (2008b, pp. 440–441/452).
9FL01 Husserl (2008b, pp. 204–209/200–204). Besides being irrelevant, any appeal to the physical, physiological, or psychophysical origins of a phenomenon would be tantamount to a petitio principii.
9FL02 Given the epistemological constraints of the phenomenologist, whatever causal antecedents in the world one might take recourse to are “just as much in question as any perception,” that is, as the primary explanandum (Husserl 2008b, p. 208/203). The same has to be said of personality and association, to the
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Husserl claims, without reference to physical, physiological, or psychophysical causation. The same is true even of genetic matters falling wholly within the immanent plane of conscious experience. One might in this sense appeal to association, for instance, as more than a postulated tendency, but as a felt connection with its own intentionality, entirely amenable to phenomenological description, e.g., when something presently seen recalls something similar in memory or engenders an anticipation.

Husserl names this felt connection “indication” (Anzeige), and it is for him not an ancillary feature of conscious life—it is pervasive.\(^\text{10}\) Despite that, phenomenology is not concerned with indication—and hence association and whatever other phenomena indication underwrites—in its own right, since it is merely a “psychological pattern of connection”\(^\text{11}\) that does not track the kinds of connections made in logical judgments, and hence suffers from a “lack of insight.”\(^\text{12}\)

The inauguration of genetic phenomenology coincides with Husserl’s change of mind on this point. It is around 1917/1918,\(^\text{13}\) when he comes to speak in terms of passive and active syntheses, that Husserl develops a suitable conceptual apparatus for the classification of conscious life that lets the sub-rational appear in a positive light. Indeed, the division of conscious life in terms of passive and active spheres (which, of course, is a distinction rather than a division or separation)\(^\text{14}\) really presents a unitary framework embracing the logical (“logical” in a somewhat extended sense, including any rational “position-taking,” whether logical in the strict sense, axiological, or practical) and pre-logical sides of consciousness alike, accounting, on the one hand, for the peculiarity of passive and active constitution and, on the other hand, for their collaboration, reciprocal influence, and mutual support.

Husserl clarifies the connection between the logical and the pre-logical in his analyses depicting the latter in its proto- or quasi-rational character. Phenomena of indication, of the natural feeling of transition from moment to moment in experience, are not rational per se, but “mimic” reason, anticipate it, prepare the way for it, and sustain it once it has been achieved. In the Crisis Husserl claims that reason, e.g., in the form of geometry and the natural sciences, could not have

\(^{9}\text{FL06}\) Footnote 9 continued

\(^{9}\text{FL07}\) extent that these are meant to causally explain the phenomenon in question, since phenomenology cannot presuppose anything about causation, and because, in principle, no causally governed fact has any bearing on the properly normative characteristics that make up a phenomenon’s essence and validity, if Husserl’s polemic against psychologism in the Logical Investigations and call for a phenomenological grounding of scientific concepts in Philosophy as a Rigorous Science (Husserl 1965) are correct. Further, Husserl excludes any dispositional tendencies within conscious life from the realm of genuine phenomenological evidence (Husserl 2004a, §24, 1989b, p. 209/204). When we merely postulate association, for instance, as a principle based on regularly occurring mental events as the effects of a tendency, the postulated principle itself has no strictly phenomenological evidence.

\(^{10}\text{FL01}\) Husserl (2001a, p. 187).

\(^{11}\text{FL01}\) Husserl (2001a, p. 114).

\(^{12}\text{FL01}\) Husserl (2001a, p. 184).

\(^{13}\text{FL01}\) As Steinbock (1998, p. 128) reports, it may have been shortly after his 1906 declaration, perhaps between 1908 and 1910, that Husserl began to seriously reconsider genetic matters, according to a letter from 1918.

emerged from a self-consciously rational impulse.\textsuperscript{15} Rather, there is a “hidden”
instinctive reason that drives the cultivation of reason from the start, revealing this
latent goal relatively late in the (historical) process.\textsuperscript{16}

Husserl generalizes this idea in his theory of passive, associative synthesis.
Before one deliberately formulates any theory connecting experiences together,
classifying them, forming judgments about them, and the like, there are already
tendencies toward rational order in the form of associative connections, themselves
rooted in the phenomenon of affection.\textsuperscript{17} Even the simplest form of association—
e.g., in the form of connecting $B'$ to $A'$ on the basis of a past experienced connection
of $A$ to $B$—has a quasi-rational character insofar it functions as a \textit{motive} for
conscious events.\textsuperscript{18} The association explains the connection. It serves as its ground
and “reason,” albeit in a loose sense.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, the logical and the pre-logical fit together in a single \textit{motivational} nexus.\textsuperscript{20}
The proto-rational realm of passive synthesis, where indication holds sway, is now
of fundamental importance to Husserl’s phenomenology, legitimating his genetic
turn and, ultimately, pointing him in the direction of a theory of genetic
reconstruction.

3 Motivation for reconstruction

It remains far from obvious how one goes from securing the field of genetic analysis
as such to the narrower problematic of reconstruction. Why would the genetic
account need to go any further than memory can take us in tracking the dynamics of
conscious life? In response, I believe reconstruction is actually intimately bound up
with the project of genetic phenomenology and, moreover, that Husserl supplies
further motivation by appealing to the nature of intentionality itself. Now, one
should note that the two are certainly not the same project. Reconstruction is only
one part of the greater project of genetic phenomenology. Besides the various
reconstructive analyses, one can also look into the realm of active constitution that
one has consciously undergone and directed or participated in oneself, such as, to
give only two examples, making a certain kind of logical judgment for the first
time,\textsuperscript{21} or undergoing an ethical self-transformation.\textsuperscript{22}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Husserl (1970, p. 52 (§9b)); p. 74 (§16)).
  \item \textsuperscript{16} However, it is a curious fact that in the \textit{ethical} sphere [at least in the early and mid 1920s, e.g., in
  Husserl (1989a, 2004b)], Husserl retains his earlier negative attitude toward the sub-rational. See Biceaga
  (2010, pp. 73–74).
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Husserl (2001c, pp. 163–165).
  \item \textsuperscript{18} If this only seems to support the emergence of logical judgment (in the strict sense) from proto-rational
  experience, that is not so. See Husserl (2000, pp. 5–9), where Husserl suggests a similar basis for the
  development of the intentionality of feeling and willing.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Husserl (1989b, pp. 223/234).
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Husserl (1999, §§38–39, Husserl 1989b, §56).
  \item \textsuperscript{21} See Husserl (2000, e.g., §65 and Husserl 1973c, Part II).
  \item \textsuperscript{22} See Husserl (1989a, 29–35 and Husserl 2004b, pp. 244–255).
\end{itemize}

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Consider how the general project of a genetic phenomenology requires forays into reconstructive territory. The chief problem of genetic phenomenology is to provide a macro-dynamic account of the primal institution (Ursitigung)\textsuperscript{23} of the basic structures of consciousness. We are told in one very early manuscript on genetic phenomenology that genetic analysis has the aim of elaborating a “‘history’ of consciousness” in order “to clarify every given structure according to its origin.”\textsuperscript{24} Since a good deal of our cognitive endowment and, in general, the experiential sediment framing our conscious life, arose in transactions with the world of which we have and can have no memory, the impetus to leave no stone unturned expressed in the preceding quotation entails the project of plumbing the depths of consciousness’ immemorial past. When Husserl more or less repeats that claim in the Cartesian Meditations, he further emphasizes the reconstructive direction such a history must eventually take.\textsuperscript{25} There he claims that genetic phenomenology will, among other things, develop an alternative to the psychological account of the origin of the “object” concept, which, if anything is, is certainly a major event lying in the immemorial past of conscious life.\textsuperscript{26}

In Husserl’s later manuscripts we find a variety of texts that sharpen Husserl’s aims and rationale for phenomenological reconstruction. As to its aims, phenomenological reconstruction is not required dig up every primal institution in consciousness’ past. Uncovering the nature of the emergence of the most basic and pervasive structures of consciousness pays the greatest analytic reward. This is evident in Husserl’s analyses of the world-horizon itself as an “acquisition,” which Text Group VII of Husserliana Volume 39 lays out. The world-horizon refers, minimally, to that form of intentionality necessary for putting us in contact with transcendent reality. It not only makes possible our exchanges with this or that particular object, but just as much enables us to inhabit an environment, a traversable space and surrounding world beyond what is immediately given in sensory experience. It comprises the sense of presence we have of the things and environment that confront us.

Accounting for this surely has to be one of the greatest explananda for genetic phenomenology. Nothing, except the basic temporal and perhaps intersubjective structures of conscious life, rivals the world-horizon in importance due to its sheer pervasiveness. The emergence of the world-horizon is, moreover, the line of

\textsuperscript{23} On the notion of “primal institution” in Husserl, see Dodd (2004, pp. 61–78).
\textsuperscript{24} Husserl (2001c, p. 339/627).
\textsuperscript{25} Husserl (1999, §58).
\textsuperscript{26} Expanding on this point, it is interesting to observe how in the brief, programmatic treatment of genetic themes in the Cartesian Meditations, Husserl puts front and center questions about the sequential compatibility of the consciousness of early childhood and that of maturity (Husserl 1999, p. 108/74), the problem of “ultimate genesis” as answering to the traditional problems of the “psychological origin of the ‘idea of space,’ ’... the ‘idea of a physical thing,’ and so forth” (p. 110/76), development in “early infancy” (p. 112/79), the primal institution of the experience of “an environment of ‘objects’” (pp. 113/79–80), and the “realm of the ‘innate’ a priori, without which an ego as such is unthinkable” (p. 114/81). These very same problems are also taken as paradigmatic in the early manuscripts on static/ genetic phenomenology (Husserl 2001c, pp. 338/626, 345/634, 1973a, pp. 38–39/640–641). Reconstruction clearly forms a central area of concern within genetic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology more generally.
demarcation in consciousness’s history between a purely passive life of bodily impulses aimed at sensory enjoyment, which Husserl in some manuscripts calls the “pre-world,”27 and the life of the mind grounded in the conscious possession of a normative framework defining the success and failure of its various more or less elaborate undertakings.28 Clarifying this juncture in consciousness’s history genetically will be impossible without reconstructive techniques.

There are two lines of thought concerning the micro-dynamics of consciousness that, taken together, push us to ask about the genesis of the world-horizon, as Husserl explains in text 41 and supplement XXXVIII of the Lebenswelt manuscripts.29

Husserl is committed, on the one hand, to the idea that every intentional act is elaborated in some extant horizon, whether by way of retentional or protential “indicating [anzeigende] apperception.”30 Indeed, the horizon is the “schema of sense” for achieving what is to be accomplished in any intentional act (1). The horizon gives the intentional act its teleological, rational, or normative character, loosely determining what will count as success or failure in performing the act. Even in perceptual intentionality, experience is defined in terms of presenting the environment and its objects in terms of the norms latently present in a horizon pointing the way to optimal contact with one’s surroundings.31

Husserl is also committed, on the other hand, to the thesis that every horizon is instituted in some intentional act. Every item in memory, of course, but likewise every practical ability or cognitive ability that is under one’s conscious control, is acquired. There is first some fledgling acquaintance or attempted performance that is then followed by practice and eventually some degree of competence or familiarity. As early as the 1907 lectures on Thing and Space, he maintains that perceptual intentionality is dependent on the competent deployment of the lived-body, an “empirical” connection arising by means of associative ties.32 A little over a decade later, in Ideas II, Husserl puts the point more generally when he states that “[o]riginally, the ‘I move,’ ‘I do,’ precedes the ‘I can do’.”33

Husserl expresses the problem these two lines of thought produce in a couple of different ways, but in each case it is clear that together they engender an infinite regress. One way is in terms of the conceptual pair (Selbst-)Habe/Vorhabe.

Intentionality involves, on the one hand, the Vorhabe, the intentional schema, pre- possession or, more simply, plan, to engage with the thing itself, or the actual Habe, the possession or intentional contact with the thing itself. Alternatively, intentionality has both an aspect of implicit, “mute” familiarity and of explicit grasping. The familiarity, the intentional schema has the character of a product of past encounters with transcendent reality while at the same time being the very condition for contact

27FL01 28 On the concept of passivity, see Biceaga (2010, especially pp. xvi–xxi).
32FL01 32 Husserl (1997, §49).
with transcendent reality. Every implicit intentional schema is the result of some explicit possession, and likewise every explicit possession is the activation of some implicit intentional schema.  

We discover here a chicken-and-egg-style infinite regress, an absurdity that Husserl deems “senseless.” Every episode of making contact with reality, as an explicit having (Habe) of the intentional object, presupposes some prior familiarity or schematic Vorhabe, while that implicitly familiar schematic Vorhabe itself is the product of some previous contact with reality, some Habe, which, again, rests on its own Vorhabe that is precipitated by yet another Habe, and so on ad infinitum, stretching back indefinitely into the past of conscious life. We can only avoid the regress by clarifying the primal institution of these forms of intentionality, and this means nothing short of providing a genetic account of the world-horizon, reconstructing the primal institution of the broader domain of intentionality in which the dynamic of Habe/Vorhabe unfolds. Clarifying the primal institution of the world-horizon (a task we will not follow through with presently) is manifestly only possible with the aid of reconstructive techniques. One does not and cannot recall this occurrence as a factual event. It must be pieced together without the kind of evidence that memory affords. And, since the primal institution of the life-world is a major event in the immemorial past of any individual conscious life, the need to clarify this event is simultaneously a call to phenomenological reconstruction.

4 Method for reconstruction

Now that we have a sense of the urgency of the reconstructive project, we can consider Husserl’s methodological prescriptions for carrying that project out. What Husserl proposes in his later manuscripts is a two-pronged approach, treating the issue both “from within,” by exploring one’s present and remembered conscious life and projecting certain features back onto its immemorial past, and “from without,” by being confronted with the fact of our immemorial past by others and by subsequently making careful observations of other conscious beings like ourselves—human infants and young children—in order to establish an indirect link with our past.

This picture is consistent with Nam-In Lee’s groundbreaking interpretive work, which emphasizes the role of empathy, although it also significantly enriches our understanding of Husserl’s reconstructive method. Lee, in particular, does not address the egological perspective, on the supposition that without any determinate memory of one’s immemorial past, the solitary subject is completely cut off from that realm. We will see momentarily that, while the egological perspective is quite

34FL01 34 See also Lohmar (2003, pp. 115–116) and Bejarano (2006, p. 157), who have both hit upon roughly this same conundrum, but without reference to the Lebenswelt manuscripts and the problem of the genesis of the world-horizon per se.
34FL02 35 Husserl (2008, p. 444; cf p. 448).
35FL01 37 See especially Lee (1993, pp. 155–160).
limited, it does produce some positive results useful for reconstruction. By implication, Lee misses the mutual support that, I will show, the approach “from within” and “from without” lend one another. And, although Lee captures the heart of the approach “from without,” he misses one crucial feature we will introduce below, namely, that the very question of our immemorial past is first posed to us and opened up as a horizon for possible phenomenological research by others, in the intersubjective sphere.

As the motivation “from within,” I observe, for instance, that I have various cultivated abilities, but I have no recollection of how they arose. For example, my ability to speak, to use my body to get around, etc., are all abilities whose formation lies in my inaccessible past despite having the character of products.

Lacking direct access to the experiences that produced them, I “analogizingly” interpret these abilities along the lines of other habits or patterns of behavior that I do remember. Ultimately, there is good reason to think that all or most of these habits and abilities have their roots in instincts, in “innate” abilities. I even have access to some such instincts “from within.” The sudden appearance of tendencies toward sexual behaviors that I did not bring about in myself, during puberty is a good example. But habitual behaviors generally, including cases of addictive behavior, work just as well to exhibit what an acquired behavior is like and how it typically emerges and functions.

A return to the topic of the primal institution of the world-horizon is helpful at this point. An investigation of this topic is not only relevant because it forces us onto reconstructive terrain, as we just saw, but also because it highlights one of the most significant events in conscious life, namely, the passage from the domain of pure passivity, of instinctive behavior aimed at various biologically and socially constrained forms of satisfaction, to the domain of active intentionality, where one has insight into one’s legitimate aims (cognitive, axiological, and practical) and can more or less rationally deliberate about the means suitable to achieve them. Arriving at this juncture, this pivotal moment, puts one in a position to trace out further lines of inquiry into the realm of pure passivity or the pre-world, along with those more basic forms of activity (e.g., acquiring language) within the newly instituted world-horizon that also lie beyond what can possibly be remembered.

It is the radicalizing of the technique of variation that takes us to the genetic line of demarcation between world and pre-world and, hence, opens up the whole field of the immemorial past of individual conscious life. This technique does not immediately produce a reconstruction of the primal institution of the world-horizon, but it clears the ground for that analysis to take place. Eidetic method is usually performed under the assumption that it will reveal the essence of an experience of

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38FL01 Husserl (2008, p. 476).
41FL01 Husserl (2008, p. 583).
42FL01 Husserl (1989b, p. 257/270).
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the form *ego-cogito-cogitatum*, i.e., of an experience that belongs to an ego, consists
of certain adumbrating moments, and presents a transcendent entity. But, Husserl
asks rhetorically, “Can I not proceed differently, so that this commitment indeed
forms the beginning, but is later overturned?”

Indeed, he thinks we can thus discover phenomena deeper and more primordial than the Cartesian “I think.”

In a radical eidetic variation we can strip away the specifically worldly character
of experience and discover its experiential subsoil, namely, possible forms of
affective lived-experience, which Husserl more specifically describes as *instinct*.
Such possibilities are not empty ones, they are not pure fictions. They are rather
possibilities “that must be drawn from transcendental factuality [Tatsächlichkeit]
and its possibilities,” which means that they “refer to actual facts of the same
apparative type,” even if we have no determinate recollection of the actual
facts. These insights are, in fact, the results of Husserl’s method of the
destructuring (Abbau) analysis of experience consistently carried out.

Performing this variation thus puts us on reconstructive terrain, on that part of it
Husserl calls the pre-world, which also allows one access to the rest. It is the fault
line revealing clearly for the first time what is on the far side of the world-horizon,
the various elements of the pre-world. From there, one must embark on the
reconstructive task of formulating the general laws of sequential composibility,
which just are the laws of genesis, the forms of genetic constitution that bridge the
gap exposed in the radical variation between world and pre-world, and then further
into the world-horizon, insofar as it pertains to the immemorial past of individual
conscious life.

One must inquire here about the relations between successive
conscious experiences, and especially the dynamics at work in the emergence of
types of experience, of whole structures of conscious life.

The relations or laws that govern such occurrences are motivational laws. We can
analyze the sequential composibility of these different states by discerning the
possible relations of motivation between them, “the relation of conditionality
obtaining between the motivating and the motivated.”

The strata of experience that emerge in one’s immemorial past are largely, if not entirely, passively
motivated. One does not choose to acquire a new dimension of conscious life, such
as language, even if its acquisition demands one’s active participation. The passive
motivation, Husserl insists, is affection. One is passively pulled in a new direction, a
new kind of response is elicited for the first time thanks to an affection that sends
one in that direction and engenders that response. As Husserl puts it, “A new kind of

44FL01 Husserl (2006, p. 353). My translation. All further translations of this text are my own.
45FL01 Husserl (2008, p. 470).
p. 644): “But attending to constitution [i.e., cognitive engagement with the world] is not attending to
 genesis, which is precisely the genesis of constitution.”
50FL01 Husserl (1973a, p. 41/644). My translation. All further translations are my own.
affection corresponds to every new region.” 51 And so for each additional stratum of experience elaborated in the reconstruction there will be some new peculiar affection that attunes one to that stratum in the first place.

Let’s now turn to the intersubjective perspective, problem of reconstruction considered “from without.” It is in this perspective that the reconstructive problem first emerges. We learn early on in life about our immemorial past from others, who are thus responsible for opening up that horizon for us. 52 The implication of others in one’s own self-understanding is an indication of Husserl’s claim that the individual’s life is an abstract segment of the intersubjective sphere. 53 It is through a joint communicative effort that we come to learn about ourselves in the memories of other people, thus acquiring “quasi-memories” of ourselves. 54

In acquiring these quasi-memories, the past of an individual conscious life is altered in a unique way. The modification has two moments. First, “new content” is added to my past. I now include in my past the events that others tell me took place, regarding things I did or ways I behaved. 55 I also include whatever I come to learn about the typical behavior of fetuses and young children, inhabitants of the pre-world. This is a process in which, Husserl says, “I remember myself in others,” in which I “quasi-remember myself ‘in’ their memories, and in a mode of ontic validity that permits demonstration precisely as a mode of presentifying experience.” 56 In other words, this information I gather about myself from others has all the validity of any statement another expresses to me in good faith, having its certainty mediated by another’s credibility. But because I “presentify” what I hear as my own experience, it is not like just any piece of information. It is supposed to stand in the unity of my life (which, importantly, imposes certain broad constraints on such information) 57 as involving behavior ascribed specifically to me. Husserl refers to this unique experience as memory “as if.” 58

Second, this addition of new content has the consequence of modifying the sense of the experience of the past that I can clearly recall. Everything I can clearly remember now has the sense of an experience that follows and is consistent with the newly acquired stock of past experience. 59 Husserl’s example of the apperception of

54FL01 54 Husserl (2008, pp. 503–504).
57FL01 57 This seems to be the upshot of Husserl (2008, p. 479). There Husserl argues that whatever I discover in a construction will still be within the constraints of what I can conceivably be like, i.e., within the limits of an eidetic variation of myself as “the transcendental ego of a world that is my environing world.”
58FL01 58 Incidentally, this passage is also important because it suggests that phenomenological constructions are also in line with transcendental phenomenology in being eidetic disciplines.
59FL01 59 This seems the be the meaning of the following remarks about the accessibility of a past that cannot be remembered from Husserl (2006, pp. 440–441): “But even if I appresentatively take over the past of another and of everything that I gain through it in worldly terms [weltlich], [I] gain, I possess [habe] in a normal manner the unity of harmoniousness [Einstimmigkeit] and [I] possess what [is included] in the ability to have a conviction again, the ability to verify or even to correct.”
a deer track is perhaps helpful for illustrating this modification of sense.\textsuperscript{60} The difference between my past without its immemorial depths and my past with those depths is like the difference between my experience of a deer track when I am totally ignorant of the existence of deer and how animals leave tracks and, on the other hand, my experience of a deer track with that knowledge, as something burdened with a unique history consisting of certain events accounting for just why it is the way it is. The distant past informs our understanding of the more recent past and the present, and the latter have a very different meaning without the former.

The horizon of the immemorial past thus opened up in the intersubjective context is indeterminate without being subjected to further reconstructive interpretation drawing still more from the intersubjective sphere. This enrichment will necessarily retain a degree of indeterminacy,\textsuperscript{61} but it will add certain important details about the main contours of one’s immemorial past that could not be gained without observing and learning from others people.

The first task in this regard is to come to grips with the cultivation of the lived-body as an instrument for perception, satisfaction of bodily needs, and self-preservation in general.\textsuperscript{62} If we are to learn anything at all about this, it will be through observation of others, of infants and young children.\textsuperscript{63} A careful, reflective empathetic engagement is required, since the mental life of infants and young children is anything but transparent. We can describe the native intelligence they possess in terms of instinct and drive, understanding its elaboration by appealing to the interplay of affection and association in memory.\textsuperscript{64} Such behaviors are invested with a meaning more felt than understood.

From there, one can graft the essential features of the developmental process, emphasizing the basic types of intentional experience and their typical style of transformation, back into one’s own life history. The two paths—the one “from within” and the one “from without”—must function together for an adequate account of the pre-world.\textsuperscript{65} It may be an intersubjective affair that one first gains a sense of one’s immemorial past life, but all of that must ultimately be ratified from within.\textsuperscript{66} It would make no sense if I was told my mind was once constituted in a way that I can have no insight into at present, or if I were to draw inferences about my past life on the basis of the radically unintelligible behavior of others. At any rate, those would be phenomenological dead ends.

The question first appears in the intersubjective context, and that is where most of the details emerge as well. But in every instance, those details are only valid if there is some degree of “coincidence,” a point of contact, between my own possible

\textsuperscript{60} Husserl (2008, p. 411).
\textsuperscript{62} Husserl (2008, pp. 467, 505).
\textsuperscript{65} See, for instance, Husserl (2006, pp. 169–170), where Husserl also approaches this problematic jointly “from without” and “from within.”
\textsuperscript{66} Husserl (1973a, pp. 335–336).
forms of consciousness and what I discern in another. The goal is not identity, but analogy. The analysis “from within” yields its most powerful results in detecting such points of contact. One observes an expression, a behavior, an utterance, and performs a variation of one’s own experience to track down an area of common ground.67 We, too, have our infantile or child-like moments, our affective urges and impulses, both biological and habitually acquired. And what is unclear here can be refined in the radicalized eidetics mentioned above, disclosing the analogous coincidence and making it possible to transplant what we discover in others into our own past.

5 Genetic and generative phenomenology: a complication

The preceding analysis has an interesting implication—one not drawn by Husserl himself—concerning the larger issue of phenomenological method in its various forms. We have so far been concerned with a problem situated in the problematic of genetic phenomenology. That is, we have been considering the large-scale dynamics of conscious life, the necessity of investigating how various strata of conscious meaning arise. In particular, we wanted to know what phenomenology can say about the emergence of such strata lying in one’s immemorial past, beyond one’s ability to recollect more or less clearly datable events in episodic memory.

One aspect of genetic phenomenology not explicitly mentioned up to this point is its “egological” character. Genetic phenomenology focuses on the emergence and refinement of forms of intentionality within the nexus of an individual conscious life.68 Generative phenomenology, on the other hand, has the task of identifying those sui generis structures and patterns of sense shared among individuals, structures constitutively characterized by differences, such as that between “home world” (Heimat, Heimwelt) and “alien world” (fremde Welt), or that between generations.69 The domain of generative phenomena is distinguished by its irreducibility to the constitutive operations of individual subjects. Such things as national and generational identities simply do not boil down without remainder to the constitutive activities of individuals making up a nation or generation.

The analysis of the preceding section, however, complicates this distinction. In the preceding section I showed that Husserl’s approach to reconstruction “from without” entails that an individual’s immemorial past is first opened up constitutively by other subjects, and, above all, by those of the preceding generation. The latter are uniquely positioned to do so, inasmuch as only members of a generation preceding one’s own are capable of reporting on one’s introspectively inaccessible immemorial life. Of course, additional peculiarities of typical inter-generational relations are in play here. For instance, there are certain motivations caretakers have in caring for the young that they tell stories about them in their infancy. That is,

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Husserl’s motivation

more is at work here than one individual indifferently passing on information to
another individual. It is in the context of intergenerational care and (perhaps
parental) bonding that one’s immemorial past is opened up for one.

If it is the case that the original motivation for exploring one’s immemorial past
emerges in a genuinely trans-individual, generative context, then genetic phenomen-
ology cannot complete its proper task without drawing on the resources of
generative phenomenology. Genetic phenomenology is, ideally, supposed to
canvas every layer of sediment defining an individual life, down to its simplest,
most primitive characteristics and abilities. Whatever takes place beyond an
individual’s ability to recall it and, despite that, continues to function in that
individual’s subjective life, is an explanatory desideratum for genetic pheno-
menology. And yet, the attempt to excavate such sedimentation brings one face to face
with generative phenomena. Genetic phenomenology’s entryway to the individual’s
immemorial past is the generative context of typical caretaker–child interrelations.

This challenges one prominent interpretive understanding of the relation between
genetic and generative phenomenology. It is often supposed that the major classes
of phenomenological technique, namely, static, genetic, and generative methods,
must be put to work in serial order. That is, one cannot rightly begin doing genetic
or generative phenomenology without working out its static precursor. Likewise,
genetic phenomenology is supposed to be a precursor to generative phenomenology.

Anthony Steinbock puts the point clearly:

[Just as static and genetic phenomena stand in a relation of the simple to the
complex, so too does Husserl intimate (initially) that genetic and generative
phenomena exist in a relation of the simple to the complex: The individual
genesis must be worked out prior to intersubjective becoming or generation,
self-temporalization and monadic facticity prior to communal historicity, the
constitution of the unity of a life prior to the constitution of the unity of a
tradition.70

As I have been at pains to make clear, however, this cannot be entirely true. It may
be that in most cases a technique and general domain of phenomena must be
elucidated prior to moving to a higher methodological register.

But an important subset of genetic phenomena—the immemorial past of an
individual’s conscious life insofar as it bears on the ongoing history of that
individual—just can’t be accounted for on genetic grounds alone. It is in that
precarious period between birth and our first memories that we get our bearings in
our lived-body, that we discover the things we like and dislike in the world, that we
establish our first and most lasting personal bonds with others. So much of interest
to genetic phenomenology lies beyond the limit of recollection (Wiedererinnerung).

Accordingly, Husserl says in one manuscript:

The primal child [Das Urkind] and its relatedness to the world. It grows up
[wächst [...] auf] precisely among grownups [den Erwachsenen], it starts out
with primal needs or primal enjoyments, and as it grows it accrues the new

70FL01 Steinbock (2003, p. 303).
upon the old ever anew – in the sociality of generative renewal/preservation 
[sich erneuern,-erhaltenden]. A single system of drives, fulfillments of drive,
formations of goals, formations of ends: World-constitution.71

What Husserl is saying here is, in a nutshell, that the individual subject’s very
intentional directedness to the world, which we saw above to be a matter falling
within the problem area of genetic reconstruction, is also a generative matter. And
that is not so just because of birth (one of the paradigmatic limit-phenomena
discussed by Steinbock72 as a bridge from the genetic to the generative domain).
Once past that ultimate threshold, once a life has been embarked upon, the basic
intentional parameters of individual subjective life, i.e., instinct or drive, are in some
way interrelated with those of generative “sociality.”

Consider a more concrete instance of this same point, from another late
manuscript of Husserl’s:

The original instinctive relatedness of every ego to its “own” as an instinctive
implication of the “welfare” [des “Wohls”] of these others in my own
[welfare]. The others’ […] “welfare” however implies again instinctively the
welfare of their others or, better, their “neighbors” in the original instinctive
sense, who are not immediately my neighbors. What is primary is thus
generative implication.73

There is a beginning in every individual life of the establishment of personal
connections with others, and this process is driven by individual subjective elements
(i.e., instinctive feelings) and by generative elements (e.g., typical interaction with
caretakers). So not only is the more cerebral phenomenon of basic world-
directedness a hybrid genetic/generative affair, so also is basic other-directedness.
On both these matters, and perhaps others still, it appears that patently genetic
phenomena, and specifically phenomena only accessible by reconstructive tech-
niques, require one to take into account the generative context in which they unfold
and to determine precisely what relations obtain between them. Husserl forces us to
recognize this ambiguity in general when he names the genetic domain of the
individual’s reconstructed immemorial past the Urgenerative.74

The neat and tidy division according to which “[g]enetic method is concerned
with self-temporalization or facticity, and generative method with socio-historical
temporalization or historicity”75 does not hold up in all cases. It is not entirely true
that “limit” phenomena appear only once a methodological register has run its
course and force the researcher to the next, higher register. Genetic phenomenology
must take recourse to generative phenomenology before it has run its course. If that

71FL01 71 Husserl (2013, p. 222); my translation, emphasis added.
73FL01 73 Husserl (2013, p. 429); my translation, emphasis added. See also Husserl (1973b, pp. 406–407, 511,
74FL01 74 Husserl (1973b, pp. 433, 182). There are numerous other passages that call into question the strict
demarcation of the genetic from the generative. See, for instance, the following: Husserl (2008, pp. 330,
74FL02 390–391, 582, 585, 662).
75FL01 75 Steinbock (2003, p. 303; cf. p. 314).
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is true, then greater caution and further reflection is necessary in order to more precisely locate the border(s) and point(s) of contact between genetic and generative phenomenology. The familiar interpretation of a clear-cut, serial ordering of methodological registers is no longer adequate in this regard.

References


