

es im doppelten Sinne in sich: Es ist zwar manchmal – um in der Metapher des Bergbaus zu bleiben – schwer zugänglich und oft auch nur mühevoll in den Griff zu kriegen; gleichzeitig verbirgt sich doch der ein oder andere Schatz unter der angestaubten Oberfläche. Wir tun gut daran, die Einsichten Blumenbergs ernst zu nehmen, die er uns anbietet: Schließlich blicken wir mit Blumenberg nicht nur einfach auf das „vergangene Jahrhundert der Phänomenologie“ (509); sondern stehen – auch als Phänomenologinnen und Phänomenologen – als „beteiligte Zuschauer“ schon längst in einem neuen Jahrhundert. Oder, mit Blumenberg gesprochen: „Die Philosophie hat nicht nur Geschichte, sie ist ihre Geschichte.“ (PS, 13)

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Alexander Schnell, *Was ist Phänomenologie?*, Frankfurt a. Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2019, 182 p., ISBN 978-3-465-04377-5, 24,80€

From its first beginnings in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, phenomenology (back then still understood as a type of *descriptive psychology*) inhabited the conflictual area between its Brentanian empirical-positivistic roots and its irreal (idealist) domain of essences. Alexander Schnell's newest book *Was ist Phänomenologie? (What is phenomenology?)* attempts along its 182 dense pages to radically re-establish phenomenology as a speculative transcendental idealism, that, reaching beyond the limits of any possible description, aims to reflect and phenomenalyze the origins of the transcendental sphere.

Right from the first lines of the *Preface*, the author stresses that this book is not at all meant to be a sort of handbook, an introduction to a defined discipline. However, this does not exclude the introductory character of the work, namely that of an *introductory consideration* (*einleitende Besinnung*), an *introduction* into the deepest spheres of subjectivity and beyond. Schnell takes phenomenology to be a unitary, systematic—but still open—project, which constitutes a “philosophical horizon shared by all [phenomenologists] and their common direction of thought” (24) and bestows upon the new generations of phenomenologists a task that has yet to be developed. This task, explicitly assumed in this volume, is that of bringing about the phenomenological idea of grounding. Schnell further spells out this task as two questions, one concerning the intelligibilization (*Intelligibilisierung*) of cognition, the other one concerning the harmonization of transcendental subjectivity and the “transcendence of the world” (22).

The book is structured in three main parts (each divided in two chapters)—“*On the method of phenomenology*,” “*Phenomenology as transcendental Idealism*,” and “*Phenomenology and the Question concerning Reality*”—according to the three different paths along which Schnell intends to proceed: a) by immersing into

the phenomenological method; b) by conducting a historical investigation of two main sources of phenomenology: German Idealism and Anglo-Saxon Empiricism; c) through an examination of the contemporary positioning of "Speculative Realism." Peculiar to this work is that it excludes the consideration of specific phenomenological problems and of according concrete research (a fourth path) that would also involve considering secondary literature. Thus, the volume appears fairly original, scarcely referring to contemporary exegesis, while still drawing on the author's previous, more detailed, German publications, *Hinaus. Entwürfe zu einer phänomenologischen Metaphysik und Anthropologie* and *Wirklichkeitsbilder* (fr. *La déhiscence du sens*).

Schnell's introductory remarks outline the classical position of phenomenology by first discussing Ernst Tugendhat's critique of phenomenology and then by setting forth four phenomenological theses as "operative guidelines" (37). Tugendhat's criticism is important for Schnell's endeavor because in elaborating his phenomenological counterargument he familiarizes his reader from the get-go with two key concepts of his constructive transcendental method which distinguish phenomenology from every Realism: namely, a generative concept of truth (*generativer Wahrheitsbegriff*), and sense-forming processuality (*sinnbildende Prozessualität*). The four theses, to which the following discussions in the book will connect, concern (1) phenomenology's double lack (ontological and gnoseological) of presuppositions, (2) givenness understood as the result of a process of genetization (*genetisierte Gegebenheit*), (3) correlativity, e.g. the irreducibility of the subject-object structure, (4) phenomenology as intelligibilization or making something transcendently intelligible.

The *first chapter* offers a more in-depth view on the Husserlian phenomenological method and its fundamental concepts (epoché and reduction, eidetic variation, phenomenological description, and phenomenological construction) starting from "four convergence points of sense-formation" (43): transcendental, the sense dimension of phenomenology (*Sinnhaftigkeit*), phenomenology as a science of essences, and correlativity with its three levels (that of natural attitude, transcendental subjectivity, and the ultimate level of pre-immanence). Beyond this first rather expository chapter, the author seeks to also expose the limitations of Husserl's (intuitive-descriptive, static or genetic) method and stresses the necessity of overcoming its frames toward a constructive approach in phenomenology.

Thus, the *second chapter* outlines a theory of understanding (*Verstehen*) that expands the phenomenological method and highlights its speculative grounding. The following two chapters depict phenomenology and its foundations in a historical frame. In *chapter three*, the author tackles three fundamental problems of phenomenology, namely the legitimacy of intuitive evidence, the specific sense of being in the attitude of epoché, and the connection between the epistemological justification and the ontological ground of transcendental

constitution, by tracing their roots in German Idealism (mainly, Fichte and Schelling) and showing how revisiting them can shed new light on the phenomenological method. Another fundamental source of phenomenology is visited in *chapter four*, namely the British Empiricism, that together with a close reading of some key passages from Husserl's *Krisis* allow Schnell to examine the impulses of Hume in a series of motives that define Husserl's later account of transcendental phenomenology. The last two chapters represent the more systematic, technical, and original part of this volume. *Chapter five* engages in a debate with Quentin Meillassoux's criticism of phenomenology and his "Speculative Realism" not just for the sake of rebutting it, but rather to show how phenomenology can face from an idealist standpoint the challenge of legitimizing speculative thinking. The concept of reality is central to the *sixth chapter*—the last chapter of the book—which ultimately aims at better outlining it in the context of what the author calls "the original phenomenon of sense-formation" (*Urphänomen der Sinnbildung*). In doing this, Schnell also sketches out the main reflective stages of a constructive phenomenology and shows how—most interestingly—imagination plays a central role in overcoming the "tautology of subjectivity".

Condensed in *Was ist Phänomenologie?*, Schnell's newest design of constructive phenomenology seeks to radicalize Husserl's phenomenology and take it to greater levels of profundity. This can be well noticed in the case of phenomenological description that the author holds to be insufficient, despite recognizing its unquestionable necessity for the analysis of immanent consciousness, for the ultimate tasks of phenomenology, namely the ultimate pre-immanent legitimization of knowledge. First of all, if it were not for the "constructive aspects" of phenomenology as transcendental philosophy which enable the critique of transcendental knowledge, description could never be freed from what Husserl called its "transcendental naivety"—taking for granted transcendental experience and its objects. Secondly, in descending beyond immanent objects and acts toward the original constitutive phenomena it becomes clear that "[...] transcendental subjectivity is not *just* 'given', 'present', 'actual' so that a description could *suffice* in order to expose its structural moments" (62). What is needed to overcome the "blind spot" (90), this limitation of description, Schnell argues, is phenomenological construction, meaning a "[...] descent in a zig-zag movement from the respective limit facts into the dimension, which is to be constructed, of that which can explain these facts. In doing this, one must always stick to these facts—thus, it is not a fictional construct, but one that sticks to what is to be constructed" (63).

However, the status of the agent of phenomenological construction remains in our view somewhat equivocal. In complementing the insufficient tool of phenomenological description on the profounder spheres of pre-immanence and pre-subjectivity, can we still speak about actually *using* phenomenological construction? Moreover, what makes Schnell's concept of

construction phenomenological? In the case of the constructive phenomenology of the *original phenomenon of sense-formation*, Schnell argues in the last pages of the volume that unlike transcendental reduction, which depends on the phenomenologist's fulfilment of the *epoché*, the reflection on reflection is fulfilled in what he calls a "transcendental induction." The term 'induction' must be taken here in its etymological sense as *leading in* (*Ein-führung*), namely into the "sphere of pre-immanent, generative, constructive intuitions, which make intelligible the self-reflexive way of proceeding of both the gnoseological and the ontological dimension in the 'original phenomenon of sense-formation'" (177). In another place in the book, Schnell emphasizes the necessity of clearly separating *Reduktion* from *Induktion*, leading-in, since the former opens up the field of transcendental subjectivity, whereas the latter leads into the domain of pre-subjective sense-formation (122). Thus, in order to tackle the fundamental task of phenomenology, namely of accounting for sense-formation, one has to peek in, gain a "constructive intuition" (Schnell quotes Fink's term of *konstruktive Anschauung*), or a depiction (*Bild*) of the workings of anonymity itself. In examining transcendental formations (*Gebilde*) and their ultimate law, imagination (*Einbildung*) plays for Schnell a fundamental role in two aspects: a) construction is understood as a multi-level self-reflective process of depiction (*bildender Prozess*), and b) following Richir's research, it can account for the "surprising, unforeseeable moment of sense-formation" (174).

Husserl himself, as the author notes, avoided entering this zone of anonymity by resorting to the "socializing intersubjectivity"—which subsequently opened the path for all accuses of subjectivism and solipsism. Hence, Schnell's path grasps the opportunity missed by Husserl and treads the non-descriptive (because non-intuitive and non-presentable) sphere of accomplishments of consciousness which are to be disclosed through the movement of self-reflection and its constructs. Given the incipient (introductory) character of this work and the subsequent lack of any concrete "constructive intuitions," it still remains open to what extent Schnell's project of phenomenological speculative idealism will hold and advance in its declared goal of undermining the divide between being-in-itself and being-for-me, while still maintaining the fundamental intuitive character of any phenomenological endeavour.

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Nicolas De Warren & Thomas Vongehr (eds.), *Philosophers at the Front. Phenomenology and the First World War*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017, 284 p., ISBN 978-94-6270-121-2, 49,50 €.

Nicolas De Warren and Thomas Vongehr's exquisitely handsome book is part of the output of a still on-going ERC research project. Headed by De