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## **Human Experience and Nature: Editors' Introduction**

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### 1. Introducing the Introduction

The papers in this volume were first presented at the annual Royal Institute of Philosophy conference hosted by the University of the West of England, Bristol, in September 2011.

The conference title 'Human Experience and Nature: Examining the Relationship between Phenomenology and Naturalism' points to a problem that, like many fundamental problems in philosophy, is at once strikingly contemporary and classical:

how can we account for the place of human experience in nature, when the special sciences that have emerged from experience to study nature seem unable to situate it?

Questions about the relationship between consciousness and the natural world have been at the centre of many philosophical debates: how can we relate first- and third-person data? Is it possible to explain exhaustively, or at all, consciousness in naturalistic terms?

Although, these questions have been the driving force of much recent philosophical work, one issue in particular has been underexplored within this broad field: what is the relationship between phenomenology (as a philosophical method for describing lived experience) and the broadly accepted idea that philosophy should be consistent with a naturalistic worldview.

Put otherwise, how does human thought think about a nature that by its own account precedes it; how can we think a world without thought? These are two sides of the same question. On the one hand, we ask: how do we think about experience or

consciousness as located in nature? And on the other hand, how do we think about what exceeds or transcends thought, but does not exclude it (or rather contains it), namely nature. These questions have emerged in various registers and in different traditions throughout the history of philosophy and have taken on a particular poignancy with the rise of modern science and the naturalistic worldview that underpins it. But they all ultimately refer to a seemingly intractable ontological problem that has played a large role in the history of philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Kant and Heidegger: what is the relationship between thought and being? Expressed phenomenologically, we find ourselves facing almost a chicken and egg problem, in asking what came first, nature or thought (experience of that nature)? The obvious answer presented by the sciences (and probably by most sensible people), that of course nature precedes thought does not account for the fact that the question already situates nature's precedence within the thought of the relation between nature and thinking. The problem therefore concerns both how to *think* about nature prior to our thought or experience of it, and what nature *is* without or prior to that experience.

The problem at stake here could also be phrased in terms of two 'nesting' problems or problems about emergence. First, how can thought come to know the nature from which it emerges and in which it is nested? And second, how can nature know thought, or more precisely, how can the language that thought has devised to talk about nature (here we can think specifically of the language of the natural sciences) explain its own origins in thought, or more specifically in conscious experience, without giving up the claim to explain what transcends thought or consciousness, i.e. nature. In both cases there is a potential worry that what emerges here, thought and the language of science

*qua* language of nature, cannot explain what it emerges from without effacing or distorting it. Thus the relationship between nature, science and thought, requires careful philosophical unpacking.

This is, in broad brushstrokes, the problem of the relationship between experience and nature and between the descriptive science of (pure) experience, phenomenology, and the language of nature, naturalism. In other words, how should we conceptualise the relationship between first-person experience (and phenomenology, the philosophical method for its study) and nature (and naturalism, the philosophical view providing an objective ontology that does not help itself to *being*, in a substantive and gerund sense, that falls outside the horizon of what is explicable in the language of the natural sciences). Of course there are many conceptions of naturalism that range from weak to strong views, and similarly, there are many different conceptions of phenomenology.<sup>1</sup> What we are interested in exploring here is the fundamental assumption naturalistic views share and phenomenologists question: whereas naturalism takes objectivity as its point of departure, phenomenology asks how objectivity is constituted in the first place. This fundamental difference between the two approaches requires careful unpacking and

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<sup>1</sup>For an overview of naturalism see J. Ritchie, *Understanding Naturalism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008); for a critical view of stronger, scientific naturalism see M. De Caro and D. Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). For a detailed survey of phenomenology see D. Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000); S. Overgaard and S. Luft (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2012).

nuanced understanding which we hope the papers in this volume offer. How deep is the disagreement between phenomenologists and naturalists? Is the possibility of a rapprochement plausible, or desirable? The answers to these questions depend on the ways in which one understands the commitments of phenomenology and naturalism.

Experience is not only *of* (directed toward) nature; experience does not only intend nature, as a phenomenologist might put it, but is *within* and a part of nature. And the language of nature, sought by the natural sciences (naturalism) would seem to be a language of the cognition of nature, in other words, of the *experience* of nature, though this is of course debated by many naturalist philosophers. The problem of course is that in the philosophical tradition the two approaches have not been seen to be able to accommodate one another in a manner that did not reduce nature to consciousness (transcendental idealism) or consciousness to nature (reductive physicalism). The former was forced into a type of anti-realist position vis-à-vis the objectivities of the sciences, making them into a species of social construction. The latter seems to lack the means to study important aspects of consciousness and is forced into looking for ways to ignore it, or explain it in the physicalist terms that it has at its disposal, which are unable to capture the quality and uniqueness of human experience, or even characterise it. However both the phenomenological and naturalistic traditions seem to share a (oft-unacknowledged) rejection of nature's proper transcendence of consciousness: phenomenology remains within a (Kantian) correlationist structure and naturalism, while positing the existence of the objective world outside consciousness, also (generally) thinks that the world is knowable in its fundamental structures and being by consciousness. This in effect limits nature to what falls within the scope of phenomenological description, or what can be

cognized by the language of the natural sciences.

The problem with which we are concerned may be situated squarely in a Kantian framework. It is hard to think of any philosophical work on the relation between conscious experience and what transcends it, i.e. nature, that escapes completely the long shadow of Kant's transcendental idealism. But Kant's Copernican turn did not so much solve the question of the relation between experience and nature as make nature in-itself something that, for all its phenomenal manifestness, frays into unknowability when questioned about its history, genesis and constitution, while deducing that all that was knowable, i.e. all experience of the sensible world, could be schematised according to the categories of the mind. Phenomenal nature, what was knowable, was a correlate of the activities of transcendental consciousness, the structure of which was knowable a priori. The laws of nature to which the sensible world conforms are in this sense knowable insofar as they are the laws of the mind according to which the world is constructed. But this limits cognition to the 'boundaries of possible experience', leaving 'the thing in itself as indeed real *per se*, but as not known by us'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'For we are brought to the conclusion that we can never transcend the limits of possible experience, though this is precisely what this science [metaphysics] is concerned above all else to achieve. This situation yields, however, just the very experiment by which, indirectly, we are enabled to prove the truth of this first estimate of our *a priori* knowledge of reason, namely that such knowledge has only to do with appearances, and must leave the thing in itself as indeed real *per se*, but as not known by us.' I. Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1965), Bxix-xx

## 2. Phenomenology

The term 'phenomenology' in the way it is understood in this volume refers to the style and method of doing philosophy that was inaugurated and elaborated by Edmund Husserl in the early part of the twentieth century (sometimes referred to as 'phenomenology with a capital 'P)'). And while Husserl's method was further developed by his students and critics, including Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, at its core the phenomenological style of thinking has remained consistent in its central concern and aim: to found a descriptive science of the appearance of meaning as it appears to consciousness (Husserl, Sartre), *Dasein* (Heidegger), or the lived-body (Merleau-Ponty). The object of this new science, for Husserl, was both sides of what he called the 'fundamental relation of correlation': on the one hand, the sense-bestowing aspect of conscious acts (*noesis*), on the other the objects or meaning-contents of the act (*noemata*). But the key (Kantian) move of Husserl's method is to bring the transcendence of nature into the immanence of consciousness. Husserl's motto was indeed, 'back to the things themselves!', but this entailed for Husserl a return to 'pure experience'. In order to arrive at a point where the fundamental structures of the consciousness-object correlation can be studied, Husserl brackets, or puts out of play, all concern with the natural (read: empirical-ontological) being of the studied object.<sup>3</sup> This epoché (bracketing, suspending)

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<sup>3</sup>E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer 1999 [1931]), 20. See also, 'I ask now: Can we not attain an attitude of such a kind that the *empirical*, being the characteristic of givenness of the natural attitude, remains completely disengaged, and indeed in such a way that *also its essence as essence of nature remains disengaged*,

of transcendent nature allows the study of nature in its givenness to consciousness.

Phenomenology, in this sense, becomes a study of pure experience.

This inevitably leads Husserlian phenomenology into a type of anti-realist position *vis-à-vis* the natural sciences, if not their object – the natural world in-itself. Nature remains out there; it is given to consciousness as transcendent to consciousness. But insofar as the natural sciences attempt to offer an objective picture of transcendent nature they remain derivative or founded upon a more originary or pure layer of the 'lifeworld', or everyday experience. The objectivities of the sciences are for Husserl formalisations of stable meaning structures that are found at the more primordial or naïve level of the lifeworld experience: the 'habits of things' in their appearance formalised.<sup>4</sup> These formal objects prove very useful in making predictions about the natural world and equally useful at generating more formalities and greater levels of formalisation in relation to the world as experienced. They nonetheless remain derivative to the more originary level of lifeworld experience from which they emerge out of the 'habits of things'. To take the objects of science as the most primordial account of nature is, to use

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while, on the one hand, components that enter into the essence of nature or, to be more precise, that enter into nature itself *in individuo*, are maintained [...] We put in brackets, as it were, every empirical act, which may rush forward, so to speak, or which we enacted a short while ago. In no way do we accept what any empirical act presents to us as being.'

E. Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. I. Farin and J.G. Hart (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 32; 39.

<sup>4</sup> E. Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 31

Husserl's words, to mistake 'for *true being* what is actually a *method*', or as Merleau-Ponty rather more poetically puts it, mistake the map for the territory that it represents – which, for Husserl, could only be what is given as transcendent *within the immanence of consciousness*; hence, his resistance.<sup>5</sup> This resistance to the naturalisation of nature is most pronounced in terms of how consciousness should be understood and studied.

One of the major endeavours of Husserl's project was to argue against the reduction of spiritual being, consciousness, to nature as understood by the natural sciences. Unlike some contemporary refusals of reductive attitudes towards consciousness/experience, Husserl's was not motivated by the seeming inability of the natural sciences to account for lived experience in a sufficient or satisfying manner. Rather, he held that contrary to the illegitimate totalisation of a derivative attitude (naturalism), a rigorous tracing back of the development of the formal objects of the sciences demonstrated their rootedness in what precisely they could not account for: lived experience. In this instance – particularly in the analyses of the *Crisis* (see note 4) – it is not so much that there is a Kantian *motivation* at work in Husserl's thought; he did not set out to preserve the space of freedom and God against the determinism of the natural sciences. Nonetheless as the quote below from Ullrich Melle shows, the demonstration of

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<sup>5</sup> 'In geometrical and natural-scientific mathematization, in the open infinity of possible experiences, we measure the life-world – the world constantly given to us in our actual concrete world-life – for a well-fitting garb of ideas [...] It is through the garb of ideas that we take for *true being* what is actually a method [...]' (Husserl, *Crisis*, 51), see also, M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. D. Landes. (New York and London: Routledge 2012), lxxii.



a realm of freedom and self-determination was the result of his descriptive study of pure experience, the fundamental findings of which Melle succinctly expresses:

Whereas nature for natural science is a senseless context of necessity ruled by causal laws, spiritual-personal being is a sense-determined context of motivation; whereas nature, in the sense of modern natural science, is a realm of uninterrupted necessity, spirit (in the sense of the personal subject and its surroundings) is a realm of freedom and self-determination.<sup>6</sup>

The upshot of this is that conscious experience, for Husserl, must be thought of as quite radically distinct from nature as understood by the natural sciences, and hence the methods of the natural sciences are inappropriate for the study of experience.

This attitude towards the incompatibility of natural scientific method and phenomenology *vis-à-vis* the study of experience was maintained and further developed by nearly all philosophers who picked up the mantle of phenomenological thinking in the twentieth-century, perhaps most notably by Heidegger.<sup>7</sup> It is however the aforementioned

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<sup>6</sup> Ullrich Melle, 'Husserl's Personalistic Ethics', *Husserl Studies* **23** (2007), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty is often thought to be the phenomenologist who sought to reconcile phenomenological method with that of the natural sciences. However, as Thomas Baldwin demonstrates in his contribution to this volume Merleau-Ponty maintained (in his two main works *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*) a critical and perhaps unjustifiably prejudiced attitude toward the natural sciences, despite his frequent use of examples drawn from scientific literature. In his later lectures on the

relation or non-relation between the orders of causation (nature) and motivation (experience) that remains the decisive issue in any exploration of the relationship between phenomenology and naturalism. Husserl seems to offer a way out of this impasse when he refers to the body as it is lived (the *Leib* or body-as-lived) as a legitimate 'naturalisation of consciousness'.<sup>8</sup> The relations embodied in the psychophysical whole of the body-as-lived (an 'ensouled' physical object) offer clues as to how the orders of motivation (consciousness, or body-subject) and causation (body-object) might condition one another. This issue is discussed in subtle detail in Rudolf Bernet's contribution to this volume. However, Husserl was never able to resolve the question of the 'legitimate naturalisation of consciousness' and the question seemed to have ceased to preoccupy the phenomenologists that followed him (with the notable

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concept of Nature, Merleau-Ponty again seems to draw heavily on the work of the natural sciences, but a close inspection reveals that he is most pleased with the sciences, or finds their ontological discoveries valid when scientists are, in his view, finally behaving like phenomenologists (Lorenz and von Uexküll being the two primary examples). This holds to Husserl's contention that biology is the closest of all the natural sciences to transcendental phenomenology, a claim that Merleau-Ponty introduces in his later lectures. See, E. Husserl, *Krisis, Beilage XXIII*, trans. Niall Keane, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44 (2013), in press; and Darian Meacham, 'Biology, the Empathic Science', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44 (2013), in press.

<sup>8</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, second book*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1989), 176

exception of Merleau-Ponty). That task, which also includes discerning the feasibility and desirability of the naturalisation project, is one of the tasks of this volume.

Ultimately, the challenge seems to boil down to a question of the compossibility or impossibility of these respective principles of change: motivation (consciousness) and causation (nature). Lacking a causal mechanism to explain how experience might supervene on physical processes, are we trapped on one side or the other of an explanatory gap, unable to think the interaction of the realist-causal and idealist constituting orders, and forced to maintain what Merleau-Ponty calls a 'near crazy paradox'<sup>9</sup> And, conversely, given the dominance of the ontological picture provided by the natural sciences in their efficacy and predictive power, i.e. given the tendency towards thinking the natural world as a sphere of causal closure, does there still remain the possibility of thinking the worldly efficacy of experience? Put otherwise, can motivation effect causation or vice versa? Or, in inquiring into the relationship between these two orders, do we remain trapped in a metaphysical *cul de sac* that in fact requires rethinking both nature and experience, rather than merely trying to think about their interaction, if we are to find a way out?

### 3. Consciousness and Nature

Several papers in this volume address the question of how consciousness and nature encounter each other and, more generally, whether a (more or less happy) marriage of phenomenology and naturalism is possible at all. One direction such a marriage might

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<sup>9</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, trans. B. Bergo and L. Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 76.

take is that of naturalising phenomenology. The other direction is that of 'phenomenologising' nature, so to speak. Both directions of engagement, each making for a very different project, are explored from different viewpoints in the papers in this volume. Several of the papers follow Husserl in his negative assessment of the possibility and desirability of either project. The strongest pro-Husserlian view is that of Dermot Moran, in his paper 'Let's Look at It Objectively': Why Phenomenology Cannot Be Naturalized'. Moran argues against the possibility of completely absorbing the descriptive science of consciousness into the naturalist project. He suggests that the peculiar manner in which the world and objects in the world appear to consciousness is not simply an objective fact in the world but rather an accomplishment of an interwoven web of subjectivities that transcend the world and are presupposed by the sciences that study the world. Phenomenology cannot be naturalized, claims Moran, because it tells the story of the genesis and structure of the reality that we experience but in so doing reveals subjective stances and attitudes which themselves cannot be objectified. Naturalism misunderstands the world because it misunderstands the subject's necessary role in the project of knowledge, and in the very constitution of objectivity. Naturalism subtracts the knowing subject from the process of knowledge, and then treats the desiccated product as if it were the real world.

Matthew Ratcliffe's paper, 'Phenomenology, Naturalism and the Sense of Reality', also responds in the negative to the question: can phenomenology be naturalised? He examines a criticism of naturalism voiced by several phenomenologists, namely that empirical science and scientific naturalism obviously presuppose, rather than succeed in describing, the everyday 'world'. The world of everyday experience, they

argue, is not incorporated into the scientifically described world, even though the latter's intelligibility tacitly depends upon the former. Ratcliffe takes this criticism to task by carefully examining the precise claims made by phenomenologists against science and naturalism, and refining it. He then provides his own definition (following Husserl) of the world as 'sense of reality', which he takes to be a possibility space that is presupposed by the scientifically described world. For Ratcliffe, we perceive various kinds of possibility, which are integral to our sense of what things are, along with our sense that they are. The 'world' that is presupposed by scientific accounts of things is comprised of an openness to the various types of possibility. Science concerns itself only with what is and is not the case, whereas the world is a modal space that is presupposed by the intelligibility of that distinction, amongst others. Ratcliffe further elucidates the sense of reality by contrasting it with the sense of unreality experienced in some kinds of mental disorder. He concludes that attempts to naturalise human experience lack sufficient appreciation of what it is that they seek to naturalise; and that because of this naturalistic explanations of human experience are impoverished, confused or possibly both.

It is a well-known fact that Heidegger's *Being and Time* contains only two brief references to the body; this seminal text has been frequently criticised for this.<sup>10</sup> Husserl's phenomenological exploration of the mind/ body relationship, in contrast, is a much richer phenomenology of the body, although Heidegger makes no reference to Husserl's rich analysis in *Being and Time*, and only briefly mentions it in later writings. In his paper 'The Body as a 'Legitimate Naturalization of Consciousness'', Rudolph Bernet presents a careful analysis of Husserl's phenomenology of the body, asking first, why it is

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<sup>10</sup>M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962[1927]).

that Heidegger overlooked this analysis of the lived body, and second, whether Husserl's account of the lived body (in section two of *Ideas II*)<sup>11</sup> is compatible with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Bernet acknowledges that Husserl's analysis of the lived-body, as innovative as it is, still fits within the traditional metaphysical framework of the unity of 'body' and 'soul'. He begins his analysis with an account of the role these two terms play for Husserl. Bernet then provides a careful study of the famous Husserlian discussion of two hands touching each other, being both touched and touching. The intricate perceptual and sensual processes exposed in this analysis demonstrate the efficacy of a phenomenology of the body. Bernet argues that the non-coincidence of the touching and the touched is the most original experience of bodily spatiality. However, he also claims (in a more Heideggerian vein) that this non-coincidence of the flesh with itself is not only the condition of openness to the world, but also the gap that puts bodily consciousness at the mercy of worldly conditions. Thus an ontological account of 'conditionality' – how the body and soul depend on and interact with one another and with external circumstances – is central to the argument in this paper. Bernet demonstrates that contrary many overly simplistic readings of Husserl, the 'material ontology' that he develops in *Ideas II* does not give itself over simply to a form of subjectivism or to physicalist naturalism.

This 'methodological solipsism' Bernet accords to Husserl is extrapolated beyond in the discovery of another flesh. My constitution of another flesh is inseparable, says

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<sup>11</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989 [1952]).

Bernet, from my experience of the modification and expansion that this foreign flesh introduces in my own flesh. So any constitution of another flesh is thus necessarily a co-constitution. But the encounter with an other is also negative. Only others or scientific instruments can bring about a 'naturalisation' of our body into an abstraction from the intimate consciousness that we have of our living flesh. Bernet concludes that although the bodily phenomenology Husserl develops is foreign to Heidegger's analysis of Dasein in terms of its transcendence, it might have been able to complement it.

Whilst still writing within the Husserlian framework, Dan Zahavi and Eran Dorfman offer a more positive response to the question whether phenomenology and naturalism are compatible. Dan Zahavi's paper, 'Naturalised Phenomenology: A Desideratum or a Category Mistake?' asks whether the attempt to naturalise phenomenology should be welcomed and distinguishes various conceptions of such a project. Zahavi discusses the suggestion that phenomenology should become part of, or at least an extension of, natural science. Zahavi claims that this approach is misguided and bears little relation to the project of transcendental phenomenology inaugurated by Husserl. Husserl took naturalism to be a misguided attempt to view consciousness as an object in the world, an attempt that fails to recognize the transcendental dimension of consciousness. For Husserl, philosophy does not simply contribute to or extend the scope of scientific knowledge, but investigates the basis of this knowledge and asks how it is possible. Zahavi sketches two alternative takes on what a naturalised phenomenology might amount to. The first is letting phenomenology engage in a fruitful exchange and collaboration with empirical science. On this view, the influence may go both ways: employing phenomenological insights in the empirical investigation of the mind as well

as letting phenomenology profit from, and be challenged by, empirical findings (Michael Wheeler's paper makes a similar suggestion with respect to cognitive science). The second – more radical – proposal amounts to a re-examination of the concept of naturalisation and a revision of the empirical/ transcendental dichotomy. Such a naturalisation of phenomenology might not only entail a modification of transcendental philosophy, but also a rethinking of the concept of nature that might ultimately lead to a transformation of natural science itself. Zahavi then suggests that our appraisal of the desirability of such naturalisation should be more positive if we opt for one or both of these takes on naturalising phenomenology.

In his paper 'Naturalism, Objectivism and Everyday Life', Eran Dorfman continues this line of thought. He appeals to the notions of the everyday and of modernity to defend a cautious optimism with respect to the interaction between phenomenology and naturalism. Following Husserl, he distinguishes between the natural attitude, the naturalistic attitude, and objectivism, each of which has a distinct meaning for Husserl. The naturalistic attitude of science, argues Dorfman, influences, accentuates and strengthens the objectivist attitude of everyday life. However, despite the philosophical risk that these attitudes pose, Dorfman argues that they are essential to human experience. He criticises Husserl for rejecting any introduction of concrete reality into the Life-world because of the risk of accepting objectivist idealisations,<sup>12</sup> which would contaminate the Life-world and draw the crisis into it. But such 'contamination' is inevitable, Dorfman claims. By turning to Merleau-Ponty's notion of radical reflection he suggests that in

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<sup>12</sup>See E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment* trans. J. S. Churchill and K. Ameriks, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 41–51.



*Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty employs a seemingly contradictory treatment of naturalism and objectivism, declaring first that they are wrong, before showing that they nonetheless contain a certain truth. Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty is not content with an abstract criticism of naturalism, and dedicates a large part of his work to a detailed analysis of empirical findings in order to insert them into a phenomenological model of perception. The objectivist and naturalistic attitudes can never be completely avoided, concludes Dorfman, and therefore we should seek a methodology which would neither blindly follow these attitudes nor crudely dismiss them.

Another author suggesting that phenomenology and naturalism can be reconciled is Michael Wheeler. In his paper 'Science Friction: Phenomenology, Naturalism and Cognitive Science', Wheeler asks whether or not it is possible to reconcile the transcendental character of phenomenology with cognitive science's commitment to naturalism. He argues that a positive friction exists between the two. Positive friction concerns the ways in which advances in our understanding of intelligent and skilful human activity may be achieved by allowing cognitive science and phenomenology to constrain or influence each other's projects and insights. Wheeler uses McDowell's distinction between constitutive and enabling understanding to show how phenomenology (as transcendental, constitutive) may constrain cognitive science (an enabling, empirical form of enquiry) and vice versa. Wheeler offers a version of naturalism – which he calls 'minimal naturalism' – as the species of naturalism that subscribes to the view that continuity with empirical science requires no more than consistency with science. He then suggests that the transcendental itself is not closed to

the possibility of revision and influence by contingent factors, including sometimes the results of empirical science, and defines a version of it – the ‘domesticated transcendental’ – which he believes is compatible with minimal naturalism. With the transcendental domesticated and naturalism made minimal, Wheeler concludes, there is no conflict between transcendental phenomenology and naturalism.

David Roden also suggests a compatibility of phenomenology and the natural sciences, but with several important caveats. In his paper, ‘Nature’s Dark Domain: an argument for a Naturalised Phenomenology’, Roden points to a ‘dark spot’ in phenomenological analysis: Phenomenology, as has been traditionally understood, is a descriptive science of pure experience. Its findings rest on a body of intuited evidence, meaning experienced in the flesh or characterised by the givenness of sensuous contents, in other words perceptions or various modifications of perception. However, there are, for example, aspects of experience that are so fine-grained as to not be given to intuitive consciousness in perception, yet still hold sway in a certain sense over the constitution of the field of perceptual experience. Roden calls such intuition-transcendent phenomena ‘dark’, offering what Thomas Metzinger calls ‘Raffman Qualia’ and, crucially, the structure of temporal awareness as primary examples of dark phenomena. Roden argues that the existence of dark phenomena disqualifies phenomenology of the transcendental authority it claims, insofar as a transcendental ‘authority’ provides the exhaustive conditions of possibility, in this case of perceptual experience. If there are dark phenomena that escape the phenomenological analysis of pure experience, but nonetheless are active, so to speak, in shaping the perceptual field, this would certainly seem to be a blow to phenomenology’s transcendental claim. Where this leaves

phenomenology is however simply on a par with other sciences, which transcendental phenomenology had previously claimed to ground. As Roden writes: 'phenomenology is in much the same epistemological relationship to its own subject matter as descriptive (i.e. 'phenomenological') physics or biology are to physical and biological reality: *phenomenology cannot tell us what phenomenology is really 'about'.*' Phenomenology can and indeed must include in its analysis the presence of its own dark matter, but it on its own cannot tell us what these are. On this basis Roden makes a case for the naturalisation of phenomenology. Phenomenology must admit the findings of the empirical sciences to inform its analyses insofar as they are able to illuminate its blind spots. In this sense, it is certainly conceivable that phenomenological analysis may also have to allow in constraints arising from outside its proper sphere of pure experience and its intuited body of evidence.

Thomas Baldwin provides a different approach to the issue. Baldwin's paper, 'Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Critique of Natural Science', critically examines Merleau-Ponty's claim that there cannot be a fully scientific account of the world. Baldwin takes this claim to be fundamentally ontological: our own existence cannot be comprehended within scientific inquiries, and since there are fundamental aspects of the world such as space and time which are dependent on our existence, these too cannot be fully comprehended within scientific inquiry. But what is Merleau-Ponty's conception of science? Primarily Merleau-Ponty sees it as a systematic extension of common sense which aims to capture general causal relationships between the objects and properties encountered in experience. But he also gives his view an idealistic flavour by arguing that the general structures which physical laws describe are themselves fundamentally 'forms'

which are dependent upon the perceptual consciousness which exhibits them. This, claims Baldwin, is not justified or developed enough in the Merleau-Ponty texts he examines. Baldwin then reconstructs the arguments Merleau-Ponty provides for his claim that perception is not an event in the world and thus cannot be fully accounted for by scientific scrutiny. He rejects the possible interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's view as a kind of emergentism and proceeds to show that Merleau-Ponty's assumptions about the scientific view of perception are erroneous. These assumptions are that the scientific view of perception is reductive, relies on atomistic 'sensations' and cannot incorporate the meaningful structures of perception. Baldwin rejects the first and the third as unnecessary, and the second as outdated. The paper ends with a discussion of normativity and culture, claiming that the appeals to normativity in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of perception do not provide a strong case for holding that there cannot be a satisfactory naturalistic scientific account of perception. Ultimately, claims Baldwin, Merleau-Ponty's reasons for claiming that our capacity for unreflective bodily perception transcends the limits of natural science are unconvincing.

A rethinking of the relationship between the natural sciences and phenomenology also plays a role in the philosophy of medicine, which takes putatively natural entities, like 'disease' and 'health' and questions their naturalness. In this domain naturalism and phenomenology have come into direct contact, or even conflict. The naturalistic approach to health and disease sees them as natural entities (or even natural kinds) that can be defined, conceptualised and understood in purely naturalistic terms. Phenomenologists (together with several other approaches, such as normativism) see health, illness and disease as inherently value-laden and socially constituted concepts. Fredrik Svenaeus'

paper 'Naturalistic and Phenomenological Theories of Health: Distinctions and Connections', provides a taxonomy of theories of health that illustrates the differences and affinities between a phenomenological and a naturalistic approach. The paper presents the naturalistic approach to health and disease via the work of Christopher Boorse, who sees diseases as processes which impair the function of our body parts making them perform in ways that are subnormal for the species in question. This approach is then criticized using Lennart Nordenfelt's action-based holistic theory of health, and phenomenology. Both the holistic theory of health and phenomenology deny that there can be a definition of ill-health (or of health, for that matter) that is entirely value-neutral. Moreover, the phenomenological approach to illness emphasises the subjective nature of the illness experience, as well as the meaning-making nature of human perception and cognition within which it is lived. Using Heidegger's notion of 'being-in-the-world' Svenaeus develops a notion of 'unhomelike-being-in-the-world' that is characteristic of illness (as well as other conditions). He argues that theories of biology and phenomenology are, indeed, compatible and in many cases also mutually supportive in the realm of health and illness. However, he stresses that even phenomena such as health and illness, which many see as undisputedly bio-physiological phenomena, are replete with the kind of intentionality that they seek to eradicate.

#### 4. Ethics, Naturalism, and Freedom

The relationship between experience and nature (or motivation and causation) does not only have relevance for methodological and ontological concerns, as Svenaeus' paper demonstrates; the practical dimension is very much relevant to this debate. Stemming

perhaps from the very intractability of the causation/motivation dilemma, one domain in which the latter is taken to maintain actual efficacy is clearly the ethical. Ethics has maintained its position as the 'acceptable face of anti scientific-realism'.<sup>13</sup> Simply put, ethics seems to rely on accepting, in some form or another, the worldly efficacy of thought. But does this lead us back to Spinoza's dictum that we call an action free when we are ignorant of its true causes?<sup>14</sup> Or does it invite a re-conception of nature in the necessity to maintain a concept of freedom over and against causal closure? And if so, is ethics not once again promoted to first philosophy for precisely the ontological significance of what it reveals?

Jonathan Webber's contribution, 'Cultivating Virtue', further enriches this line of argument by developing a phenomenological approach to virtue ethics (virtue cultivation) that is based on the reflective method of Jean-Paul Sartre, developed in his earlier works *The Imaginary* and *Transcendence of the Ego*. Phenomenologically speaking, virtues or dispositions are something akin to lenses through which the world is given to a subject. As Webber writes: 'Character [...] structures the agent's environment into a field of reasons'. As such, our character itself is not an object of unreflected experience, it is rather something like the prism through which the world appears but also elicits responses from us. Thanks to the distance afforded by phenomenological reflection we

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<sup>13</sup>Thanks to Iain Hamilton Grant for suggesting this phrase.

<sup>14</sup>'This is that human freedom, which all boast that they possess, and which consists solely in the fact, that men are conscious of their own desire, but are ignorant of the causes whereby that desire has been determined.' Baruch Spinoza in a letter to G.H. Schaller (1674)

can examine how it is that character acts upon the appearance of the world in its eliciting structure. It then becomes an empirical question how we wish to refine or alter the character that appears in reflection. The phenomenological approach is thus able to avoid two of the central criticisms of virtue ethics, that it is a form of narcissism, that is, a perversion of the proper directedness of ethical reflection towards others, and that it falls victim to a kind of ‘double-speak’ wherein character is thought of as mechanistically producing behaviour while at the same time supposing that actions manifest rational decisions. By utilising Sartre’s reflective method, phenomenological analysis not only serves to de-naturalise character and traits, but also put the epoché, or a variant of it, to ethical use in the discernment of the formation and activity of character. Webber nonetheless maintains a strong empirical dimension of ethical thinking, arguing that ‘it is an empirical question how one should best go about altering unwanted aspects of the practical structure of one’s experience’ and that virtue cultivation ‘should be the subject of further research in philosophical moral psychology’. This empirical dimension rests, however, on the basis of phenomenological analysis which continues to provide a transcendental account of both character and ethical behavior.

James Lenman, in his contribution ‘Science, Ethics and Observation’, takes on two ethical naturalists, Sam Harris and Richard Boyd. Rather than arguing against an empirical scientific approach to ethics *per se*, Lenman argues that it must be put in its proper place, as the servant (in a sense) of philosophical reflection. In other words, once ethical reflection has established what it is that we should do, it may well be for the social sciences to decipher how best to concretely achieve the goals set by reflection. But contrary to Harris and Boyd, Lenman is quick to point out that we are a long way from

answering the question of what should we do in a satisfactory manner. The case that Lenman lays out is not just that we are a long way from a natural scientific answer to the question of what we should do, but that this is to mistake the place of the sciences in ethical reflection altogether.

Alison Assiter approaches the relation between experience and nature in ethical thought from another direction. In her contribution, 'Kant and Kierkegaard on Freedom and Evil' she points to shortcomings in both Kant's account of the origins of freedom and the question of how one can freely act wrongly. Namely, Assiter argues, Kant's transcendental account of freedom fails to adequately account for freedom's origins. Kant's difficulties, she argues, stem from a limited conception of both the natural world and human nature. It is the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard who offers a possible solution, which stems from his own engagement with Kant. Kierkegaard's understanding of freedom, rooted in a conception of the body very much akin to the idea of the lived body developed by twentieth century phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, is, Assiter argues, phenomenologically more convincing than Kant's, i.e. it comes much closer to providing an account of freedom as experienced in and through the lived body than Kant's formalistic account. But this phenomenologically more satisfying account of freedom is not grounded in a transcendental idealist account of nature. Rather paradoxically, Assiter argues that Kierkegaard's phenomenology of lived, embodied freedom is grounded in a 'speculative claim' about nature *qua* a natural world that 'exists "outside" the realm that is accessible to human cognition'. Thus Assiter concludes that Kierkegaard's understanding of freedom, an understanding that she also wishes to defend, rests on two intertwined conceptions of nature. On the one hand the 'legitimate'



naturalisation of consciousness' (to echo Husserl and Rudolf Bernet), in this case consciousness of freedom, in the lived-body, and on the other hand a speculative understanding of nature as outside the boundaries of all human cognition. Assiter traces this later 'speculative claim' about nature to Kierkegaard's reading of Schelling.

## 5. Reinterpreting Nature

The relation between human experience and nature has also been garnering a great deal of attention in recent years in its incarnation as the twinned questions of the 'hard problem' and the 'explanatory gap' introduced by David Chalmers in his paper 'Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness' (1995).<sup>15</sup> As Chalmers writes, 'There is nothing that we know more intimately than conscious experience, but there is nothing that is harder to explain'.<sup>16</sup> The 'hard problem' and the 'explanatory gap' must not be conflated into a single problem. They are the acquired names of two intertwined but distinct issues pertaining to the relationship between consciousness and nature. The latter refers to a methodological question of how to relate phenomenological or subjective accounts of conscious experience to scientific or naturalistic accounts in a manner that gives both their proper due and space, i.e. without attempting to reduce one order of description (normally the phenomenological in these post-idealist times) to the other. As Chalmers

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<sup>15</sup> Although this line of approach to the problem probably can be traced back, at least in its contemporary form, to Thomas Nagel's seminal paper 'What is it like to be a bat?' *The Philosophical Review* **83** (1974), 435-450.

<sup>16</sup> David Chalmers, 'Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness' *Journal of Consciousness Studies* **2** (1995), 200.

demonstrates in his seminal paper, conscious experience does not submit to naturalistic explanation without the loss of the very thing one had set out to explain. The ‘hard problem’ on the other hand refers to an ontological question of how to situate what seemingly evades explanation in naturalistic terms (consciousness) within nature. The hard problem of consciousness, which could just as easily be described as the hard problem of nature (see David Morris’ contribution to this volume) goes straight to the heart of the ontological dilemma in the relation between experience and nature: given the drawbacks of recourse to a reductive naturalist or physicalist metaphysics (inability to explain consciousness) and the problems that beset transcendental idealism (inability to explain nature in-itself) we seem left with two options: we can either take shelter in a reformed dualism or set about trying to elaborate a non-reductive or physicalist monist ontology of nature, in which conscious experience would nonetheless have a place. But such a monist ontology, one that is neither idealist nor a variant of physicalist material reductionism, i.e. a non-physicalist monism or a monism that can account for both the sense-content of consciousness and its modulation, and the ontology of the natural sciences would seem to require rethinking *what nature is* from the bottom up. This is the direction that the contributions from Iain Hamilton Grant and David Morris are travelling in. As such it is only appropriate that they form the anchor and last word of the volume.

In ‘The Universe in the Universe: German Idealism and the Natural History of Mind’ Iain Hamilton Grant goes straight to the ontological question at the heart of the volume: ‘If we take it to be true that thought and its objects occur in one and the same universe, what must a nature be in which the concept of nature may arise?’ Grant takes up this question within the tradition of transcendental philosophy, and German Idealism

in particular. He argues we can avoid two unsatisfactory choices: a bald or 'thoughtless' reductive naturalism, and the retreat from metaphysics into a form of transcendental idealism unable to account for nature outside the immanence of mind. It is, he thinks, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* that can show us the way out of the dilemma facing all transcendental accounts of nature

Grant starts by looking at the nature of transcendental arguments themselves, demonstrating that transcendental arguments 'begin and end by reducing nature to experience; or, the alpha and omega of experience coincide in the elimination *from mind* of mind-independent nature'. This leaves two choices, Grant argues, either accept the elimination of mind independent nature or posit the identity of mind and nature. It is a variant of the latter that he argues for. Grant argues that Schelling's idealism does not preclude mind-independent reality, this is, he says, almost a straw-man caricature of idealist thought. Rather, 'the onus is on the anti-idealist to show that the idealist is committed to this elimination'. Schelling's position seems to rule out this oversimplification from the outset. The German *Naturphilosoph* writes: 'it is not because there is thinking that there is being but rather because there is being that there is thinking'.<sup>17</sup> But to argue for an identity of mind and nature does not necessarily mean to argue for their reciprocity or 'operating by mutuality'. As Grant says, reciprocity 'amounts to a trap for identitarians regarding mind and nature, since it proposes that the two are reciprocally limiting and exhaustive of the whole'. The ambitious task that Grant sets for himself, then, is nothing less than a renewal of Schelling's project: a natural

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<sup>17</sup>F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* trans. B. Matthews (Albany NY: SUNY, 2008), 203n.

history of the mind in which we must think a nature that thinks ‘the concept of the divisions antecedent to its emergence’.

In his paper, ‘From the Nature of Meaning to a Phenomenological Refiguring of Nature’, David Morris brings the residual Cartesian bias of the configuration of the hard problem into question. In its traditional configuration the ‘hard problem’ views consciousness as the impossible anomaly in an otherwise understandable ‘natural’ universe. But, argues Morris, this is still to understand nature in terms of a Cartesian conception, i.e., as meaningless matter in motion. This picture of nature is, however, undermined by the sciences themselves, thus leading Morris to assert: ‘the hard problem isn’t figuring out mind, but refiguring nature.’ Morris turns to phenomenological method to allow nature to show itself in its inherent meaningfulness and sense-generative activity. This involves not so much a reconceptualisation of phenomenological method but a return to its origins in a radical form of empiricism that allows what shows itself in experience to ‘educate us into the proper way to conceptualise things’. This means turning away from a conception of phenomenology as an introspective method, which is a misunderstanding, says Morris (echoing Dan Zahavi and Michael Wheeler’s earlier papers). What phenomenological method reveals, according to Morris, is not an anthropocentric projection of subjective meaning upon a mechanical nature that is without inherent meaning, but rather a production of meaning in the processes of life that could be considered a-subjective. Morris draws on Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of animal behaviour to speak of an ‘institution of sense’ rather than ‘subjective constitution’. Drawing on examples from embryology and immunology, Morris illustrates what it means to say that there is sense in nature that is so to speak non-anthropocentric. This

does not run contrary to, but is in fact supported by recent findings in biology. One cannot begin to properly understand the development of an embryo or the sophistication of immune response without implicating the development and modulation of sense-structures. Using these examples Morris argues for what he call a 'transcendental field of life', which is a field of sense generation and development in the 'material' workings of life itself. We cannot begin to understand the processes of life without sense: 'differences that make a difference'. Morris develops this ontology of nature through the idea of a 'negative in being', an idea that again eludes the traditional positivist Cartesian conception of nature that still guides much philosophy of science.

It seems clear that if the hard problem is not to remain completely intractable then we must conclude that the dominant philosophical conceptions of either consciousness or nature (or perhaps both) will have to be radically altered (as suggested by several papers in this volume). It is in this nexus of seemingly intractable philosophical dead-ends that the papers in this special issue boldly attempt to navigate a path that is neither reductive nor idealist. The papers in this volume were a response to an invitation to address the problems described in this introduction. We are grateful to the contributors for accepting the challenge and making such significant inroads into this 'explanatory gap'.

Before you turn to the first paper, we would like to express our gratitude to the Royal Institute of Philosophy for its support in funding the conference where these papers were originally presented.<sup>18</sup> And now, to the papers themselves!

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<sup>18</sup>Thanks also to Iain Hamilton Grant and to Michael Wheeler for helpful comments on the introduction.