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Intuitions, Seemings, and Phenomenology

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Analytic philosophers talk a lot about intuitions. Phenomenologists¹ talk a lot about intuition too. But do they talk about the same thing? My tentative answer in this paper will be “no”. However, it is, as I hope, no boring, unqualified “no”. The overall take home message is *not* that there is no hope for dialogue between the analytic and the phenomenological treatments of intuition(s). Rather, my thesis is that phenomenologists who talk about intuition do not talk about intuitions, but about something that resembles *seemings* in Michael Huemer’s sense of the term.

1. Intuitions in Analytic Philosophy

As of recently, analytic philosophers talk a lot about intuitions, their alleged importance for philosophical inquiry and their general epistemic relevance. Intuitions seem to play a role in two contexts: On the one hand, they are portrayed as the kind of evidence that is generated and utilized in thought experiments. To perform a thought experiment is to describe an imaginary scenario in order to evoke intuitions about what would happen if the described scenario would actually obtain (Gendler 2000, 34). These intuitions are then used as evidence for or against particular target theses. In this manner the intuition that, say, Mary learns something new about colors when she first perceives a tomato serves as evidence against physicalism.

On the other hand, the history of philosophy contains many examples of more general propositions that seem to be likely candidates for intuitive justification. Besides intuitions about logical and mathematical truths, philosophers mention “the intuition that phenomenal colors are incompatible, that moral and aesthetic facts supervene on the [...] physical and psychological facts, that a given determinate (e.g., a particular phenomenal shade) falls under its determinables (e.g., being a phenomenal shade), that the part/whole relation is transitive over the field of regions, or that congruence is a symmetric relation” (Bealer 1998, p. 211). In all of these cases, we seem to be clearly justified in believing the proposition in question. At the same time, however, our justification seems to be independent from sense experience, introspection or memory. It thus appears not altogether unreasonable to assume that we are dealing here with examples of intuitive justification.

Much of the contemporary discussion is concerned with the question of whether intuitions can indeed be a source of justification. Yet, before one can take a serious stance toward this matter, a more fundamental issue has to be resolved: *What are intuitions?* Obviously, there is no point in assessing their epistemic status without explicating what one takes them to be.

Generally speaking, the debate over the nature of intuitions is dominated by two main positions, *reductivism* on the one hand and *sui-generism* on the other. Reductivism comes in different flavors, one of which is the so-called judgement-view, championed by,

¹ A word on my use of the term “phenomenology”: In a similar sense in which there is not just *one* analytic

for instance, Timothy Williamson. On Williamson's view, there is no need to postulate a mysterious knowledge-generating faculty and thus a special type of mental state that deserves the title "intuition". Quite the opposite: "What are called 'intuitions' in philosophy are just applications of our ordinary capacities for judgement." (Williamson 2004, 109; Williamson 2007) In Gettier-style cases, for example, it is not an intuition that pressures the JTB-theory of knowledge but a judgement of an a posteriori counterfactual.

Another version of reductivism is *doxasticism*. As the title suggests, doxasticists hold that "intuitions are simply opinions" (Lewis 1983, p. x) or beliefs, "or perhaps, in some cases, the tendencies that make certain beliefs attractive to us" (van Inwagen 1997, p. 309). Some naturalistically-minded doxasticists fine-tune their account by stating that intuitions are beliefs with a special causal history. According to Michael Devitt, for instance, intuitions are "empirical theory-laden central-processor responses to phenomena, differing from other such responses only in being fairly immediate and unreflective, based on little if any conscious reasoning" (Devitt 2006, p. 491).

There are various reasons why philosophers feel attracted to reductivism. The hope to circumvent the alleged mysteriousness of intuitive justification is one of them; the appreciation of the meta-philosophical maxim of ontological parsimony is another. Yet, sui-generists nevertheless reject the idea that intuitions can be reduced to a class of already established mental states such as judgment, belief or inclination to belief. On their view, intuitions are distinct from other types of mental states and hence must be treated separately.² According to Ernest Sosa, for instance, an intuition is "a conscious state that can serve as a justifying basis for belief while distinct from belief, not derived from certain sources, and possibly false" (Sosa 2006, p. 212).³ Along similar lines George Bealer claims that intuitions are a "sui generis, irreducible, natural [...] propositional attitude that occurs episodically". Intuitions are, as Bealer adds, "distinct from [...] beliefs, guesses, hunches, judgements, common sense, and memory [...]; not reducible to inclinations, raisings-to-consciousness of non-conscious background beliefs, linguistic mastery, reports of consistency; and so forth" (Bealer 1998, 213). To be sure, sui-generism comes in flavors too, for instance with regard to the question of whether intuitions exhibit a sensory quality. But regardless of the details, sui-generists regard the alleged irreducibility of intuitions as crucial for the very idea of philosophical method.⁴

Finally, a word about the actual heart of the discussion, the question concerning the epistemic status and the reliability of intuitions: While optimists regard intuitions as an indispensable source of knowledge not only, but especially in philosophy, pessimists criticize contemporary analytic philosophy for the widespread use of intuitions.

² Among the reasons to adopt sui-generism, a number of well-known problems with doxasticism are particularly important: Consider, for instance, Bealer's example of the Naïve Comprehension Axiom of Set Theory (Bealer 1998, p. 208). On Bealer's analysis, we do not believe that this axiom is true, simply because we have seen proofs for its falsehood. This, however, doesn't prevent us from still having the intuition that it is true. Hence, beliefs must be distinguished from intuitions. Cf. for further discussion Williamson 2007, pp. 216-220; Chudnoff 2011, pp. 631-634.

³ Note that Sosa hereby abandons his earlier doxasticist view.

⁴ The term "intuition" is usually understood in a rather restricted sense, denoting only so-called "philosophical" or "rational" intuitions. How can rational intuitions be distinguished from, for instance, physical intuitions? A common answer is that, while non-rational intuitions present themselves as contingent, "to have a [rational] intuition that A is for it to seem *necessarily* true that A" (Hales 2000, p. 137; my emphasis; cf. e.g.: Bealer 1996; Sosa 1996; Bonjour 1998, p. 102).

Although the reasons for their negative verdict are quite diverse, the following three concerns stand out: the nature and workings of intuitions are said to be mysterious; intuitions cannot be calibrated against anything else; and, far from being neutral, intuitions are said to be relative to cultural and/or socio-economic backgrounds. One common reaction against these challenges has been to argue that selective skepticism concerning intuitions equally affects other sources of putatively justified belief.

2. Intuition in Phenomenology

Even a cursory review of the phenomenological literature shows that phenomenologists talk a lot about intuition too. It is therefore natural to suspect that phenomenology can be easily located within the rough-and-ready taxonomy developed in the previous section. However, a second look gives cause for doubt. The first thing to notice is that it is not so much the noun “intuition” that is being used by phenomenologists, but rather its adjectival equivalent. This may seem a minor point at first. But its significance becomes more apparent when we take a look at the list of things that are qualified by the adjective “intuitive”. Phenomenologists not only use the familiar terms “intuitive knowledge” and “intuitive justification”. They also employ a number of much more specific notions such as intuitionalization, intuitive fulfillment, intuitive intention, intuitive content, intuitive givenness, intuitive experience, intuitive substance, intuitive presentation, intuitive basis, intuitive separation, intuitive illustration or intuitive understanding.⁵ Even more importantly, it is a phenomenological commonplace to emphasize the “demand for an *intuitive method* of philosophy” (Husserl 1975, p. 23; my emphasis) and to stress that this method is *the* defining feature of phenomenological philosophy. All this raises a number of questions, the most obvious of which is the following: What is the conception of intuition that operates in the background of such a multi-faceted idiom?

The phenomenological conception of intuition takes its proper place within the much wider theory of intentionality, the actual centerpiece of phenomenology. Intentionality is the essential feature of most⁶ conscious experiences, their *being about something*, their *being conscious of something*. I do not merely see, doubt, think etc. When I see, I always see *something*, for instance, my bike; my perception is thus a perception *of* something, namely of my bike. When I doubt, I always doubt *something*, for instance, that the sun will turn into a supernova tomorrow. Hence, my doubt is *about* something, namely the sun’s gloomy future.

The point is that every intentional experience is, first, an experience of a certain type (seeing, doubting etc.) and, secondly, an experience of a certain object (my bike, the sun etc.).⁷ One way to express this is to say that there are two aspects to every intentional

⁵ A word on the focus of this paper: Since I am restricting myself to the philosophical core of the phenomenological notion of intuition, I will ignore a number of historical and linguistic details. To give just one example, English editions of Husserl translate both the German “Anschauung” and the German “Intuition” (two words with a rich philosophical history) with just one term, namely the English “intuition”. Although Husserl himself is not always consistent in distinguishing “Anschauung” from “Intuition”, a thorough analysis of his philosophy would have to pay attention to this and similar other subtleties. For a couple of first steps in this direction cf. e.g. Hintikka 2003.

⁶ Although intentional acts constitute a central group of experiences, not all consciousness is intentional. Dizziness, pain, happiness or nausea are examples for experiences that do not have intentional objects.

⁷ I use the word “object” in a generic sense, that is, as a placeholder for all kinds of individuable things and states of affairs, including processes, events and qualities. This usage is in accordance with Husserl’s

experience: the intentional *quality* that determines the experience as a particular type of experience; and the intentional *matter* that specifies what the experience is about.⁸ Different intentional qualities can be combined with the same intentional matter and different intentional matters can be combined with the same intentional quality. But in a similar sense in which there is no sound without pitch, the moments of intentional quality and intentional matter cannot exist independently from each other. It is for this reason that phenomenologists talk about the *intentional essence* of an experience in order to denote the complex of intentional quality and intentional matter.

The distinction between intentional quality and intentional matter is crucial to account for a number of interesting aspects of our conscious life. For instance, it allows to explain how one and the same object (e.g. that my bike is in the office) can be meant by virtue of different types of acts (e.g. doubting that my bike is in the office vs. imagining that my bike is in the office). But there are other facets of our conscious life that call for more sophisticated conceptual tools. Take, for instance, the difference between my judgement that my bike is in the office while I am in the cafeteria and my judgement that my bike is in the office while I am standing right in front of it. Obviously, the intentional essence is the same in both cases – I am judging that my bike is in the office. But, clearly, there is a difference, nevertheless: It is only in the second case that I am directly acquainted with my bike, that my bike is given to me in a straightforward, unmediated manner.

It's cases like these that illustrate the need for a distinction that complements the one between intentional quality and intentional matter. If I am directed towards an object in its absence, my intention towards the object is *empty*. The intention I am having is, to use an alternative terminology, merely *signitive*. If, on the other hand, I am directed towards an object in its actual presence – if the object is given in its “bodily selfhood” (*‘leibhaftige’ Selbstheit*) (Husserl 1983, pp. 9-10; translation modified) –, then I am having an *intuitive* intention towards the object – my intention towards the object is *intuitively fulfilled* by the givenness of that very object. We have thus made a first step towards the phenomenological conception of intuition: In every intentional experience an object is intended as such-and-such. But it is only if the intention towards the object is fulfilled by the givenness of the object as it is intended that we are dealing with an *intuitive* intention. Hence, as a first approximation, we may regard intuition as “one’s immediate cognitive relationship to the objects of knowledge” (Hintikka 2003, p. 174).

On the basis of what I have said so far, it should come as no surprise that, phenomenologically construed, a visual perception is a model case of intuitiveness (cf. e.g. Husserl 1982, pp. 5-6, 82-83, 154, 327). If intuitive acts are those in which we are directly acquainted with the objects of our intentions, then acts of direct, unmediated perception are as clear examples of intuitions as one is likely to find. Does this mean,

remark “that I use the words ‘objectivity’, ‘object’, ‘thing’ etc., always in the widest sense, in accordance, therefore, with my preferred sense of the term ‘knowledge’. An object of knowledge may as readily be what is real as what is ideal, a thing or an event or a species of a mathematical relation, a case of being or a what ought to be.” (Husserl 2001a, p. 145)

⁸ The distinction between intentional quality and intentional matter resembles the contemporary distinction between propositional attitudes and propositional content. However, the crucial difference is that phenomenologists typically deny that all intentional experiences are propositional in nature. It should also be noted that the quality/matter-terminology (as well as the theory of intentionality as a whole) underwent a number of modifications in Husserl’s later philosophy, particularly in the *Ideas I* (cf. Husserl 1983, §§ 87-135). But this is not the place to comment on these developments.

however, that intuitiveness is characteristic *only* of perceptual experiences? Consider another example.

Suppose I am sitting in the cafeteria, when, all of a sudden, a daunting thought crosses my mind: “Where did I leave my bike?” My first reaction is to think that I have left it in my office. After a short period of reflection, I have the recollection of me leaving my bike in the office about an hour ago. I finish my coffee, return to my office and, indeed, I find my bike leaning against the bookshelf. This episode has three stages of which the first and the last have already been addressed: At the first stage, I am in the signifying mode of merely thinking that my bike is in the office. Here, the intention towards my bike’s whereabouts is empty – the meaning-intention is not fulfilled by the object’s presence. At the third stage, in contrast, the signitive intention towards my bike’s location is fulfilled by the object’s bodily presence. Here, I am having an intuitive intention, i.e. the intention towards the object coincides with what is given. But what about the middle stage, i.e. the recollection of me leaving the bike in the office about an hour ago? On the one hand, it is clear that the recollection of this-and-that is not a case of direct acquaintance. Since I wasn’t intending the bike-as-remembered, the recollection of me leaving the bike in the office doesn’t count as an intuitive fulfillment, at least not in the fullest sense of the word. However, on the other hand, it would also be wrong to say that the first and the second stage are simply on par. Recollections of past events may not present the intended objects in their bodily presence. But there is a difference between the mere thought that I have left my bike in the office and the recollection of me leaving my bike in the office. The most obvious difference is that recollections have at least a certain amount of justificatory force – something that mere thoughts lack.

The previous example shows that the distinction between intuitiveness and non-intuitiveness is still not sufficient to do justice to all the complexities of our conscious life. In a sense, my intention towards the assumed location of my bike *is* intuitively fulfilled by the corresponding recollection of me leaving my bike in the office. Thus, in order to distinguish a case like this from cases in which we are in immediate cognitive contact with the objects of knowledge, phenomenologists employ another distinction, namely the distinction between *originary* intuitiveness on the one hand and *non-originary* or *reproductive* intuitiveness on the other. Recollections are prime examples of acts that present their objects in an intuitive, but non-originary manner. Perceptions are prime examples of acts that present their objects in an intuitive and originary manner.

There is one last aspect that has to be stressed: On the basis of what I have said so far, one may still think that the phenomenological conception of intuition only applies to perception and its derivatives, recollection and memory.⁹ This, however, is far from being the case. Consider yet another example: Suppose I am sitting in the cafeteria when, all of a sudden, a daunting thought crosses my mind: “Is Gödel’s First Incompleteness Theorem correct?” My first reaction is to mechanically recite “Any consistent formal language in which arithmetic can be formulated contains statements that can neither be proved nor disproved”. But after a short period of reflection, I have a recollection of the Eureka!-moment I had when I first learned the proof back in the days as an undergrad. I return to my office, dig out the old notes and refresh my knowledge about Gödelizations

⁹ To be sure, memory and recollection are derivatives of perception only with regard to their justificatory force. According to Husserl, it is evident that “every memory of an A is at the same time the memory of an earlier perception of the A” (Husserl 2005, p. 236). Hence, as Husserl puts it, “*the rationality [...] of memory springs from the power of perception*” (Husserl 1983, 339).

and Diagonalizations. Now, the truth of Gödel's Theorem is right there again, in its entire beauty.

The point I am trying to get to with this example is this: Even though it is true that perception is a prime example of originary intuitiveness, the dual distinction "signitive/intuitive" and "originary/non-originary" must be kept neutral with respect to both the types of objects we are intending and the types of acts by virtue of which we are intending these objects. What phenomenologists try to capture is just this: There are different ways in which our intentions towards objects can be fulfilled (or frustrated) by the givenness of whatever it is that we are intending. Hence, the phenomenological notion of intuition concerns certain modes of givenness – without, however, thereby implying any restrictions on what we think can be thus given.¹⁰ Or, in Husserl's words:

"The essential homogeneity of the function of fulfillment, as of all the ideal relationships necessarily bound up with it, obliges us to give the name 'perception' to each fulfilling act of confirmatory self-presentation, to each fulfilling act whatever the name of an 'intuition', and to its intentional correlate the name 'object'." (Husserl 2001b, p. 280)

3. A First Peek Over the Fence

Generally speaking, much of the analytical discussion concerning intuitions is framed by the following set of questions: 1) Is there a particular type of mental state that deserves to be called "intuition" or can "intuitions" be reduced to another type of already established mental states such as judgement, belief or inclination to belief? If the former is the case, 2) do these intuitions play a significant role in different fields of inquiry, especially in philosophy? And, if 2) is answered in the affirmative, 3) ought intuitions play this role?

The challenge of comparing the analytic with the phenomenological approach to intuition(s) is already apparent at the level of 1): As I have indicated, the phenomenological term "intuition" is simply not designed to pick out a particular type of mental state in which a particular type of content (e.g. an abstract object) presents itself in a particular manner (e.g. as necessary). Rather, "intuition" is the name for a specific way in which objects as they are intended relate to the objects as they are given, regardless of *what* it is that's intended and regardless of *how* we are intending it. Or, to put it differently: Instead of singling out a particular type of mental state that allegedly gives a particular type of content, phenomenologists use the term "intuition" to refer to different kinds and degrees of congruity between meaning-intentions and the objects

¹⁰ I am hereby not saying that phenomenologists don't have their views about the possible objects of intuitive givenness. All I am saying is that, strictly speaking, these views are not already built into the phenomenological conception of intuition. Let me, however, at least mention Husserl's official doctrine for the sake of completeness: On his view, originary intuition can be had of a) individual things (perceptual intuition), of b) state of affairs (categorical intuition of individual things bound together by ideal categorial forms), of c) essences (the notorious *Wesensschau*), of d) logical forms of propositions and their entailments (logical intuition), of e) mathematical objects (mathematical intuition) and of f) intentional contents and the structures of consciousness more generally (phenomenological intuition). In the sphere of non-originary intuition, Husserl mentions recollection (intuition of past events), phantasy (intuition of objects with the index "as-if") and empathy (intuition of other persons). Cf. for more detailed presentations of Husserl's views e.g. Kidd forthcoming.

that ideally fulfill them. On the basis of this understanding, seeing my bike in front of me is every bit as intuitive as grasping the truth expressed in Gödel's Theorem.

If my previous considerations are sound, then my initial conjecture is proven true for the first time: Analytical philosophers and phenomenologists mean pretty diverse things when they talk about intuition(s). While the former refer to a particular type of mental state that allegedly gives a particular type of content, the latter talk about a specific way in which the objects of our intentions can be given to us. Obviously, classifications resulting from these different notions are orthogonal, depicting entirely different aspects of entirely different things.

So far, so good. But what about questions 2) and 3)? One may accept that phenomenologists and analytical philosophers talk past each other as far as questions about the nature of intuition(s) are concerned. But perhaps a more constructive exchange is possible if we focus on methodological aspects instead. After all, optimists among analytic philosophers and phenomenologists at least seem to agree that intuition(s) are somehow important for our cognitive endeavours, particularly in philosophy. So, maybe, it makes more sense to begin here, i.e. with the question of why intuition(s) should matter for philosophical practice.

I have already touched upon two contexts in which intuitions are deemed relevant for standard justificatory procedures in analytic philosophy. On the one hand, optimists think of intuitions as the kind of evidence that is used for or against different philosophical claims and theories. According to George Bealer, for instance, "[p]hilosophical investigation and argument approximate the following idealization: canvassing intuitions, subjecting those intuitions to dialectical critique, constructing theories that systematize the surviving intuitions, testing these theories against further intuitions, and so on until equilibrium is approached" (Bealer 1998, p. 205). Others go even further than that: On their view, intuitions "purport to be nothing less than a direct insight into the necessary character of reality" (BonJour 1998, p. 107), as, for instance, color incompatibility propositions show. I take it that analytic philosophers primarily think of these two contexts when they conclude that the use of intuitions "has been characteristic, perhaps definitive, of philosophical argumentation throughout its history" (Levin 2005, p. 194).

But what do phenomenologists say about the role of intuition for philosophical method? Given the prevalence with which phenomenologists point to an *intuitive* method as one of the defining features of their philosophical project, it must be something substantial. But what exactly is an *intuitive* method? A good starting point for answering this question is the so-called *Principle of All Principles*, or *PoP* for short:

"No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the *principle of all principles: that every ordinary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak, in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.*" (Husserl 1983, p. 44)

As I read it, PoP covers two interrelated theses, one about the architecture of knowledge and one about justification. Let's start with the first, i.e. with the claim that ordinary intuition is a legitimizing source of knowledge.

What is knowledge and how is it composed? On a phenomenological view, knowledge is the accumulation of beliefs which are formed through appropriate judgements. And what are appropriate judgements? Well, ideally at least, it's those judgements whose validity is rooted in the intuitive givenness of the intended objects. This claim, however, deserves some care. Clearly, phenomenologists are sensitive to the fact that *indirect* knowledge is the rule rather than the exception: Most of what we know derives from our knowledge of other propositions and not from the direct cognitive contact with the intended objects. Yet, phenomenologists nevertheless hold that the inferential chains in which we are usually stuck are neither infinite, nor circular, nor based on beliefs that do not constitute knowledge. Rather, inferential chains have to terminate in something through which a belief or judgement acquires epistemic justification directly and non-inferentially (cf. e.g. Husserl 2001b, pp. 226-233; Husserl 2008, ch. 1).¹¹ According to phenomenology, this "something" is the intuitive givenness of the intended object, precisely as it was intended. And it is exactly in this sense that originary intuition serves the role of the legitimizing source of knowledge. Phenomenologically construed, everything that is asserted rationally must be either directly or indirectly warranted by a legitimizing intuition.¹²

The second thesis in PoP is that "everything originally offered to us in intuition is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being". On my reading, this passage expresses an internalist¹³ view about epistemic justification: If object *P* is exhibited to a subject *S* in intuitive givenness, then *S* has at least *prima facie* justification for believing that *P* exists and that *P* has those properties which are exhibited intuitively. This can be easily converted into prescriptive mood: If *P* is exhibited to *S* in intuitive givenness, then *S* *ought* to accept to have at least *prima facie* justification for believing that *P* exists and that *P* has those properties which are exhibited intuitively.¹⁴

¹¹ On my reading, phenomenology is committed to some sort of foundationalism. However, since this term still has a suspicious ring for many phenomenologists, two qualifications are in order: First, foundationalism, as I understand it, merely says that there are certain beliefs which we are justified in holding, but which do not depend on other beliefs for their justification. Secondly, foundationalism is a thesis about the architecture of knowledge or justification, but not about its strength. Particularly, foundationalism does not imply that foundational beliefs are infallible. Cf. for a thorough treatment of the relation between phenomenology and foundationalism: Hopp 2008.

¹² I am simplifying here: First of all, knowledge does not depend on the *actual* achievement of intuitive givenness. Rather, intuitive givenness is an "*ideal limit*" (Husserl 2001b, p. 227) to which all of our epistemic endeavours aspire (cf. Wiltsche 2012, pp. 107-109). Secondly, the link between intuitive givenness and knowledge is not quite as direct as my remarks might suggest. The intuitive givenness of an object gives rise to knowledge only if the congruence between the signitive and the intuitive intention is registered in a high-order act involving a synthesis of the lower-order acts of signification and intuition (cf. Husserl 2001b, pp. 181-334; Hopp 2011, ch. 7).

¹³ Since the epistemological distinction between internalism and externalism is a minefield (cf. e.g. Fumerton 1995, pp. 60-69), I should add that I am merely thinking of a weak form of access internalism here. That is, on my understanding, in order for *S* to be justified in believing *P*, *S* must only be *able* to access the conditions that constitute her justification. Specifically, *S* doesn't have to have *actual* access to the *epistemic principles* according to which her beliefs turn out to be justified.

¹⁴ There is an obvious difference between my interpretation of PoP and its original formulation: While Husserl writes that everything "*originarily* offered to us in intuition has to be accepted as what it is presented", I am liberalizing PoP by abstaining from the qualifier "originary". This has to do mainly with the applicability of PoP in practical contexts: A liberalized version of PoP can, for instance, account for the fact that, in the absence of defeaters, even a very hazy memory (i.e. a particularly weak instance of a non-originary intuition) is a perfectly legitimate justifier for belief.

We are now in a position to see more clearly what phenomenologists mean when they speak of an intuitive method: Phenomenologists start from the observation that we do most of our thinking signitively, i.e. without having the intended objects intuitively given to us. Since we are finite beings with finite mental capacities, there is really no alternative to this way of proceeding: Modern science, for instance, wouldn't be possible if every generation of scientists had to start from scratch instead of building on complex systems of historically sedimented knowledge. What phenomenologists stress, however, is that this "natural" way of proceeding has to be complemented by a philosophical method of "clarification". In this context, "clarification" means nothing else than to trace back our signitive intentions to the objects by which they would be intuitively fulfilled. And this is precisely what the phenomenological slogan "To the things themselves!" amounts to: In a similar sense in which the mechanical recitation of Gödel's Theorem is "clarified" by bringing its content to intuitive givenness, the aim of phenomenology in general is to unveil the intuitive basis on which our signitive judging is built in all domains of discourse. This task of clarification serves the purpose of critically examining the validity of the implicit assumptions underlying our signitive intentions.¹⁵

According to the view developed so far, phenomenologists call their method "intuitive" because intuition gives the course of phenomenological analysis its direction: We start with whatever it is that's intended in the mode of mere signification and then seek to uncover its intuitive basis in order to assure ourselves of the validity of our signitive intentions. This, however, is only part of the story. At the same time, intuition is also "a generic term for the stopping-points" (Hintikka 2003, p. 174) of the kind of inquiry phenomenologists are up to. What this means can be best illustrated by recourse to the aforementioned comments on epistemic justification: It is without question crucial to strive for intuition as the goal of our analytical endeavours. Yet, it is equally important to respect the foundational character of intuition as soon as we reach this goal. Intuitive acts give the intended objects in their bodily presence. And in doing so, intuitive acts serve as direct, non-inferential justifiers of belief and thus as natural stopping-points for the phenomenological task of clarification. To be sure, phenomenologists must always be open to the possibility that foundational beliefs are overruled by future experience. But as long as defeaters are absent, the only reasonable thing to do is to accept these beliefs simply as what they are: *foundational* beliefs that are directly warranted by the intuitive givenness of their objects.

There is another aspect of the phenomenological conception of intuition that can now be appreciated more fully. As we have seen earlier, phenomenologists endorse a functional concept of intuition that corresponds to a functional object concept. This is to say that the phenomenological concept of intuition is neutral with respect to both the types of objects we are intending and the types of acts by virtue of which we are intending these objects. But, so far, I haven't offered an argument for this usage of the term. Why not using "intuition" differently? Why not using it in a more restricted sense, denoting, for instance, only certain types of objects? An answer to this question is implicit in PoP: Let's grant, for the sake of the argument, that PoP is correct and that intuition is a valid source of knowledge in the sense described above. So, whatever it is that's asserted rationally must be either directly or indirectly warranted by a legitimizing intuition. This formulation makes it clear that whoever accepts PoP must, on pain of self-refutation, understand the notion of intuition in a sufficiently inclusive sense. At the very least, the

¹⁵ For a more detailed presentation of the phenomenological method of clarification cf., e.g., Moran 2007.

notion of intuition employed in PoP must be inclusive enough to not cut against PoP itself. Consider the following example to get the point: Imagine a version of PoP that restricts intuition to perceptual intuition, i.e. to the direct givenness of spatiotemporal things. Obviously, such a version of PoP is self-refuting: if it is true, then we cannot know that it is so. Phenomenologists seek to extend this line of reasoning to suggest that “[i]mmediate ‘seeing’, not merely sensuous, experiential seeing, but *seeing in the universal sense as an originally presentive consciousness of any kind whatever*, is the ultimate legitimizing source of all rational assertions” (Husserl 1983, p. 36, §§ 19-20).

4. From Intuitions to Seemings

Let us pause for a moment and take stock. One of the conclusions reached in the previous section is that a comparison between analytic and phenomenological philosophy is hardly possible if the question of the nature of intuition(s) serves as the point of departure. It is for this reason that we turned to methodological issues instead. But did this shift of attention bring us closer to a fruitful exchange between analytic philosophy and phenomenology? I think it did.

Part of my interpretation of PoP is a certain view about the nature of epistemic justification: If P is exhibited to S in intuitive givenness, then S has at least prima facie justification for believing that P exists and that P has those properties which are exhibited intuitively. As I have pointed out, this view is vital for the understanding of the phenomenological method: Amongst other things, it accounts for the difference between foundational and non-foundational beliefs. Foundational beliefs are those that, through appropriate judgements, are directly and non-inferentially warranted by the intuitive givenness of their objects. Let us now turn to a different theory of foundational justification that seems to conform well with the position developed so far.

In a series of papers and books, Michael Huemer has defended what he refers to as the “Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism”, or *PC* for short.

“(PC) If it seems to S that p , then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that p .” (Huemer 2007, p. 30; cf. also Huemer 2001, p. 99)

Like PoP, PC expresses a view about epistemic justification that fits nicely with an internalistic version of foundationalism: According to PC, if it seems to an S that p and if S has no grounds for doubting that p , then it is reasonable for S to accept that p . Hence, the belief that p does not depend on other beliefs for its justification; it is directly and non-inferentially justified by the fact that S has a seeming that p . It is important to note that Huemer ascribes justificatory significance to *all* seemings. Following this approach, Huemer has applied PC in quite diverse philosophical contexts such as the debates about direct realism, skepticism and moral realism.

It is needless to say that the notion of seemings is central to PC. But what exactly are seemings? As we shall see in more detail below, Huemer isn’t particularly specific on this score. On the one hand, Huemer seeks to characterize seemings negatively: Seemings aren’t beliefs since it is easily imaginable that it seems to S that p although S doesn’t believe that p (Huemer 2007, p. 31). Seemings are also not to be confused with inclinations to belief since not all seemings result in inclinations to belief and since

seemings are the reasons for (and thus not identical with) our inclinations to belief (Huemer 2007, p. 31). On the other hand, Huemer seeks to characterize seemings positively by asserting that “its seeming to one that P is a matter of one’s having a certain kind of experience” (Huemer 2013a), namely an experience in which a propositional content presents itself with a certain forcefulness or assertiveness (Huemer 2001, pp. 77-79). Following Huemer’s remarks, there are at least four different kinds of seemings: perceptual seemings, memory-related seemings, intellectual seemings (“intuitions”) and introspective seemings (Huemer 2001, pp. 99-100).

I think that Huemer is on to something that is interesting from a phenomenological point of view. To begin with, Huemer identifies a structural element in our experiencing that is common to highly disparate types of mental states. In placing this commonality at the center of his epistemology, Huemer is able to acknowledge the existence of a unifying principle of epistemic justification that accounts for the foundational status of beliefs in areas that may at first appear highly diverse and probably even unrelated. In my view, the exact same thing can be said about the phenomenological concept of intuition and its role in PoP. Furthermore, Huemer notices that there is no point in discriminating among different types of seemings by invoking epistemically relevant differences between them. According to Huemer, such differences either turn out to be arbitrary. Or they are not specific enough to discriminate among seemings in an interesting way. Or they result in an overall position that is either indistinguishable from PC, or self-defeating (cf. Huemer 2007). As I have tried to show, phenomenologists endorse a functional concept of intuition that corresponds to a functional object concept for reasons similar to Huemer’s. What is more, Huemer forcefully argues that we should accept PC because its denial leaves us in a state of self-defeat (Huemer 2001, pp. 105-107; Huemer 2007, pp. 39-50). I take it that phenomenologists follow a similar line of argument when they claim that “[n]ot to assign any value to ‘I see it’ as an answer to the question ‘Why?’ would be a countersense – as, yet again, we see” (Husserl 1983, p. 37).¹⁶ Finally, Huemer recognizes that PC is not just a singular thesis about epistemic justification, but rather a normative rule that underlies reasoning and judgement in general (Huemer 2001, p. 107). Here too, phenomenologists couldn’t agree more: PoP is not just a theory about epistemic justification in this or that area of cognitive involvement; PoP lies at the very heart of what phenomenologists refer to as the “phenomenology of reason” (cf. e.g. Husserl 1983, §§ 136-145).

This, then, is the thesis of this paper: Phenomenologists who talk about intuition do not talk about intuitions; they rather talk about a structural characteristic of experience that resembles Huemerian seemings. Hence, it is natural for phenomenologists who wish to engage with the contemporary debate about intuitions to choose PC as a starting point.¹⁷

¹⁶ The key notion in this passage is “countersense”: Following Husserl’s distinction between nonsense (“Unsinn”) and countersense (“Widersinn”) (cf. Husserl 2001b, pp. 67-68), a countersensical expression arises due to a material incompatibility of the meanings contained in this expression. Hence, Husserl’s argument really amounts to the charge of self-defeat: On his view, if *S* assigns no value to the intuitive givenness of *P*, *S* does so either without any reasons at all. Or *S* finds it intuitive to do so. In the first case, *S* simply doesn’t participate in the game of rational discourse. In the latter case, *S* is self-defeating in the sense that her denial of the principle presupposes that very principle.

¹⁷ One could wonder if I am not overstating my case: Philosophers such as George Bealer (1998) or Joel Pust (2000) are explicit in their understanding of intuitions as “intellectual seemings”. So, aren’t at least some analytic philosophers and phenomenologists talking about the same thing, if phenomenologists really mean something that is similar to seemings? I don’t think that this is the case: One of the crucial points about the phenomenological notion of intuition is to capture a *general* characteristic of experience,

However, it is important not to overstate this claim: I am *not* denying that there are fundamental differences between phenomenology and phenomenal conservatism.¹⁸ Neither am I claiming that the phenomenological notion of intuition is identical with the Huemerian notion of seemings. In fact, much further work will be necessary to explore how far the affinities between the two theories really go. All I am suggesting here is that certain affinities exist and that both positions could profit from at least taking notice of each other. Let me indicate one way in which phenomenal conservatism could profit from phenomenology in the remainder of my paper.

The notion of seemings is central to the formulation of PC. Consequently, a clear grip of what seemings are is vital for the tenability of PC. However, as I have indicated, Huemer doesn't offer much of an analysis of seemings. Critics have thus complained that seemings are utterly obscure or even nonexistent (Williamson 2007, p. 217; DePaul 2009; Tooley 2013). According to Michael DePaul, for instance, memories, intuitions, introspective and perceptual experiences are highly disparate types of mental states. And since Huemer doesn't provide an analysis of what seemings are, DePaul finds it hard to believe that these disparate types of mental states really exhibit a sufficiently interesting commonality. He thus denies that there is a unified kind of experience that Huemer needs to get PC off the ground. On DePaul's view, "[seemings]" is a category that Huemer has *manufactured* that gathers together importantly distinct kinds of experiences" (DePaul 2009, p. 208, my emphasis).

In a recent paper Huemer plainly admits that he hasn't provided a definition or analysis of the term "seeming" (Huemer 2013b). But, according to Huemer, there is a reason for this omission: "Despite the popularity of the school of linguistic analysis in twentieth-century philosophy, I cannot name a single analysis of any philosophically interesting term that has not been refuted." (Huemer 2013b, p. 328) Hence, on Huemer's view, it is the impotence of the method of linguistic analysis that forces us to make do with examples in order to identify the kind of experience that lies at the heart of PC.

I am sympathetic with Huemer's assessment of the prospects of linguistic analysis. Like most other phenomenologists, I agree that this kind of analysis isn't sufficient or even appropriate if we wish to get a grip on a feature of our mental life. Yet, at the same time, I think that Huemer indeed hasn't done enough to show that the category of seemings isn't just manufactured to serve a pre-established epistemological goal. In my view, Huemer's omission to provide a profound analysis of seemings plays right into the hands of those who see in the category of seemings nothing but an ad hoc stipulation devoid of any explanatory value.¹⁹ But it is at this point that a crucial question arises: Why is it that linguistic analysis and casuistry should be regarded as the only options to analyze the much sought-after commonality of seemings? Why not opt for a

regardless of its particular forms of manifestation. Hence, at best, intellectual seemings are a sub-category of what phenomenologists are after with their concept of intuition.

¹⁸ One of the most obvious differences between PoP and PC is that the former cannot be reduced to a certain view about epistemic justification. Rather, as I have tried to show, PoP combines a view about epistemic justification with a view about the architecture of knowledge in order to specify the crucial notion of phenomenological clarification. This notion, however, is entirely absent from Huemer's philosophy. Hence, one of the most pressing questions is whether something like "clarification" could possibly be integrated into phenomenal conservatism.

¹⁹ I take it that DePaul's actual charge is that of ad-hocness: A hypothesis is ad hoc if it only accounts for the phenomena it was designed to account for. Hence, what Huemer has to provide in order to counter this critique is an account of seemings that has plausibility independently from PC.

phenomenological analysis that conceives of seemings as those acts that exhibit a congruity between the objects as they are intended and the objects as they are given? To be sure, there is nothing in Huemer's original account that suggests an affinity to this way of putting things. Besides, I am realistic enough to assume that those who find Huemer's original notion of seemings obscure will not be immediately satisfied with a phenomenological analysis either. But, at the very least, phenomenology offers something of which Huemer seems to be in urgent need: a theoretical framework that is sufficiently independent from the epistemological ends it serves and that accounts for some crucial characteristics of our mental life, including the fact that quite different types of acts exhibit the commonality of the intuitive givenness of the objects that are intended by virtue of these acts.²⁰

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²⁰ Parts of my work have been generously supported by the Austrian Science Fund (J 3114).

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