Husserl’s Noetics – Towards a Phenomenological Epistemology

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Husserl’s Noetics – Towards a Phenomenological Epistemology

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ABSTRACT
For Husserl, noetics is the most fundamental science and the centrepiece of a phenomenological epistemology. Since in his major works Husserl does not develop noetics systematically but uses its main ideas and achievements often in apparent isolation without clarifying their systematic unity, the significance of noetics is often overlooked. Although Husserl has repeatedly stressed the importance of a phenomenological epistemology, what the concrete theses of such an undertaking are supposed to be often remains obscure. We shall see that the best way to clarify this is by providing a detailed account of Husserl’s noetics as it is developed in Husserl’s lecture courses “Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge” (1906/07) and “Logic and General Theory of Science” (1917/18). This is the main aim of the present paper. We will shed light on the significance, systematic unity, and concrete theses of noetics. Furthermore, I shall show in what way the main theses of noetics are present in Husserl’s other works, even if the term noetics does not even occur. Finally, we will see that some basic ideas of Husserl’s noetics play an important role in current analytic epistemology and we will indicate how a phenomenological epistemology could enrich current debates.

1. Phenomenology and Epistemology

Husserl scholars and phenomenologists in general often do not give sufficient weight to epistemology. To some extent, it is simply overlooked that Husserl’s phenomenology at its most fundamental level is an epistemological endeavour. Husserl, however, is quite clear on this. While it may be true that Husserl does not often explicitly address the systematic role of epistemology, when he does so, he unambiguously states that phenomenology at its most basic level is epistemology. To be more precise, phenomenology at its basic level has to be epistemology. This is because “epistemology is the discipline that is supposed to make all scientific knowledge reach final evaluation of its definite knowledge content, to make all scientific knowledge reach ultimate foundation and final completion.”¹ In this sense “all of philosophy depends on epistemology.”²

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¹ Hua XXIV, 158. All Hua-references refer to the series: Husserliana: Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke.
² Ibid., 174.

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More importantly, the projects Husserl is most concerned with only make sense if we understand them as epistemological undertakings. Be that establishing logic as theory of science or establishing phenomenology as first philosophy aiming at ultimate justification, there is no doubt that these projects have a fundamental epistemological dimension. In fact, for Husserl being a philosopher has the precise meaning of being interested in the basic epistemological questions. There are many forms of science and knowledge but what distinguishes the philosopher from other scientists is the philosopher’s ambition to gain knowledge that is ultimately justified “letztgerechtfertigt” and to uncover the ultimate sources of justification and knowledge. Phenomenology is precisely the science that “encompasses the whole system of sources of knowledge from which all true sciences must draw their fundamental concepts and statements and all force of their ultimate justification [Rechtfertigung].” There seems to be a tendency in current phenomenology to assume that phenomenology is primarily metaphysics and that epistemology can be reduced to metaphysics. For Husserl, the opposite is true. Metaphysics presupposes epistemology and the temptation to “ground epistemology on metaphysics” is one of the main errors that has occurred in the history of epistemology.

All this tells us that in order to be the final science, phenomenology has to be epistemology. However, what is even more important for the purpose of the present paper is that, according to Husserl, epistemology needs phenomenology! “No epistemology without phenomenology.” This means that there is a distinctive phenomenological way of doing epistemology. To fully capture what a phenomenological epistemology amounts to, we need to shed light on a Husserlian conception that is often overlooked: Husserl’s noetics. The only two places I know of in which Husserl establishes the conception of noetics systematically is in chapter four of his lectures “Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge” (1906/07) published in Husserliana XXIV and in the final chapter of his lecture course on “Logic and General Theory of Science” (1917/18) published in Husserliana XXX.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In sections two and three, I shall reconstruct Husserl’s conception of noetics as established in the aforementioned two chapters. In the fourth and final section, I will first point out how the fact that Husserl does not explicitly establish noetics in his main works, does not mean that the basic ideas of Husserl’s noetics are not present in those places. We will see that, on the contrary, the main ideas of noetics play a crucial role in all of Husserl’s major works and that our present analysis can contribute to our understanding of central Husserlian principles. Finally, I shall show that

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3 With respect to the former project, Husserl says: “It is fair to say that this task of an epistemological clarification of logic mainly corresponds to a critical clarification of thinking and knowing in general, thus to epistemology as such.” (Hua XVIII, 262).
4 Husserl, ‘Londoner Vorträge’, 204.
5 Ibid., 200. Thus, I absolutely agree with Beyer when he states that for Husserl transcendental phenomenology is a fundamental epistemological project (Beyer, ‘Husserls transzendentale Phänomenologie’, 31). For the relationship between transcendental phenomenology and current debates in epistemology cf. Berghofer, ‘New Ways to Transcendental Phenomenology’.
6 Hua XXIV, 177; cf. also Hua III/1, 8.
7 Hua XXIV, 176.
8 Ibid., 217.
9 For how phenomenology and epistemology fit together cf. Husserl, Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft, 21–3. We shall discuss this in more detail in the following sections.
some of the basic ideas of Husserl’s noetics are of great significance in current analytic epistemology.

2. Noetics in “Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge”

The whole undertaking of noetics is crucially linked to the presumably most fundamental principle of a phenomenological epistemology. That is that justification is subjective in the sense that the source of epistemic justification has to be found within a person’s subjective acts. Acts or mental states are the carriers of justification, and an act’s justificatory force is located within this act. “All knowledge is realized as subjective act, and the subjective act must harbor within it what pleads and warrants its claim to legitimacy. Only in this is < the justification > to be sought.” For Husserl, the most fundamental epistemological question is how subjectivity can be the source of objective knowledge, and noetics is supposed to provide an answer to this question.

This already reveals that Husserl is not an externalist about epistemic justification. He does not think that external factors such as reliability are the source of justification, but that whatever the source of justification is, it has to be located within a person’s acts. This, however, does not mean that every mental state is a source of justification. It is precisely the task of noetics to reveal which mental states are justification-conferring and what internal factor it is that gives them their justificatory force. Let us turn now to chapter four of “Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge” that is entitled “Noetics as Theory of Justification of Knowledge.” In the chapter’s first paragraph, § 25, Husserl first points out that in the natural sciences subjectivity is the source of all justification. “Subjective acts motivate everything.” To be sure, the basic principles of mechanics, optics, etc. do not resemble what we experience, but if we trace back the ultimate source of justification for these principles, we see that at the very end there are observations and corresponding propositions such as “So it has been observed.”

Although less obvious, the same is true for the mathematical disciplines. Mathematical statements are justified by apodictic insights. “Therefore, apodictic Evidenz justifies. Apodictic Evidenz, the consciousness of necessity, seen, actually experienced (and not just spurious and presumed) is, though, something subjective, a singular experience,

\[\text{By epistemic justification I mean the kind of justification that is attributed to beliefs or judgments and is supposed to give them an epistemic value such as “rationality” or “legitimacy.” In this way epistemic justification is distinguished from moral justification that is attributed to actions and is supposed to give them a moral value such as “goodness.” Many epistemologists define epistemic justification as the kind of justification a belief must have in order to amount to knowledge. However, since there are approaches in epistemology that are incompatible with such an understanding of justification (for instance knowledge-first epistemologies that hold that knowledge is basic and cannot be further analyzed or the opposite view that holds that justification is the most fundamental epistemic value and that something like knowledge might not even exist) I prefer the more general definition above. Furthermore, it seems that the more general definition better suits Husserl’s conception of epistemic justification, since he does not always use the term “knowledge” consistently. However, he leaves no doubt that certain acts can be justified (namely judgments) and that other acts can justify (namely perceptions or experiences). In this context Husserl says that acts can have or bestow “legitimacy.”}

\[\text{Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 129.}
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\[\text{Cf. Melle’s introductory remarks in Hua XXIV, XXXI.}
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\[\text{Cf. Hua XXIV, 120.}
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\[\text{Ibid., 121.}
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\[\text{Ibid.}
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\[\text{Ibid., 120.}
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\[\text{Ibid., 121 f.}
\]
and in it lie grounds for justification.”

Accordingly, in the next paragraph Husserl poses the question which science it is that is supposed to be the principled and systematic investigation of the subjective and ultimate sources of justification. A natural candidate seems to be formal logic. This section, however, contrary to what might be suggested in the Prolegomena, concludes that formal logic cannot be this most fundamental science we are looking for. Of course, formal logic is concerned with scientific theories and correct judgments. It is a general theory of science since it abstracts from the individual sciences and aims at extracting the first principles and axioms such as the law of contradiction and the excluded middle. Based on these axioms, in further consequence, it aims at building purely logical theories.

Since its principles, theories, and statements are based on apodictic evidence, the legitimacy of formal logic cannot reasonably be questioned. Its results are epistemically justified due to being based on apodictic evidence. But that is precisely the point. Formal logic does not address apodictic evidence. Formal logic works because apodictic evidence is a source of epistemic justification. But why are apodictic insights a source of immediate justification? What gives them their justificatory force? In chapter 7 of the Prolegomena, for instance, Husserl points out that we need to accept apodictic insights because doing otherwise leads to unacceptable consequences such as relativism and skepticism. This is still true for Husserl, but note that the question now is a different one. The question is not, why should we believe that apodictic evidence is a source of justification? The question is, why is apodictic evidence a source of justification, i.e. what gives it its justificatory force? Although related, these are two different questions. Husserl rightly notes that the second one is more fundamental. For Husserl, certain acts, such as apodictic insights, are the ultimate carriers of justification. Investigating why they carry justificatory force is the task of noetics. With respect to apodictic insights, the difference between formal logic and noetics is that the former is concerned with the questions: What are the basic axioms and what can we deduce from these axioms? The latter is concerned with the more fundamental question: What justifies the axioms and the method of deduction? The answer is: apodictic insights. Investigating why apodictic insights carry justificatory force is one of the tasks of noetics. I say one of the tasks because apodictic insight is not the only type of experience that carries immediate justificatory force. We shall see that for Husserl every originary presentive intuition is a source of immediate justification. Besides apodictic insights, this includes sensory experiences of physical objects or states of affairs and introspective intuitions. The aim of noetics, then, is to answer the following question: What is it that makes these experiences justifiers, that is to say, what gives them their justificatory force?

Paragraph 27 is entitled “Noetics as Investigation and Evaluation of Intellectual Position-takings with Respect to Their Claims to Legitimacy.” Noetics is defined as the “theory of norms of knowledge” and here one finds the passage we have already quoted at the very beginning of this section: “All knowledge is realized as subjective act, and the subjective act must harbor within it what pleads and warrants its claim to legitimacy.

18 Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 120.
19 Hua XXIV, 124.
20 Ibid.
Only in this is < the justification > to be sought.” In a highly important passage, Husserl establishes noetics

as a science that investigates cognitive acts (i.e. intellective position-takings by their nature making claims to legitimacy) one after the other out of pure scientific interest and evaluates the relationships of legitimacy belonging to them, both in isolation and in combination and based on one another. However, it realizes this evaluation by the detection of immanent qualities that, within every species of such position-takings, constitute the mark of true legitimacy, as opposed to merely presumed legitimacy (or, of proven and provable, as opposed to unproven and unproduceable justification). In the same way, it has to inquire after both the indirect and direct conditions of the possibility of justification grounding in the specific essence and meaning content of these position-takings.

This passage states that noetics is concerned with acts, and more precisely with acts that are candidates for carrying justificatory force. Noetics has the task of distinguishing truly justification-conferring acts from those that only presumably do so. By doing so, noetics must determine the distinguishing factor of justification-conferring acts. This factor is something that is internal, that is located within the respective type of experience. It is located within the “immanent qualities” of the acts in question.

We can skip the next paragraph and turn to § 29. Here Husserl points out that there are two different ways of doing noetics. The first of these is termed “superficial,” “mac-  

roscopic,” and “externally morphological,” the second is termed “deep,” “microscopic,” and “internally analyzing.” Each way has its own goals, importance, and legitimacy, but the second one is more fundamental. This paragraph is mainly about macroscopic noetics. Macroscopic noetics is concerned with classifying acts. For instance, you can differentiate between immediately justifying acts, acts that are in need of epistemic support, and acts that have no justificatory force at all. Consider the mathematical statement that the number two is the only even prime number. If, presumably by understanding the terms involved, you have an apodictic insight with respect to this statement, you are immediately justified in believing this statement. The situation is different when your teacher tells you that two is the only even prime number. Justification by testimony is no immediate justification. Hearing what your teacher tells you, does not immediately justify you in believing what you were told. This act of hearing needs justificatory support, for instance from your background knowledge that your teacher is a trustworthy person. Given this background knowledge, hearing what your teacher tells you inferentially justifies you in believing that two is the only even prime number. However, you can also simply entertain the thought “Two is the only even prime number,” without any apodictic insight or evidential support. Or you can wish or hope that two is the only even prime number. These acts do not have any justificatory force with respect to the mathematical statement in question.

Furthermore, you can classify acts with respect to what kinds of judgments they can justify. Your introspective intuition that you hope that two is the only even prime number does not tell you anything about mathematical truths. But it has justificatory force with respect to your inner life. An apodictic intuition, on the other hand, can have immediate justificatory force with respect to mathematical statements but not with

21 Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 129.
22 Ibid., 132.
23 Hua XXIV, 136.
respect to judgments about the physical world. The type of object you are intuiting, determines what kind of evidence you can have. So much for macroscopic noetics. For Husserl, a macroscopic noetics must be supplemented by a microscopic one. Unfortunately, Husserl is not so clear on the precise task of a microscopic noetics. What are the questions a microscopic noetics addresses? What are the doctrines or results of a Husserlian microscopic noetics? Furthermore, in Husserl’s whole oeuvre this paragraph appears to be the only place where Husserl explicitly addresses the distinction between macroscopic and microscopic noetics. This does not mean that the distinction is not important, but rather that it is difficult to fully grasp it.

According to my reading, noetics is intimately related to a theory of evidence and answering the questions of microscopic noetics amounts to clarifying the nature of evidence. Macroscopic noetics tells us: Evidence distinguishes judging emptily from judging justifiably. Within the broad field of evidence, roughly speaking, we can have inadequate evidence for physical objects and states of affairs, apodictic evidence, for instance, with respect to logical, mathematical, and phenomenological truths, and adequate evidence for one’s own mental states. Microscopic noetics, on the other hand, poses the questions: What is the nature of evidence? What is the nature of inadequate, apodictic, and adequate evidence? What unifies them in making them evidence, what separates them in making them different types of evidence? In this sense, Husserl states with respect to the shortcomings of a macroscopic noetics:

What is lacking on the other hand, though, is a systematic characterization of all the different varieties of Evidenz and the limits of legitimacy that they set for the corresponding cognitive acts, likewise, a systematic investigation of the conditions of the possibility of Evidenz lying in the meaning content of these acts, therefore, a complete noetic theory of axioms.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that in the final paragraph on noetics, the final section is devoted to the topic of evidence. Here Husserl emphasizes that the difference between empty and insightful thinking refers to the difference between non-evident and evident thinking, and that different types of acts can differ in their evidence, and that evidence depends on factors such as meaning forms. This is followed by the all-important question: “What is Evidenz?” As already mentioned, I take the examination of the nature of evidence to be the prime task of (microscopic) noetics. A macroscopic noetics classifies acts with a focus on justification-conferring acts. A microscopic noetics aims at disclosing the nature of justification, i.e. the nature of evidence. So what does Husserl say about the nature of evidence? In this final section on noetics, he provides the following characterization of evidence:

24 At least not in the sense of immediately justifying judgments about the external world. Of course, mathematics plays a significant role in the natural sciences and is an important but not immediate source of knowledge about the physical world.


26 Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 136.

27 Hua XXIV, 154.

28 Ibid.

29 Sometimes it is considered the “common view” that phenomenology is only interested in studying acts that are relevant for justification but not interested in what it is that makes them justified or a source of justification (Soldati, ‘Epistemology’, 384 f.). Husserl’s distinction between macroscopic and microscopic noetics clearly shows that this is not true. Since Husserl insists that a microscopic noetics is more fundamental and important than a macroscopic one, it is safe to say that the contrary is true: Phenomenology is genuinely interested in investigating what it takes for acts to be justified or justifying.
Obviously, Evidenz is nothing but a word for the quality of givenness. One just has to take givenness in a comprehensive-enough way. One must not limit oneself, as most often happens, to the being of individual real things. Evidenz is a word for the fact that, as noethicians affirm and prove, there is a difference between acts that not only think that something is thus and thus, but are fully certain and aware, in the manner of perspicacious seeing, of this being and being thus. Therefore, the thing, the state of affairs is given in insight—direct and indirect insight—whether it is a question of a general or individual state of affairs. In the foregoing, we have seen that for Husserl the ultimate source of justification has to be something that is internal to the act. Not an external factor such as reliability but only something that is act-immanent can be the defining justifying factor. This passage reveals that the quality of givenness is this defining factor. Unfortunately, Husserl does not provide a more detailed analysis here, but from passages later in this work and from passages from his other works it is clear that it is the character of originary givenness that discloses the nature of evidence. When Husserl refers to “the quality of givenness” this means that the very same object can be given differently. You can entertain the thought that there is a table in front of you, you can hope that there is a table in front of you, you can imagine a table being in front of you, and you can have a perceptual experience of a table in front of you. Only within this last act of seeing the table is given to you originally, given in a fleshed out manner. According to noetics, the character of givenness is something that is internal to the act. This is why the term “phenomenal character” is appropriate to denote this kind of character. Even illusions and hallucinations can have the phenomenal character of originary givenness. Remember, the type of object determines which kind of evidence is possible with respect to this object, but what evidence is, its nature, is disclosed by act-internal factors, namely the quality of givenness, i.e. by how the act presents its contents.

It is of crucial importance for Husserl to insist that while evidence or justification is subjective in the sense that the source of justification is disclosed by the phenomenal character of experiences, this does not mean that evidence is a mere feeling. Evidence is not subjective in the sense of being a mysterious index that is attached to certain judgments. I am not justified in believing that the number two is the only even prime number because I can feel that it is so. I am not justified in believing that there is a table in front of me because I can feel that this judgment is true. Justificatory force depends only on how something is given to me, not on how I feel about what is given to me. For Husserl, to link justificatory force to feelings is “silly talk” and he insists that “the feeling and indicator theory of Evidenz is wholly meaningless.” Above, we have pointed out that noetics is not interested in the question of why we should believe that certain acts, e.g. apodictic insights, have justificatory force, but what it is that gives them their justificatory force. In this light, we can now

30 Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 153.
31 An anonymous referee of this journal has rightfully pointed out that Husserl’s conception of evidence is central for a phenomenological epistemology. Unfortunately, it would go beyond the scope of this paper to analyze how Husserl develops the notion of evidence in his main works and beyond. However, for such a discussion especially concerning a phenomenological epistemology in the light of current debates cf. Berghofer forthcoming.
32 Moran accurately characterizes the givenness of experiences as “the manner they are displayed to the experiencing subject.” (Moran, ‘Noetic Moments’, 198).
33 In a similar context Pietersma uses the term “phenomenological character.” (Pietersma, ‘Intuition and Horizon’, 96, 99).
34 Cf. Hua XVI, 15 and the helpful comments that refer to this passage in Erhard, ‘Husserls moderate empirischer Fundamentalismus’, 57 and Soldati, ‘Epistemology’, 391.
35 Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 154.
say: *the quality of givenness!* Acts are evidence, i.e. a source of justification, if they possess the phenomenal character of originary givenness. The chapter on noetics is concluded by the statement: “And, in these enlightening investigations, the question must finally be solved as to how objective existence can be conscious and known in subjectivity (and even Evidenz is something subjective).”

Thus, Husserl’s answer to the question that he takes to be the most fundamental epistemological question, namely of how subjectivity can be the source of objective knowledge, or, to put it differently, how subjectivity can lead to knowledge about objective objects and states of affairs, is answered as follows: Noetics reveals that subjective acts can be distinguished by their quality of givenness and those acts that have an originary presentive phenomenal character have justificatory force simply by virtue of this distinctive phenomenal character. Certain acts can justify believing objective states of affairs because they have originary givenness with respect to these states of affairs. Let us summarize the basic principles of a Husserlian noetics:

N1: Subjective acts are the ultimate carriers of justification.

N2: Justification-conferring acts can be distinguished from non-justification-conferring acts.

N3: Evident insight must be distinguished from empty judging.

N4: The distinguishing epistemic feature that discloses the nature of evidence is internal to the respective act.

N5: What discloses the nature of evidence, what distinguishes justification-conferring acts from non-justification-conferring acts is the quality of givenness.

N6: Justification-conferring experiences gain their justificatory force precisely by virtue of their phenomenal character of originary givenness.

N1 is a fundamental principle of a phenomenological epistemology, which reveals that epistemology and philosophy of mind are intimately related. N2 is a simple fact and N3 is a reformulation that already indicates the significance of the quality of givenness. N4 is a principle of a phenomenological epistemology that reveals its commitment to epistemic internalism. N5 is the main result of Husserl’s theory of evidence and likewise of his noetics. Compared to rival concepts of epistemic justification, N5 stands out in how closely it connects epistemology and philosophy of mind. N6 is a remarkable claim and in my opinion the defining claim of a phenomenological conception of experiential justification. However, it is debatable whether N6 is part of a noetics. First, note that N6 is different from N5. N5 tells you what distinctive feature distinguishes justification-conferring acts from non-justification-conferring acts. N6 states that this distinctive feature also is the source of justification. It is possible to affirm N5 but to deny N6. For instance, you could hold that only originary presentive acts are a source of justification but deny that

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36 Ibid.
37 For a similar claim in current analytic epistemology cf. Smithies, ‘The Phenomenal Basis of Epistemic Justification’, who argues for the epistemological significance of “phenomenal consciousness”.
38 For more details on how this is a genuinely phenomenological claim and how it can enrich current debates in epistemology cf. Berghofer, ‘Husserl’s Conception of Experiential Justification’, and Berghofer, ‘Towards a Phenomenological Conception’.
this is so because of their character of originary givenness but because, for whatever reason, only originary presentive intuitions are reliable.

Perhaps N6 goes beyond noetics since noetics is primarily concerned with analyzing acts. However, since N6, whether it is true or not, is a fundamental epistemological principle and since Husserl wants noetics to be fundamental in the sense of clarifying what it is that makes certain acts justifiers, I would like to include N6 in my enumeration of a Husserlian noetics. One might object that Husserl’s brief remarks on the nature of evidence in this chapter on noetics clearly speak in favour of his commitment to N5 but do not justify interpreting him as subscribing to N6. I have to admit this and would like to add that in Husserl scholarship there is no agreement (or even a discussion) on whether or not Husserl endorses N6.39

It is to be noted, however, that the final paragraph of this lecture course entitled “The phenomenological Elucidation of Natural Scientific Knowledge” should be read as contributing crucially to noetics (or at least to a phenomenological epistemology in general). Here the passage that most clearly speaks in favour of interpreting Husserl as endorsing N6 reads as follows:

A statement is grounded in experience, more precisely in perception and memory. It carries, so to speak, empirical weight. The clearer and more distinct the fulfilling empirical consciousness of givenness is, the more weight it carries. Obviously, we are not in a realm of contingent psychological subjectivity here either. Perception justifies by its phenomenological content, by its essence. Every singular perception with the same essence would justify the same statement proper to it in a precisely similar way, no matter where and for whom.40

With respect to epistemic justification, this might be the single most important passage in Husserl’s oeuvre.41 This is not the place to discuss the epistemological consequences of this statement in detail, but let us briefly focus on the remark that “Perception justifies by its phenomenological content, by its essence. Every singular perception with the same essence would justify the same statement proper to it in a precisely similar way, no matter where and for whom.” Here Husserl explicitly states that perception justifies by virtue of its “phenomenological content,” “its essence.” Of course, “phenomenological content” is a technical term that is not easy to grasp and is not consistently used by Husserl. Broadly speaking, “[p]henomenological content is that which is contained in experience simply as lived.”42 This strongly suggests that Husserl subscribes to H6. Furthermore, in Ideas I Husserl holds:

*Immediate ‘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. This source has its legitimizing function only because, and to the extent that, it is an originally presentive source.*43

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39 To be fair, there is not much discussion in Husserl scholarship addressing Husserl’s basic epistemological principles. The only remarks I know of that support interpreting Husserl as subscribing to N6 appear in Erhard, ‘Husserls moderater empirischer Fundamentalismus’, 56, fn 25.
40 Husserl, Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, 343; translation modified.
42 Drummond, Historical Dictionary of Husserl’s Philosophy, 157.
43 Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology, 36 f.
For the present purpose we need to focus on the last sentence, the claim that originally presentive consciousness “has its legitimizing function only because, and to the extent that, it is an originally presentive source.” This is a clear commitment to N6, since Husserl emphasizes that our ultimate source of justification, i.e. our originary presentive intuitions, gain their justificatory force simply by virtue of their phenomenal character of being originally presentive.

3. Noetics in “Logic and General Theory of Science”

As mentioned above, the final chapter in Husserl’s lecture course on “Logic and General Theory of Science” (1917/18) entitled “The Idea of Noetics” is a main resource for Husserl’s noetics. In fact, this chapter and the one we discussed in the previous section seem to be the only places in Husserl’s oeuvre where he develops the conception of noetics systematically. Hence, it is important to show that within the ten years that lie between these two systematic portrayals of noetics, the basic ideas of noetics that we have presented as the theses N1-N6 are still the same. Since the depiction of noetics is more lengthy and detailed in the earlier lecture course and since we have discussed this depiction exhaustively in the previous section, I wish only to briefly shed light on the main passages of “The Idea of Noetics” and to point out the subtle advancements that can be found in this later text.

This chapter begins with the remark that for each ontology there is a corresponding noetics. To put it differently, for each science of objects there is a corresponding (and genuinely phenomenological) science of how we can be intentionally directed to these objects. The nature and epistemological significance of the undertaking of noetics is well captured in the following passage:

Everything we call method, every procedure of justifying knowledge that is established and is equipped with a claim to legitimacy leads us back, by analysis, to the manifold basic types of acts that we consider by the broad title of ‘knowledge.’ All these acts must be examined, thus not only the specific intellectional position-takings that we call acts of judgment, but all that ground them in knowledge, all that justify or refute them. They are all connected by essential relations, all raise a claim to legitimacy or have their distinct role of legitimacy going by the title of ‘legitimation’ or ‘refutation.’ They all gain legitimacy by virtue of perceptions or value-ceptions, and so these acts become legitimizing acts. Perceptions turn out to

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44 The text published in Husserlana 24 dates back to 1906/07 and the text of the lecture course we are discussing in this section to 1917/18. However, it should be mentioned that the first time Husserl gave this lecture course was in the winter semester 1910/1911 and the earlier lectures of 1906/07 were one important source Husserl drew on for this new lecture course (cf. Ursula Panzer’s introductory remarks in Hua XXX). However, Husserl constantly worked on the manuscript for this lecture course until 1917/18 and even aimed at publishing it, which reveals the importance of this text.

45 Hua XXX, 311.

46 What is here translated as “justifying knowledge” is termed “Erkenntnisbegründung” in the original. Personally, I think that this term “Erkenntnisbegründung” should be read as “epistemic justification,” since what Husserl seems to have in mind is justification (Begründung) that aims at knowledge (Erkenntnis). In all of my translations, however, I wish to stick to the original as closely as possible which is why I have chosen the term “justifying knowledge.”

47 Here I have translated “Erkenntnis” as “knowledge.” Some Husserl scholars tend to translate “Erkenntnis” as “cognition,” saving the term “knowledge” for “Wissen.” However, since in the previous chapter we have often referred to the translation of Clair Ortiz Hill who prefers the term knowledge, I intend to stick to this terminology. Furthermore, it ought to be noted that Husserl, unfortunately, does not make any clear distinction between “Erkenntnis” and “Wissen” which is why there is no real need to do so when translating him. Lastly, I would like to point out that Husserl often uses the term “Erkenntnis” rather loosely in the sense of evident judgment. Since for Husserl evidence is not infallible, evident judgment is not necessarily true, which means that “Erkenntnis” should often be read as justified belief rather than knowledge.
conflict with perceptions, they contest their legitimacy, and the nullified perception counts as ostensible perception. Judgments can also be legitimizing for other judgments, be it for judgment-certainty, be it for probability.48

All epistemic justification leads back to acts. There are acts that claim to be justified, to have epistemic legitimacy. These acts are judgments (or if you prefer more modern terminology: beliefs). Then there are justifying, legitimizing acts. These justification-conferring acts are perceptions and value-ceptions.49 Perceptions justify judgments, but perceptions are not necessarily veridical and judgments based on perceptions are not necessarily true.50 Perceptions can conflict with each other and turn out to be misleading. Perceptions are a fallible source of evidence, but, importantly, this does not undermine their justificatory force. They do justify judgments even if these judgments might be wrong. For Husserl, this is of great importance and he emphasizes this point on many occasions, especially when he is concerned with a phenomenological epistemology. “Everyone knows that perception, memory, expectation deceive, and yet they justify – not the absolute certainty of the existence of the matters of fact perceived, remembered, expected, but the reasonable assumption, nevertheless.”51 Finally, judgments are not only capable of being justified, they can also justify. When your perceptual experience justifies you in believing that there is a car approaching, this justified belief can justify other beliefs such as “I should cross the street more quickly.”

It is to be noted that Husserl in this lecture course is clearer on what he takes to be the justification-conferring acts, namely perceptions.52 Like every science, noetics has a clear basic question it wants to answer:

Thus, the first question of noetics, the most general one, is the following: What distinguishes judging as such from legitimately justified judging that reveals its alleged legitimacy? What does such a legitimate justifying look like? How to understand the meaning of such an accomplishment?53

As in the lectures from 1906/07 noetics is referred to as a “theory of justification of knowledge”54 and just as in the former lectures, noetics is intimately related to a theory of evidence. It is pointed out that “[s]cientific judging is not judging arbitrarily, it is evident judging”55 and again evident judging is contrasted with judging blindly:

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48 Hua XXX, 317; my translation.
49 This distinction between justified acts (judgments) and justifying acts (perceptions) is of great importance. In current epistemology, there is some agreement that experiences are either justifying or non-justifying but they are not justified or non-justified. They are a source of justification without being in need of being justified themselves. This is of great significance for any foundationalist conception of justification and it is in line with Husserl’s distinction between judgments and perceptions.
50 To put it differently, perceptual evidence is not infallible.
51 Husserl, *Introduction of Logic and Theory of Knowledge*, 119. It should be pointed out, however, that many epistemologists, especially externalists, think that it is problematic if epistemic justification cannot provide a straightforward link to truth. Some Husserl scholars think that such concerns have led Husserl to give his transcendental idealism a metaphysical tone such that experience always matches with reality since reality in some sense is constituted by experience (cf. Soldati, *Epistemology*). Personally, I do not think that justification has to be reliable or even infallible and I side with an interpretation according to which Husserl’s transcendental idealism is primarily methodological and metaphysically neutral (cf. Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity*, and Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning*).
52 On other more prominent occasions Husserl is even more precise in stating that every originary presentive intuition is a source of immediate justification. Here the locus classicus is Husserl’s principle of all principles in § 24 of *Ideas I*. Cf. also Hua Ill/1, 326.
53 Hua XXX, 320; my translation.
54 Ibid., 318.
55 Ibid., 322.
We can judge without insight, blindly, as a matter of routine, etc. However, we can also judge with insight – and only by doing so does our judging have objective epistemic value. If we were not able to have evidence, then all talk of truth and science would not make sense.\(^{56}\)

Husserl, again, argues against a “psychologistic epistemology” that holds that evidence consists of feelings\(^{57}\) and, more importantly, gives a positive account of evidence according to which the nature of evidence is linked to the quality of givenness:

By focusing on evidential consciousness and by bringing to mind what this actually is, namely self-giving consciousness in contrast to mere acts of meaning without grasping by itself, [in contrast to] empty intention without fulfillment, by bringing to mind, I say, this difference, you can see that, naturally, such self-giving consciousness can unravel mysteries but it cannot any longer be mysterious itself. All that is mysterious, all that is problematic is located within mere acts of meaning. Treating the seeing grasping of something itself [das schauende Selbsterfassen], the self-having, as a miracle, would mean not to understand, would mean to philosophize about evidence from above, instead of looking at evidence itself, making evidence itself evident.\(^{58}\)

Here Husserl tells us that evidence is self-giving consciousness, i.e. originary givenness. All this is in line with the previous section. There is one aspect in which this chapter goes crucially beyond the noetics as presented in 1906/07. This is the claim that the type of object you intuit, determines the type of evidence that is available to you. We have briefly mentioned this doctrine in the previous section, but not in the context of textual support but only as an anticipation. Here is the textual evidence:

Only a systematic analysis, namely an eidetic analysis of consciousness with respect to all its basic types, with respect to all its eidetic correlations can solve the problems of a critique of reason, can lead to a unanimous and completely sufficient noetics. That it belongs to the essence of all consciousness to be consciousness of something is the starting point. But for every basic type of objectivity, consciousness, and more precisely presentive consciousness, is characterized differently, it has different eidetic structures that a priori correlate to the essence of the respective objectivity.\(^{59}\)

This is of crucial importance since it indicates the interdependence of noetics and noe-matics. All the justificatory force, the nature of evidence, is located within justification-conferring acts, namely originary presentive intuitions, but what kind of justification this is, what the evidence looks like, depends on the type of object that is given. To put it differently, “evidence is a function of the evident.”\(^{60}\) In his Crisis Husserl calls this doctrine the “universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness” and he has left no doubt that the significance of this doctrine can hardly be overestimated as he states that his “life-work has been dominated by the task of systematically elaborating on this a priori of correlation.”\(^{61}\)

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 323.
\(^{57}\) Ibid.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 326 f.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 329 f.; my translation.
\(^{60}\) Heffernan, ‘Miscellaneous Lucubrations’, 26. For the carriers of evidence or justificatory force this means that “the precise nature of the intuitive evidence at issue varies in dependence on the respective types of objects or states of affairs that the relating acts are directed towards.” (Rinofner-Kreidl, ‘Phenomenological Intuitionism’, 37).
\(^{61}\) Husserl, The Crisis of European Sciences, 166. Note that, strictly speaking, there is a clash between Husserl’s principle that evidence is subjective and fallible and the principle that the type of object determines the type of evidence. The latter doctrine should be formulated as: The type of object you are intuiting determines the type of evidence that is possible for you with respect to this object, if your evidence is veridical. It is possible that your evidence is not only misleading but
Has Husserl succeeded in providing such a systematic “eidetic analysis of consciousness with respect to all its basic types, with respect to all its eidetic correlations?” Given that he has successfully shown that (1) acts are the carriers of justification, that (2) the justificatory force of acts has to be located within the acts, that (3) it is the quality of givenness that distinguishes justification-conferring acts from non-justification-conferring acts, and that (4) originary givenness discloses the nature of evidence, of ultimate justification; has he provided a sufficient phenomenological analysis of what “originary givenness” means for different types of evidence? Of course, we know that the originary givenness of physical objects means the object is given “in the flesh” and we know that such evidence is inadequate and that physical objects can only be given in perspectives. We acknowledge that this is a crucial difference to the givenness of logical or mathematical truths. Here we can have apodictic evidence, they are not simply given “in the flesh,” they are given as indubitable. We may say that in the case of physical objects or states of affairs I can see that something is the case, e.g. that there is a table in front of me. By having apodictic evidence, on the other hand, I can see that something has to be the case and could not be different, which means I can see why something has to be the case, e.g. that 2 is the only even prime number. Hence, it is beyond doubt that Husserl has not only paved the way for a phenomenological epistemology, he has also provided concrete aspects of such an undertaking. However, especially with respect to originary givenness and its different variations, there is still much that remains to be done. We need a more detailed phenomenological analysis of what it means that objects are given “in the flesh” of what originary givenness means in the case of apodictic and adequate givenness and what it is that unites apodictic, adequate, and inadequate evidence so that in all these cases we can speak of originary givenness. This is an ongoing task for a phenomenological epistemology.

Husserl delivers the following synopsis and prospect of noetics:

Beginning with the natural sciences, the path leads to the ontologies up to the most universal ontology (to analytics) and then on to noetics that follows all these ontologies and elucidates their principles and methods and through noetics every particular scientific knowledge is elucidated. And all knowledge, then, is transformed to absolute knowledge, to metaphysical knowledge. Thus, noetics is the theory of science in the highest sense and likewise the discipline that makes possible final and highest fulfillment of our desires for justification; because final satisfaction of knowledge can only be granted by absolute knowledge. Above all knowledge – as it belongs to its essence – being its guiding star there is the idea of the absolute. If philosophy is the title for any scientific investigation that apart from ordinary scientific work aims to serve our striving for absolute knowledge, then all logical disciplines and first and foremost noetics deserve the title philosophical discipline.62

Needless to say, this goal of transforming all knowledge to absolute knowledge has not yet been reached. It also goes without saying that this is more of an ideal than an actual goal. According to my understanding, a phenomenological epistemology does not aim at ensuring that we know everything or that all our justification is infallible in the sense that none

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62 Hua XXX, 330; my translation.
of our beliefs such as that there is a table in front of me could turn out to be illusionary. Instead, the aim of a phenomenological epistemology is ultimate justification (Letztbegründung) in the sense of unfolding the ultimate sources of justification. The question is not whether or not my belief that there is a table is infallible (it is not). The question is if my belief is justified, and, if so, what acts are responsible for justifying it and what is it that gives these acts their justificatory force. These are the questions of a phenomenological epistemology and above we have discussed the answers provided by a Husserlian noetics (N1-N6). Continuing and refining noetics must be one of the tasks of current phenomenology.

4. Prospect: Noetics in Husserl’s Oeuvre and in Current Analytic Epistemology

The term “noetics” does not often occur in Husserl’s major writings. In Logical Investigations, Formal and Transcendental Logic, Cartesian Meditation, Crisis, and Experience and Judgment the term noetics does not even occur. In Ideas I noetics is mentioned as an important supplementation to formal logic but the conception of noetics is not developed systematically.63 This notable absence of the term noetics, however, does not mean that its basic ideas systematically developed in “Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge” (1906/07) and “Logic and General Theory of Science” (1917/18) and portrayed in the previous two sections play no role in his major writings.

I claim that, on the contrary, Husserl has in all his major writings argued for the following thesis:

Thus, it is clear that there must be a new discipline which is equally directed to all sciences by investigating in formal universality all acts of knowledge with respect to their claims to legitimacy. This science that we call formal or logical noetics […]64

He has not always used the term noetics to provide his phenomenological epistemology with a proper name, but the basic ideas discussed in the previous sections are omnipresent. Husserl’s commitment to the theses N1-N6 can be most clearly seen in his remarks about evidence that occur in all of his major writings. It can be seen in all those places where Husserl says that judging blindly must be distinguished from judging with evidence.65 It can be seen in all those places where Husserl tells us that evidence consists of mental states or more precisely of experiences or perceptions.66 The same is true for all the passages in which Husserl states that originary givenness discloses the nature of evidence.67

Even the Crisis, which is probably the one major work of Husserl’s that is least concerned with epistemic justification, draws significantly on one of the most fundamental theses of noetics. This is the principle that subjectivity is the source of all epistemic justification. Husserl’s whole critique of the various attempts made to mathematize the world and naturalize philosophy can only be understood by acknowledging that for Husserl

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63 It should be noted, however, that in the chapter “Noesis and Noema” of Ideas I Husserl offers much that is helpful for fully grasping the conception of noetics. Cf. Moran, ‘Noetic Moments, Noematic Correlates’, for a detailed discussion of this chapter.
64 Hua XXV, 357.
65 Cf. Hua XVIII, 28; Hua VII, 65; Hua VIII, 32; Hua I, 51 and Husserl, Experience and Judgment, 19.
the source of all justification is to be found within the subject. Apart from the passages in the context of noetics we have discussed above, this is most clearly stated in his lectures on “First Philosophy.” Here Husserl insists that all justifications have their ultimate source and their unity in the unity of the cognizing subjectivity that must be understood in its transcendental purity. Thus, there was the requirement for a science of the primal sources, a First Philosophy, a science of transcendental subjectivity.

It is to be noted that our reconstruction of Husserl’s noetics not only allows us to identify elements of noetics in Husserl’s main works but also to gain a better understanding of Husserl’s main works. Think about the famous “principle of all principles” of Ideas I or, equivalently, the “first methodological principle” of the Cartesian Meditations. In these works we do not find a proper elucidation of why evident judging must be based on originary presentive intuitions or why they should be considered a source of immediate justification. However, by considering the main theses of noetics (N1-N6) we gain a much better understanding of the principles themselves and where they come from.

Importantly, there are movements in current analytic epistemology that share some of Husserl’s basic principles of a phenomenological epistemology. This is particularly true for versions of epistemic internalism that stress that mental states, especially experiences, are the prime source of justification; for moderate versions of foundationalism that emphasize the justificatory force of experiences but acknowledge the fallibility of experiential justification and stress the significance of coherence; for moderate versions of rationalism that argue that a priori intuitions are analogous to perceptual experiences in that they are a source of immediate justification by virtue of how they present their contents; and for evidentialist approaches that hold that justification is determined by evidence. I have highlighted these similarities and illuminated how a Husserlian approach can enrich current debates elsewhere. In the following, I want to give some brief indications of the significance of Husserl’s phenomenological epistemology by contrasting it with one of the currently most popular principles of epistemic justification that implies that one’s mental states are one’s justifiers. This is the principle of phenomenal conservatism (PC). PC has been introduced by Michael Huemer as follows:

PC: “If it seems to S as if P, then S thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that P.”

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68 Cf. Hua VI, 7, 115, 129. Similar claims can be found in the Cartesian Meditations and in Experience and Judgment. Cf., e.g. Hua I, 95 and Husserl, Experience and Judgment, 17.
69 Hua VIII, 4.
70 Of course, there are also many approaches that are directly opposed to a phenomenological account. Externalists, for instance, who locate the justificatory force of acts not within the acts but in external factors such as reliability are clearly in opposition to a Husserlian epistemology.
73 Huemer, Skepticism and the Veil of Perception, 99.
Huemer’s PC has become very popular, and even opponents of PC tend to agree that seemings are mental states that should be a focus of epistemological investigations. But what is a seeming? The attempt to analyze the notion of “seeming” turns out to be extremely difficult. Typically, proponents of PC do not try to give a proper analysis but use examples to clarify this notion. The most common types of seemings are perceptual, introspective, memory based, and intellectual seemings. When I see my black laptop in front of me, it visually seems to me that there is a black laptop. This is an example of a perceptual seeming. When I realize that $2 + 2 = 4$, it intellectually seems to me that $2 + 2 = 4$. According to proponents of PC, rational intuitions are intellectual seemings. Furthermore, they typically claim that there are crucial similarities between intellectual cognition and sensory perception, in that seemings like $2 + 2 = 4$ should be regarded as a form or a product of intellectual seeing. As I understand Huemer, he also holds that seemings have a distinctive phenomenal character.

Hence, Huemer is in agreement with Husserl that mental states and more precisely experiences are the carriers of justification. They also agree that these justification-conferring experiences are united by their distinctive phenomenal character. However, there are important differences between their conceptions. Huemer does not provide a more detailed phenomenological analysis of what the phenomenal character of seemings looks like and he appears to hold that this seeming-character is the very same in all areas of justification. This means that the very same type of experience – namely seemings – with the very same kind of phenomenal character are the ultimate justifiers in all areas of possible justification. This is an important difference to Husserl who distinguishes different types of evidence according to different types of possible givenness. My visual experience of a table in front of me and my rational intuition that $2 < 3$ differ significantly in their justification-conferring phenomenal character, i.e. in how they present their contents. They are unified by being originally presentive, but what it means to be originally presentive is not the same for visual experiences and rational intuitions.

Furthermore, Huemer’s PC is in danger of becoming what Husserl has criticized as a feeling-theory of evidence, according to which one’s evidence consists of one’s feelings. Due to the lack of a more detailed phenomenological analysis of seemings it is difficult for Huemer to explain what distinguishes seemings from mere empty feelings. What distinguishes an empty “seeming” that there is a greatest prime number from an insightful grasping that two is the only even prime number? What distinguishes an empty “seeming” that my table consists of $N$ atoms from my experiencing that the table is black? Since Huemer has difficulties providing an answer to such questions, his approach is in danger of allowing too much in the sense of not being able to exclude such empty seemings. Remember, Husserl rightly stresses that justificatory force depends only on how something is given, not on how one feels about what is given. Huemer’s PC is not well-suited to account for this difference.

Furthermore, while Huemer seems to hold that seemings have some distinctive phenomenal character, he does not explicitly state that they are justifiers by virtue of

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74 For more on this experience-view of seemings cf. Tucker, ‘Seemings and Justification’.
75 Thus, even if Huemer is on the right track, what needs to be done is a more careful phenomenological analysis. In this context, cf. Audi, ‘Doxastic Innocence’, 194 and Wiltsche, ‘Intuitions, Seemings, and Phenomenology’.
76 I have developed this objection against Huemer in more detail in Berghofer, ‘Husserl’s Conception of Experiential Justification’, and Berghofer, ‘Towards a Phenomenological Conception’.
their phenomenal character. According to our interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenological epistemology, Husserl claims that justification-conferring experiences gain their justificatory force from their distinctive phenomenal character. This was our thesis N6.

N6: Justification-conferring experiences gain their justificatory force precisely by virtue of their phenomenal character of originary givenness.

It is to be noted that there are current analytic epistemologists who agree with the basic idea that it is the distinctive phenomenal character that gives certain experiences their justificatory force. John Bengson has called this distinctive character “presentationality.”77 Elijah Chudnoff has called it “presentational phenomenology.”79 According to Jennifer Church, it is the “phenomenology of objectivity”80 that makes certain experiences justifiers and for Koksvik it is the combination of “phenomenology of objectivity” and “phenomenology of pushiness.”81 They all agree that it is the distinctive phenomenal character that gives certain experiences their justificatory force, but they differ in their precise characterization of this character.

Although these philosophers share many significant basic ideas and theses with a Husserlian epistemology, there are still important differences. Husserl’s doctrine of different types of evidence, for instance, and the respective link to different types of givenness is missing in the more recent approaches but seems to be a crucial supplement that leads to a more precise phenomenological analysis of the basic sources of justification. Clearly, there is much potential for mutual enrichment. Noetics, i.e. an epistemologically motivated phenomenological analysis of acts should be established at the very core of any epistemological investigation.

References


77 In recent publications I have called this doctrine the “phenomenological conception of experiential justification” (PCEJ). I am convinced that PCEJ is the most plausible approach towards experiential justification and I have aimed at offering an elaborated version of PCEJ in Berghofer, ‘Husserl’s Conception of Experiential Justification’, and particularly Berghofer, ‘Towards a Phenomenological Conception’.

78 Bengson, ‘The Intellectual Given’.

79 Chudnoff, Intuition. In the context of the justificatory force of such a presentational phenomenology, Chudnoff explicitly refers to Husserl.

80 Church, Possibilities of Perception.

81 Koksvik, Intuition. It should be mentioned that Koksvik and Church have developed their accounts independently of each other. Church is significantly closer to a Husserlian approach and like Chudnoff she explicitly refers to Husserl (although in a different context).


