

The Intentionality of Passive Experience: Husserl and A Contemporary Debate

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What sort of warrant can sensory experience lend our thoughts and judgments? Under what description, if any, can sensory experience serve as a constraint, a condition, or even a criterion for our claims to know? Such questions are hardly new in the history of philosophy but they have taken on a distinctive coloring in the wake of the charge, forcefully argued by Sellars and others midway through the past century, that various appeals to experience for justification of our judgments fall prey to the myth of the given, the mistaken notion that epistemic value or, more simply, a reason for specific thoughts and judgments can be “found” in and thus legitimately attributed to a sensory experience or empirical description.¹ Some respond to this challenge by insisting that our conceptual capacities are always already operative in experience, while others respond by elaborating how experience includes informational but nonconceptual contents capable of serving as a legitimate constraint on thought. In keeping with the historical precedents acknowledged by their authors, these responses may be said to rest on ‘Kantian’ and ‘Lockean’ cognitive models respectively.²

Husserl’s analyses of passive syntheses have intriguing similarities and dissimilarities with both cognitive models and, for that reason, present a neglected alternative that merits consideration. Not that Husserl’s analyses by themselves

1. Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” in *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 127-196, esp. 169f; W. V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), 20-46; Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: New Left Review Edition, 1973), 168, 81-92; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 182-192.

2. See Pierre Jacob, *What Minds Can Do: Intentionality in a Non-intentional World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 74 (hereafter = Jacob) and John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3f (hereafter = MW). While both authors attempt to give substantive accounts of experience that, if trenchant, might undermine Sellars’ charge, they differ fundamentally about the contents of experience.

are sufficient to resolve the debate over the epistemic force of sensory experience; indeed, tensions within his investigations plainly foreshadow aspects of that debate. But consideration of his analyses of passive syntheses that operate within experience with structures of their own also exposes a blind spot in much of the current debate and, in the process, suggests a possible way out of the impasse resulting from Kantian and Lockean approaches. In order to make this case, I first sketch two representative accounts of these conflicting interpretations of experience and its import for cognition: John McDowell's interpretation, as it is presented in his *Mind and World*, and Pierre Jacob's interpretation, as he outlines it in *What Minds Can Do: Intentionality in a Non-intentional World*. I then review Husserl's analysis of passive syntheses with a view to its potential fruitfulness for the contemporary dispute.³

1. Two representative, conflicting approaches to the mind

Before I turn to the theories of McDowell and Jacob, a few qualifications are in order. By no means do I pretend to offer a comprehensive account of either theory. My aim is rather to provide an account sufficient to indicate where Husserl's analyses of passive syntheses might be situated within the framework of their influential but disparate interpretations of experience. It should also be noted that those differences can be traced in part to different primary concerns, ontological concerns in Jacob's case and epistemological or, better, therapeutic concerns in McDowell's case. Nevertheless, Jacob's endeavor is just the sort of

3. Given the fact that Husserl's exchanges with Frege antedate the "analytic-continental" division within philosophy and yet, by many accounts, mark its beginning, scholars have tended to emphasize Husserl's early analyses of issues (such as psychologism, meaning, and knowledge) common to him and Frege. See, for example, Dagfinn Føllesdal, *Husserl und Frege* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1958); J. N. Mohanty, *Husserl and Frege* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 117-126; Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 43-56; Richard Cobb-Stevens, *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy* (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer, 1990); Claire Ortiz Hill and Guillermo Rosado Haddock, *Husserl or Frege? Meaning, Objectivity and Mathematics* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2000). One of the ancillary aims of this paper is to contribute to reversing this trend by demonstrating the potential import of Husserl's later "genetic phenomenology" for contemporary debates. For useful studies of Husserl's analyses in this connection, see (in order of publication) Antonio Aguirre, *Genetische Phänomenologie und Reduktion* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1970); Ronald Bruzina, *Logos and Eidos: The Concept in Phenomenology* (Paris: Moulton, 1970); Guido Antonio De Almeida, *Sinn und Inhalt in der genetischen Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1972); Elmar Holenstein, *Phänomenologie der Assoziation. Zur Struktur und Funktion eines Grundprinzips der passiven Genesis bei Husserl* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1972); Mary Larrabee, "Husserl's Static and Genetic Phenomenology," *Man and World* 10 (1976): 163-174; Ichiro Yamaguchi, *Passive Synthesis and Intersubjektivität bei Edmund Husserl* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1982); Donn Welton, *The Origins of Meaning: A Critical Study of the Thresholds of Husserlian Phenomenology* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1983); Donn Welton, "Husserl's Genetic Phenomenology of Perception," *Research in Phenomenology* 12 (1982): 59-83.

enterprise in “constructive philosophy,” bent on explaining how brains can think, how intentionality is possible in a non-intentional world, that is based, in McDowell’s view, on a failure to understand the predicament that motivates it.⁴

a. Minimal empiricism in a relaxed naturalism: McDowell’s exorcism

McDowell’s aim is to exorcise an anxiety, the philosophical anxiety produced by the disturbing conclusion that there are only two alternative but equally unpalatable ways of construing the relation of thought to experience: a “bald naturalism,” committed to a “useless” idea of the given, and a “coherentism,” committed to a set of beliefs unconstrained by experience. Naturalism is motivated by a genuine need for some constraints on our empirical thinking, but the “bald naturalist” conception of that constraint is “useless” because it insulates experience from thought and, in the process, confuses causes with reasons or, more precisely, exculpations with justifications, thus falling victim to the myth of the given. McDowell maintains that even Evans’ account of perceptual experiences—as states of informational systems with non-conceptual content available to thought—falls prey to this confusion.⁵ In McDowell’s view, Evans’ appeal to non-conceptual content is false advertising, doing the work of conceptuality merely under another name, since the non-conceptual content as such is “blind” and, despite appearances, makes no room for a connection with thought and, thereby, with experience.⁶ But if this sort of appeal to the given is bankrupt, so, too, is the position of the coherentist whose insistence on the difference between experience and thinking leaves her unable to explain how the mind can represent the world at all. According to McDowell, Davidson’s view that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief” exemplifies this sort of coherentism.⁷ The particular sort of anxiety that we as-

4. MW xxii-xiv.

5. MW 63. It should be noted that, according to McDowell, neither Evans nor Davidson is tempted by “bald naturalism”; cf. MW 67, 72. Nevertheless, on Evans’ view, it is possible for an entity to possess a non-conceptual informational system, even one produced by a perceptual capacity, but not have the requisite capacities of thinking, conceptualizing, and reasoning; cf. Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 157f. As discussed below, Jacob appropriates this way of understanding perceptual experience.

6. MW 51-55. McDowell proceeds to identify and dispute three considerations about the content of experience that underlie Evans’ position: that it may have a determinacy exceeding our conceptual capacities, that it may be independent of our beliefs, and that it may, in some respects, be shared with animals; cf. MW 56-65, 69f.

7. Donald Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,” in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 310; for McDowell’s criticisms of Davidson (and fellow-travelers Sellars, Quine, and Rorty), see MW 14-18, 130-161.

sociate with philosophy is, McDowell infers, the result of an inability to find a way out from these two intolerable but opposite and thus, supposedly exhaustive positions: the insulation of receptivity from spontaneity in experience and vice versa.

McDowell proposes to exorcise this philosophical anxiety by establishing a third alternative, unrecognized by those who can find no place either for concepts in experience (naturalistically construed) or for experience in the space of reasons (inference, justification, etc.).⁸ According to that third alternative, experience combines, in an inextricable fashion, receptivity and spontaneity. The receptivity supplies the external constraint on our empirical thinking, but does so by virtue of the fact that the conceptual capacities are “unbounded” and thus already at work, *albeit passively*, in the experiences themselves.⁹ McDowell dubs his view “minimal empiricism” since, on this view, a supposedly attenuated conception of experience continues to serve as a constraint on thinking. Though experience, he insists, is passive in certain important respects, “it draws into operation capacities that genuinely belong to spontaneity”; or, as he also puts it, “we must insist that the understanding is already inextricably implicated in the deliverances of sensibility themselves.”¹⁰ Underscoring this fusion, McDowell contends that “we must not suppose that receptivity makes an even notionally separable contribution to its co-operation with spontaneity.”¹¹

McDowell recognizes that the alternatives proffered by Evans and Davidson stem not only from the specter of falling prey to the myth of the given, but also from the modern scientific conception of nature as the realm of law. This

8. McDowell repeatedly stresses that the alternative proposed by him simply falls off the radar of either Evans or Davidson; see MW 18, 61, 67.

9. MW 62f: “If one fails to see that conceptual capacities can be operative in sensibility itself, one has two options: either, like Davidson, to insist that experience is only causally related to empirical thinking, not rationally; or else, like Evans, to fall into the Myth of the Given, and try to credit experience, conceived as extra-conceptual, with rational elements to empirical thinking.” See, too, MW 26f, 67ff.

10. MW 13, 46; cf. MW 25f, 61, 87, 89f. There is an obvious and acknowledged Kantian ring to this proposal, though it comes without the commitment to the sort of transcendental constraints provided, according to Kant, by pure intuitions and categories. McDowell does not address these constraints, but does explicitly distance his view from what he calls “Kant’s transcendental story,” with its occasional appeal to a constraint emerging from the noumenal order; see MW 41-44. Perhaps the best analogue in Kant’s critical philosophy to McDowell’s proposal is what Kant dubs “the system of epigenesis,” an expression borrowed from biology to characterize his own synthetic model of cognition – in contrast to the “*generatio aequivo-ca*” view according to which experience alone makes concepts possible or the “preformationist” view that the categories of our thinking are strictly subjective, but implanted in us in a preordained way such that their use accords with the laws of nature (B167). Not surprisingly, given Kant’s hylomorphic elaboration of this epigenesis, McDowell ultimately proposes to combine a supposedly Kantian with an Aristotelian cognitive model; see MW 85, 95-99, 110f.

11. MW 51, 40f.

conception, McDowell submits, prevents them from entertaining his expanded notion of spontaneity. For, in relation to the realm of natural law as construed by modern sciences, the notion of spontaneity proposed by McDowell is, by his own lights, *sui generis*. Yet McDowell is unprepared to surrender the notion of nature to the realm of scientific law or to equate his notion of *sui generis* spontaneity with a form of supernaturalism. Instead, he appeals to the Aristotelian notion of ἕξις (*habitus*) that we cultivate (*bilden*) in keeping with our upbringing and that thereby comes to form our second nature.¹² Just as Aristotle's notion of habit combines art with nature, so McDowell's appropriation of this notion allows him to construe his proposal as "relaxed naturalism."

There are obvious problems with McDowell's empiricism, an empiricism dubbed 'minimal' because spontaneous, conceptual capacities are so "inextricably implicated" in the "deliverances" of the receptive side of experience, that we are not permitted to suppose that the contribution by the latter is "even notionally separable" from that of the former or, more precisely, from "co-operation with spontaneity." But then, on what basis are they distinguishable at all? McDowell's desire to preserve the supposedly legitimate impulse behind empiricism, namely, to recognize a constraint on empirical thinking, makes it imperative that he insist on that distinguishability. The receptivity in experience, much like the material formed in the course of making something, is supposed to serve as a constraint on the maker's ability to impose that form. But in order for the material to serve as the constraint, it must be distinguishable from the form, that is to say, the description of the material must, indeed, be "notionally separable" from the description of the form. Or, at least, establishing its distinctiveness would be a first step towards demonstrating how it can be a constraint. Yet McDowell's comments on the inextricability of the receptivity and spontaneity in experience as well as on the notional inseparability of the contributions made by these sides of experience suggest that he has a distinction without difference or, at least a difference that he cannot articulate.¹³

A cognate problem afflicts McDowell's relaxed naturalism, "a naturalism of second nature," as he dubs it, to account for the exercise of conceptual capacities at the ground level of human experience. This appeal, he insists, is not su-

12. MW 84f, 87f, 109f.

13. The issues that I raise here are a variant of the problems that often beset traditional forms of hylomorphism; particularly if there is no natural form without matter and vice versa, it is incumbent upon someone who insists on the explanatory efficacy of the difference to give an account of the distinctive constraints or imports of the formal and material principles respectively. Or, to put the issue in more phenomenological terms, is there any conscious access to the sensory as such, on McDowell's account, and if not, what is the difference between conceptual content and the concept itself? For a related discussion of these issues, see my "Gibt es eine eigene menschliche Anschauung?" *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie* VIII (2001): 116f.

pernaturalist but also does not aim to reject the progress made by the view of nature as “the realm of natural law,” however empty of meaning this realm putatively is.¹⁴ But perhaps the devil still possesses me (despite McDowell’s efforts at exorcism), since I fail to see how the concept of a second nature eliminates the question of how it is possible for a second, meaningful nature to supervene upon a first, meaningless nature. Or, better, why we should think that the first nature allows for the second nature? Moreover, why we should think that this query has been successfully expunged?

b. Intentional realism in a non-intentional world:
Jacob’s naturalization of intentionality

McDowell’s philosophy of mind is a prime example of what Pierre Jacob considers a top-down approach to intentionality (although Jacob explicitly mentions Davidson, not McDowell in this connection). According to Jacob, contemporary philosophers generally pursue a top-down or bottom-up approach, depending upon whether they take their bearings from human intentionality (“creatures having full-blown sets of propositional attitudes, mastery of a human language, and the ability to ascribe mental states to others”) or more modest creatures (having “inner states representing aspects of their environment”).¹⁵ Jacob concedes that the top-down approach is motivated by a genuine insight into the distinctively human cognitive capacities to acquire a human language and to form second-order beliefs and desires, e.g., beliefs about beliefs, beliefs about desires, etc. (i.e., a “meta-representational” capacity to form propositional attitudes about propositional attitudes). Yet he notes that the differences between human belief and other human or, for that matter, nonhuman states of mind do not entail a lack of intentionality (and, indeed, a lack of a capacity for thought and an erring intentionality) on the part of the latter. Moreover, those distinctively human capacities call in any case precisely for an explanation of how certain states of physical systems can have the sort of intentionality that we associate with propositional attitudes.¹⁶

To this end, Jacob pursues a bottom-up approach to intentionality by elaborating the representational character of sensory conscious experiences in con-

14. MW 109.

15. Jacob 9, 63.

16. Jacob labels his view “intentional realism” to contrast it with intentional irrealism, the view that it is either false or meaningless to ascribe semantic properties to an individual’s propositional attitudes. Thus, by his own lights, his approach contrasts with an eliminativism (for which conscious experience is not a genuine property of an individual brain), with the view that the question is simply unsolvable, and with the attempt to explain intentionality in terms of consciousness; see Jacob 9-17, 62f.

trast to conscious beliefs and desires (propositional attitudes).¹⁷ The key to that elaboration is, among other things, a particular notion of information. This notion is supposed to capture non-conceptual contents of experience, for example, seeing red or hearing a C note in contrast to a belief (e.g., *that* the color is red or *that* the note is C). In order for an individual to form the belief that *s* is *F*, the individual must be capable of wielding the relevant concepts. But information may be present that is quite independent of such a propositional attitude or even the ability to make a conceptual identification. Smoke indicates fire and, indeed, can indicate it to someone who fails to note the indicative relation as such (i.e., fails to take the smoke as *evidence* of fire).¹⁸ The information contained in the nonconceptual contents of experiences also differs from that in the conceptual contents of beliefs in two other ways, according to Jacob. Whereas conceptual contents are inferentially related to one another and appear to lead to intentional voluntary behavior, the same cannot be said for the non-conceptual contents. Thus, merely hearing a sound does not *imply* that the sound is that of a bee. Merely hearing that sound also does not provide the sort of basis for saying “That’s a bee’s buzz” that the conceptual content of my belief about it does.¹⁹

The distinction between non-conceptual and conceptual contents parallels distinctions that, according to Jacob, must be made in order to explain visual il-

17. Jacob also distinguishes “creature consciousness” from “state consciousness,” roughly paralleling the distinction between mere consciousness, e.g., being awake rather than asleep, and a cognitive consciousness, e.g., having formed a thought about the state of one’s consciousness. Jacob’s general thesis is that informational semantics can help explain how a state of a physical system can have “creature consciousness.” However, this distinction between creature consciousness and state consciousness does not coincide with the conceptual/nonconceptual distinction. It is possible, according to Jacob, to be conscious of something by way of a sensory experience or a thought, without either the experience or the thought being a conscious state; Jacob 62. Jacob’s distinction between creature consciousness and state consciousness resembles the contrasting senses of ‘clarity’ in early modern philosophy (mere awareness vs. reidentifiability) and Husserl’s distinction between acts with a transcendent orientation and acts with an immanent orientation (e.g., acts referring to an act or to a sensory datum of the same ego); see, too, Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1980), 67f (hereafter = ‘Id I’).

18. Or even if, as Jacob puts it, “possible causal relations or counterfactual dependencies also contribute to determining informational relations” (Jacob 51). Jacob also addresses problems ensuing from the relativity of information to previous information and from the dependency of the information on certain channels over which it is transmitted and received; cf. Jacob 55-60.

19. Husserl anticipates this aspect of the distinction between nonconceptual and conceptual contents when he distinguishes at least two levels of action and scopes of interest on the part of ego. Thus, he distinguishes voluntary and nonvoluntary movements involved in directing one’s attention to an object from nonvoluntary actions performed prior to doing so, actions that are accordingly not something that *in strictu sensu* “I do”; cf. Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1985), 90-93 (hereafter = ‘EU’); Jacob 65, 76, 260ff.

lusions (such as the Müller-Lyer illusion), the object of visual perception (its constancy in response to different proximal stimulations), or the more complex process of reading. Jacob reasons that whether we are talking about the appearance of inequality of two equal segments or about the appearance of a certain color under different lights and, thus, different proximal retinal stimulations, we have to distinguish between the non-conceptual content of an experience and the conceptual content of a belief. Following Dretske, Jacob explicates this distinction by way of the difference between analogically and digitally encoded information.²⁰ The information that a sound is a bee's buzz is *nested* within the rich and profuse, analogically coded information contained in the non-conceptual content. Thus, the information that a sound is a bee's buzz is analogically contained in the information available to someone who hears the sounds but is completely unfamiliar with bees. In order for that information to be digitalized, it must be "sublimed" or singled out from the wealth of information analogically contained in the non-conceptual content of that experience.²¹

There are at least three significant implications of this account. First, the process of conceptualization involves disregarding other available information. This construal is akin to traditional (e.g., Scholastic) theories that link conceptualization to abstraction. More importantly for our purposes, this aspect of Jacob's account has affinities with the Husserlian notion of attention and "retaining-in-the-grasp" against a horizon of possibilities. Second, Jacob's account precludes the possibility of "a maximally specific sensory experience"; in other words, conscious sensory experiences will have "a graded continuous fine-grainedness" to them that exceeds conceptualization.²² As we shall see below, this fine-grained continuity closely approximates Husserl's account of passive syntheses at or on the ground floor of experience. Third and most important, Jacob's insists (following Evans) that a sensory state is a conscious experience only if it (or, more precisely, its analogically encoded information) can serve as input for concept-formation and thus, presumably, propositional attitudes. We speak of information being processed by a thermostat or a cell but without that information in any way being digitalized (conceptualized) and thereby stored for further use. Hence, according to Jacob, only analogical information that can be

20. Jacob 70: "A signal r codes analogically the fact that s is F if and only if the fact that s is F is not the most specific information about s contained in r . Alternatively, if the fact that s is F is the most specific information carried by r about s , then the information that s is F is digitally coded by r ." Jacob 71: "Both an experience and a belief may carry the information that s is F . An experience of an s (which is F) will carry analogically the information that s is F , whereas a belief that s is F will carry the same information digitally."

21. This account entails neither that all properties that have or will be conceptualized must be analogically encoded in an individual's sensory experience nor that there are no innate concepts or ways of conceiving; see Jacob 74.

22. Jacob 74f. McDowell contests a cognate claim made by Evans; see MW 56-59.

digitalized qualifies as a conscious experience.²³ Herein lies the basic force of Jacob's contention that informational semantics can help explain how a state of a physical system can have "creature consciousness." While not semantic in the sense of a propositional attitude, a mere sensory experience is a source of information, albeit only if that information can be drawn upon by the mind (to which that information is available) for the sake of conceptualizing or forming a propositional attitude or even approximating the latter.

Jacob's account of informative but nonconceptual contents of experience is directly opposed to McDowell's insistence on the unboundedness of concepts in experience. Yet Jacob's acknowledgement of the necessity of that nonconceptual information's availability to the mind points to a basic problem that he shares with McDowell. As noted earlier, McDowell appears to lack the resources or, at least, any concern for explaining the receptivity in experience, though it would seem incumbent upon him to provide such an explanation since presumably, even if there is in his view no nonconceptual experience, the experience is not equivalent to the concepts operative within it. Similarly, Jacob fails to explain precisely how the nonconceptual contents or aspects of experience are constituted as part of or a condition of an intentional or, as he puts it, proto-semantic experience. Or, in his own jargon, what is it about some analogically coded information that allows it to be digitalized?

2. Husserl's potential contribution: passive syntheses

In *Experience and Judgment* Husserl attempts to identify general structures of receptivity. Since this "receptivity" involves activity on the part of consciousness, he is interested, more precisely, in elaborating the general structures of the conditions for a low level or even basic activity by the ego, such as simply turning toward something. These conditions include the stimulus and obtrusion on the ego as well as the ego's tendency to give in to the obtrusion. Though the aim is to identify general structures, Husserl's analysis begins with a paradigmatic sort of such receptivity, namely, the sort that figures in external perception (awareness of the actual presence of an individual spatial thing).²⁴ Perceiving is an active achievement or accomplishment of the ego (*aktive Leistung des Ich*), a judgment in the broad sense, that presupposes that "something is already given

23. Jacob 76f.

24. EU 73f; Husserl claims, nevertheless, that the uncovered structures are not restricted to perceiving, but can be found in feeling and appreciating as well. On the complicated composition of *Erfahrung und Urteil*, see Dieter Lohmar, "Zu der Entstehung und den Ausgangsmaterialien von Edmund Husserls Werk *Erfahrung und Urteil*" *Husserl Studies* 13, 1 (1996): 31-71.

to us in advance,” i.e., in advance of any objectification.²⁵ What is thus given is not an object, but a sensory field from which something sets itself apart and, in the process, lures (“*reizt*”) the perceiver to perception of it. Husserl begins with the admittedly abstract assumption (necessary for research purposes) that the field is merely “a field for me to which I turn by way of perceiving” and not yet the world or environment intersubjectively determined.²⁶

What perhaps first deserves mention is the fact that Husserl’s approach cannot be adequately classified in terms of the categories that either Jacob or McDowell employs to guide their respective investigations. His approach is neither straightforwardly a “top-down” or “bottom-up” approach in the senses indicated by Jacob. It is not “top-down” since Husserl does not begin with the linguistic or meta-representationalist capacities that Jacob deems distinctively human. Much like the “bottom-up” approach, Husserl’s analysis tries to capture something like “the semantic properties of thoughts which do not presuppose the existence of language and linguistic capacities, let alone a linguistic community.”²⁷ Most importantly, throughout his early published works and repeatedly in his unpublished investigations, Husserl accepts even as he struggles with the thesis that we have experiences distinct from the intentional experiences associ-

25. Husserl distinguishes judgment in a broad sense as “turning toward an entity in a prepredicative, objectifying manner” from judgment in the “narrowest and proper” sense, namely, a predicative judgment. Yet he insists that neither be confused with “passive belief,” corresponding to “the passive constitution of a datum distinguishing itself in the background”; cf. EU 63.

26. EU 74; see, too, Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis: Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918-1926*, ed. Margot Fleischer (Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), 131 (hereafter = ApS). Husserl already stipulated the necessity of this abstraction in his first *Logical Investigation*. Given Husserl’s strictures against naturalism, it bears noting that Jacob refers to this pre-linguistic approach as a “naturalistic feature common . . . to all informational semanticists” (ibid.). As Jacob notes, the view that the semantic properties of thoughts or propositional attitudes should be accorded a certain priority over those of linguistic symbols or utterances is endorsed by Grice, Searle, Fodor, Dretske, and Haugeland, among others; see Jacob 22-32; 44; for a contrary view, see Rorty’s holistic interpretations of Sellars and Quine in Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 170; 170-230.

27. Jacob 44. There is good reason to think that Husserl would probably have rejected, much as Jacob does, the Davidsonian thesis that having a thought presumes an ability to interpret what someone else says. He would also likely concur with Jacob that interpretation requires some second-order, “meta-representational” capacity or, in Husserl’s own terms, a capacity for reflection. For an illuminating discussion of the precedence of thought to language, in connection with Husserl’s Second Logical Investigation, see Gail Soffer, “Language and the Formation of General Concepts: The Second Logical Investigation in a Genetic Light” in *Husserl’s Logical Investigations*, ed. D. Dahlstrom (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 37-56.

ated with propositional attitudes.²⁸ As elaborated in more detail below, Husserl's genetic approach begins, much like Jacob, with the constitution of a sensory field given in advance of any intentional voluntary activity. Yet Husserl's analysis is also not "bottom-up" in Jacob's sense since the analysis remains fixed on human consciousness and does not appeal to a causal transmission of information below the threshold of consciousness.²⁹

Husserl's strategy also falls outside the threefold schema by means of which McDowell defines his project. Husserl's investigation of experience and judgment cannot be classified as either a bald naturalism or a coherentism. But it also cannot be identified with the "relaxed naturalism" that McDowell is promoting as the best alternative to these positions. Passively synthesized sensory fields, as Husserl construes them, cannot be adequately rendered either as matters of causal relations between an organism and its environment or as matters of beliefs in Davidson's coherentist sense. However, the operative syntheses are preconceptual and thus also at odds with McDowell's insistence on "the unboundedness of the conceptual."

In Husserl's mature work, he is concerned with the genesis of acts and structures of judgment from experience. Though this project has close affinities with an investigation into the possibility of semantics, it obviously differs from McDowell's endeavor to establish a minimal empiricism or Jacob's efforts at naturalizing intentionality. Nevertheless, the phenomena identified by Husserl in his account of "pre-predicative (receptive) experience" and "the general structures of receptivity" not only are missing in McDowell's and Jacob's accounts of experience but also suggest a bridge between them.

In the first section of *Experience and Judgment* Husserl endeavors to determine "the accomplishment of pre-predicative experience." Pre-predicative experience includes perceiving something in the sense of grasping and observing ("the *undermost* level of the lower, objectifying activity") or explicating it and, at a broader level, relating it to something else. But in order for someone to perceive or observe something, it must already be present in some sense to consciousness. Husserl's recognition of the need to explain this presence to consciousness

28. See Id I 65: "Man sieht nämlich leicht, daß *nicht jedes reelle Moment* in der konkreten Einheit eines intentionalen Erlebnisses selbst *den Grundcharakter der Intentionalität* hat, also die Eigenschaft >>Bewußtsein von etwas<< zu sein. Das betrifft z. B. alle *Empfindungsdaten*, die in den perzeptiven Dinganschauungen eine so große Rolle spielen." See also Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen II/1* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1913), 392f. However, see also Id I 202 where Husserl distinguishes the "Empfindungsfarbe" from the color that "zum Noema gehört."

29. In keeping with the phenomenological reduction, there can be no question of causal connections or unconscious information. Note, however, that an actual causal relation between a signal and what it indicates is not sufficient for the informational relation, in Jacob's view; cf. Jacob 51f.

in the perceptual act, yet as a condition of and not because of that act, is one of the distinguishing features of his later phenomenology.³⁰ Though something that we respectively accomplish (or, more precisely, that the respectively embodied consciousness with which each of us individually comes to identify himself or herself accomplishes), the experience of what is given in advance of perceiving or relating is a receptive experience, to be distinguished from “the ego’s active accomplishments” such as pre-predicative perceiving and predicative thinking (judging).³¹

Echoing his confidence in the possibility of carrying out a phenomenological reduction, Husserl asks us to turn to the original state of what is passively given, that is to say, to turn to it in a purely abstract manner, apart from any previous acquaintance with it by virtue of which it is there “for us” and apart from any objectifying activity on the part of the ego. What is thus given is not an individual something but, as noted above, a sensory field from which such an individual entity might stand out and draw attention to itself.³² This account of a preconceptual, sensory field departs from the conceptual, i.e., recognitional orientation of McDowell, though it has interesting parallels to Jacob’s account of analogical information in relation to which conceptualization is a kind of digitalizing. Husserl is concerned with the constitution of sensory fields and their presence to consciousness, “prior” to consciousness of individual objects and “prior” to recognition of an individual or a field, i.e., cognition of either as an

30. Husserl initially construed sensory givens as “non-intentional experiences” (*Sixth Logical Investigation*) and “hyletic data” (*Ideas I*), the content of a perception that figures in the perception only by virtue of some animating apprehension (*beseelende Auffassung*) or objectifying apperception (*objektive Apperzeption*) where the latter yields the “form” for that content. This schema persists in Husserl’s thinking but is offset by increasing qualifications and ultimate criticism of it, at least at a fundamental, prejudgmental level where the sensory dimension is said to be temporally constituted; for a review and interpretation of this development, see Welton, *The Origins of Meaning*, 213-232, 236, 244f.

31. As can be gathered from the foregoing remarks, Husserl’s use of ‘pre-predicative’ does not completely coincide with the uses of ‘non-conceptual’ reviewed in the first part of this paper. Observing or relating, as Husserl construes them, involve what McDowell and Jacob respectively consider conceptual capacities and propositional attitudes.

32. Taken in this sense, it is not, strictly speaking, a field of “objectivities” (*Gegenständlichkeiten*) for the latter is the product of an objectifying accomplishment by the ego and, in the precise sense, a predicatively judging accomplishment; nevertheless, they are “themselves already unities of identity, that appear in a manifold manner and can then as unities themselves become thematic objects”; cf. EU 75. Something new enters the scene if the ego yields to the stimulus and the phenomena move from the ego’s background to its foreground. On the side of the ego, Husserl distinguishes the ego’s tendency to turn to the alluring phenomena from the turning itself “through which it becomes actual ego”; cf. EU 82. See, too, EU 83: “Insofar as the ego in the turning-towards takes up what is given in advance to him by means of the affecting stimulus, we can speak here of the ‘ego’s receptivity’”; though Husserl adds that this receptivity is in fact the lowest stage of activity; see note 19 above.

instance of a concept.³³ There is, Husserl immediately recognizes, a tendency to construe this preconceptual field as a “chaos” but he insists that it has a determinate structure. Part of that structure is spatial and temporal, in keeping with the kinaesthetic and successive character of our sensations.³⁴

Yet how do we know that such fields exist? After all, colors (which presumably make up sensory fields of their own) are “always already” taken up as colors of concrete things.³⁵ To this query Husserl responds that even if such fields are not given separately in our typically perceptual experience, it is always possible to abstract from perceptions into which they have been integrated and turn our attention to these “underlayments” (*Unterschichte*) themselves.³⁶ This possibility indicates, he submits, that these sensory fields of givenness (*Gegebenheiten*) form unities with respective intentional identities of their own. Thus, each of the sounds and colors of the cars passing by has a distinctive duration, intensity, modulation, and movement (change of place). These identities are the product, at least in part, of a synthesis by consciousness, albeit not the sort of synthesis that is the act or doing of a judging ego (in the broad or narrow sense of judgment). In other words, I am not aware of one of those sounds—or their constitutive “aspects” (*Momente*)—only as the sound of this or that car or, for that matter, as necessarily the sound of a car at all.³⁷ The identities of these sensory fields are rather the product of, among other things, the movements of an embodied consciousness, at once oriented and constituted by its sensory interaction with its environment. As Husserl puts it in *Ideas II*: “Field in the pregnant

33. The quotation marks here are intended as scare quotes to draw attention to the fact that the priority is not necessarily temporal. It is the priority of conditions that analysis reveals must be on hand for something to be the case or to occur, not unlike the logical priority of ‘p’ to ‘p ∨ q’.

34. These fields are in fact synaesthetic; kinaesthetic, temporal, and, as we shall see, associative syntheses work in tandem in them; cf. ApS 77: “Nur in der protentionalen Linie der ursprünglichen Zeitkonstitution waltet Assoziation, und zwar fungiert dabei, wie wir wissen, die kontinuierliche retentionale Linie als weckend.” See, too, EU 79; ApS 14f, 406; see, too, Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1954), 108ff.

35. As Heidegger puts the matter: “Niemals vernehmen wir, wie er vorgibt, im Erscheinen der Dinge zunächst und eigentlich einen Andrang von Empfindungen, z. B. Töne und Geräusche, sondern wir hören den Sturm im Schornstein pfeifen, wir hören das dreimotorige Flugzeug, wir hören den Mercedes im unmittelbaren Unterschied zum Adler-Wagen. Viel näher als alle Empfindungen sind uns die Dinge selbst”; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960), 18.

36. See Sydney Shoemaker, “Qualities and Qualia: What’s in the mind?” in *The First-Person Perspective and Other Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 97-140.

37. I employ the term ‘moment’ here in Husserl’s mereological sense as a dependent part; thus, each sensory field is a unity, the “parts” of which are not independent of that unity.

sense is a transversible ‘continuous’ unity due to the functioning kinaesthenen.”³⁸ Moreover, as he notes in connection with this last quotation, the spatial expanse of the sensory fields by no means need differ essentially from the space of perceived objects.

The unities formed by these various fields of sensible data and the syntheses that produce them do not by themselves constitute the ground level of consciousness. These unities are products of syntheses which presuppose a synthesis in the inner consciousness of time. In *Experience and Judgment* Husserl is quick to add that this synthesis merely provides a general form (succession and co-existence) for syntheses that yield sensory fields and that “form is nothing without content.”³⁹ Thus, the field of a Poussin blue that is part of my perception of a particular sky is a content that, like the synthesis that produced it, is formed or, better, co-constituted by the synthesis that consciousness of time is at bottom (a synthesis of an *Urimpression* with appropriate retentions and protentions). But it is also important to emphasize that there is no time-consciousness, as that form, without the content, namely, the sensory fields.⁴⁰ Nor, obviously, do I need to identify that field of blue with one of the painter’s favorite shades in order to experience it with that particular unity.

But how do these sensory fields manage to be informative and thus have an intentional or proto-semantic character? The answer cannot lie in their spatial (kinaesthetic) and temporal make-up alone.⁴¹ According to Husserl, the answer lies in the associations that account for the “immanent genesis” of the sensory fields. “The phenomenon of associative genesis is what dominates this sphere of passive, advance-givennesses, established on the basis of syntheses of inner time-consciousness.”⁴² What makes association a theme for phenomenology and

38. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Zweites Buch, ed. Marly Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1952), 128.

39. EU 75; 75f: “Das Zeitbewußtsein ist die Urstätte der Konstitution von Identitätseinheit überhaupt.” Note, however, Husserl’s observation that “the phenomenology of association is a higher continuation of the doctrine of the original time-constitution” (ApS 118).

40. As noted earlier in the case of spatiality and as suggested by the very notion of an *Urimpression*, the embodied character of this temporal structure prohibits any purely immanent, non-transcendent characterization of it. The primitive concepts of space and time are alike abstractions of the ways sensory fields come to be constituted as a function of the body’s interaction with its environs.

41. ApS 77. Note, however, that inasmuch as associative syntheses extend and complement temporal and kinaesthetic syntheses, the intentional character is already present, however tacitly, in the latter syntheses. In this regard, see notes 32 and 34 above. For Husserl’s developing view of association, see Holenstein, *Phänomenologie der Assoziation*, 118ff.

42. EU 77. Husserl identifies two temporal sorts of association, contemporaneous and noncontemporaneous (a presence with another presence and a presence with an absence respectively) and then subdivides the former into contemporary homogeneous and heterogeneous associations (affinity and contrast respectively). Under the contemporary homogeneous association, he then distinguishes repetition from fusion, noting that there are many intermediate levels.

not merely for objective psychology, he adds, is their “indicatory” character and the fact that the *indication* involved is “something that can be demonstrated phenomenologically.” Husserl thus contrasts “a type of psycho-physical regularity of nature to be gleaned through objective induction” with his notion of association as “the purely immanent connection of ‘something recalling something,’ ‘of one thing pointing to the other.’”⁴³ In other words, within each elapsing sound of the cars on my street or, for that matter, among those successive aural fields as well as other accompanying or adjacent sensory fields, there is an association of the foregoing with the oncoming not simply by way of similarity or contiguity but by virtue of the way that one “moment” points to another and its degree of congruence with it, thereby forming for me, at some level of consciousness, an identity across a manifold.⁴⁴ This association by way of indication ranges between the limits of a complete blending or fusion (*Verschmelzung*) and a contrast, with “repetitions” and “similarities” falling somewhere between these two limits.⁴⁵ The association emerges passively; it is undergone but in a process whereby one constitutive aspect (*Moment*) of a sound or one sound *indicates* another. All immediate associations are by way of similarity, Husserl maintains, thereby iterating that it is against the background of the homogeneity of a particular field that something different sticks out and calls attention to itself as an initial condition for the perceptual act, whether it be a different sort of sensory field, e.g., color instead of sound, or a difference within a sensory field, e.g., a patch of red against a white background, an alto against a bass accompaniment. At this ground level of associations that give rise to the sensory fields or, better, at this ground level of genetic associative syntheses that constitute sensory fields, apprehension and content are not independent of one another and the ego does not explicitly identify the blends and contrasts within and among those fields.⁴⁶

43. EU 78. In this connection, Husserl describes association as “the essential *form of the regularity* [*Gesetzmäßigkeit*] of *immanent genesis*” (ibid.). It deserves mention that the term ‘indication’ is also employed by Jacob, albeit by way of Dretske and Grice, to characterize the relation of information at the sensory level; see Jacob 49-54.

44. Whereas, at the perceptual level, a thing constitutes an identity in the manifold of appearances and, at a preperceptual level, an appearance can constitute an identity in a manifold of sensory fields, at the ground level a sensory field constitutes an identity in a manifold of phases and moments. The identity-manifold relation in each case is intentional (or, in another idiom, proto-semantical) in the most rudimentary sense. Cf. ApS 117f, 140f; EU 85; Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1962), 169 (hereafter = ‘PP’).

45. EU 76ff.

46. PP 424. Instead of providing elements that await apprehension or apperception for their meaning, sensory fields constitute an implicit ‘what’ (ApS 130); see Welton 244: “The various homogeneous elements within a profile or a field are such that they ‘resonate’ each other and they tend to call each other forth. This we believe, is the origin of perceptual senses and of the perceptual horizon in Husserl’s phenomenology.”

While sketchy, the foregoing review hopefully suffices to illustrate how much Husserl's analysis of passive syntheses intersects with the two conflicting, contemporary explanations of the epistemic force of sensory experience, treated in the first half of this paper. Husserl's account of associative syntheses by way of an indicatory function clearly does work similar to the informative function that Jacob locates in sensation. Like Jacob, Husserl is elaborating nonconceptual yet intentional contents of experience and, indeed, doing so in a methodologically solipsistic fashion. Husserl's emphasis on the involvement of kinaesthetic data and bodily movements in the constitution of sensory fields also clearly anticipates much of Jacob's account; not surprisingly, there is more than an echo of the transcendent character implied by that involvement in Jacob's "transcendental externalism."⁴⁷ If the guiding idea of this informational semantics is that the semantic properties of an individual's propositional attitudes derive from the information relations between the individual's mind and his or her environment, then there is much in Husserl's account of the constitution of sensory fields that supports that idea.⁴⁸ Yet, unlike Jacob, Husserl brackets causal relations and bases his account on strictly intentional phenomena. Moreover, within that framework, he identifies a temporal component that is integral to (underlying and, in some respects, inseparable from) the informative or indicatory character of the passive, associative syntheses constituting sensory fields. Finally, anticipating the force of the myth of the given, Husserl insists, much in the spirit of McDowell, that only judgments yield objects of knowledge.⁴⁹

47. Jacob 47: "Our senses of taste and smell are yoked together phenomenologically, and so are the senses of touch and kinesthesia, the sense of the position and motion of our limbs and other body parts. We 'feel' things by touching them, grabbing them, pushing against them in many ways, but the resulting conscious sensations, while they seem to naïve reflection to be straightforward 'translations' of the stimulation of the touch receptors under the skin, are once again the products of an elaborate process of integration of information from a variety of sources." For Jacob's account of "transcendental externalism," see Jacob 44.

48. Jacob 43.

49. EU 63f; Husserl's "transcendental aesthetic," as Husserl dubs these analyses of pre-predicative experience, amounts to a "world-ontology," since it reaches beyond the syntheses of an actively constituting subjectivity to "the passive pre-consciousness [*Vorbewußt-sein*] of a *world* of pure experience" (De Almeida 204; for Husserl's reference to world in this connection, see De Almeida 209-219). De Almeida identifies two contrasting approaches in Husserl's transcendental aesthetic, an unsuccessful "structural-analytic" approach in which reason serves as an invariant capacity [*Vermögen*] or formal structure for experience and a successful "genetic-analytic" approach according to which experience anticipates reason, discursively and historically projecting "identical, objectively determinable objects as enduring causal unities"; see De Almeida 219ff, esp. 221: "Die Erfahrung legt schon die Welt auf, sie ist an sich z. B. schon Logik oder Wissenschaft, indem sie auf eine aktuelle Auslegung vorgreift und sie voraussetzt."

The primacy that Husserl assigns to perception that is always grounded in sensory experience anticipates McDowell's minimal empiricism, his insistence on the answerability of thinking to experience. So, too, Husserl's early arguments against psychologism and his method of bracketing the natural attitude and sciences founded upon it are motivated by a concern for an epistemological version of the naturalistic fallacy, the very confusion of empirical descriptions with something in the logic space of reasons that so exercises McDowell. Not surprisingly, Husserl too is searching for a middle ground between bald naturalism, on the one hand, and coherentism or—in Husserl's day—Neo-Kantian constructivism, on the other.⁵⁰ There is even agreement with McDowell that the middle ground must be sought in some account of spontaneity extending out to passive operations.⁵¹

Yet, with all these similarities, Husserl does not share McDowell's view of the unboundedness of the conceptual. In Husserl's analysis but not in McDowell's analysis one finds an account of how sensory fields come to be constituted passively (preconceptually) yet with an intentional and, to that extent, epistemically normative structure. To be sure, that intentionality is minimal and largely tacit, i.e., it is typically woven into a unified appearance or the identity of an object of perception and judgment. McDowell argues that conceptual capacities must operate passively and he bases his argument on the counterfactual premise that, unless they operate passively, there can be no legitimate appeal to experience (and we would be faced with the philosophical anxiety that results from seeing only two mutually exclusive, but equally intolerable alternatives). By contrast, Husserl explains how sensory fields come to have epistemically normative force in a way that, while not yet conceptual or judgmental, contains the basis and, in some sense, even the makings of conceptual experience and empirical judgments.

The purpose of this paper has been to situate Husserl's analysis of passive syntheses within the contemporary debate over the answerability of thought to experience (or, in Jacob's idiom, how a natural system is able to be about other things and states of affairs). That analysis is potentially fruitful precisely because of the ways, elaborated above, in which it at once overlaps and departs from Jacob's naturalization of intentionality and McDowell's minimal empiricism.

50. Husserl and McDowell reject the sort of naturalism that denies that the practice of giving and having reasons is irreducible to the natural-scientific description that causally situates things. In both cases, moreover, it is a rejection of philosophical naturalism. That is to say, by no means do they reject the engineering question of how it is possible for brains to have the capacities that humans exhibit. See MW xxi-xxii, 55.

51. See MW 62; there is yet another similarity, not developed in this paper, namely, that between McDowell's notion of second nature and Husserl's account of habits and sedimentation. Note, however, that Husserl's account is not open to the same criticism that I voiced of McDowell's notion of a second nature in the first part of this paper.

Husserl's analysis of the structures of passive syntheses complements Jacob's account of the non-conceptual contents of experience without pursuing Jacob's goal of bridging "the gap between semantic properties and non-semantic (physical, chemical, and biological) properties."⁵² In fact, by assiduously bracketing concerns for causal connections and the descriptions required by those connections, Husserl systematically eludes the pitfalls of the so-called "myth of the given." Yet his alternative is not, as it is for McDowell, to extend conceptuality to all levels of intentionality, but instead to identify levels of intentionality in the preconceptual yet indicative syntheses constituting sensory fields.⁵³ What renders Husserl's analysis so potentially fruitful is its insistence on elaborating phenomena that, if the analysis can be sustained, fall *outside and between* the sort of phenomena countenanced by Jacob's Lockean and McDowell's Kantian approaches to the mind.⁵⁴

52. Jacob 22.

53. This strategy, particularly as sketched in the foregoing paper, leaves much unsaid. Considerably more argument is required to establish the intentional integrity of these passive syntheses and their relation not only to the physical phenomena involved (of which Husserl in the end has too little to say), but also to perception, predicative judgment, and the habits of perceiving and judging (of which he has a great deal to say, indeed, far more than has been conveyed in this paper). The elasticity of the identity-manifold schema, as indicated in note 44 above, suggests part of an answer; their presence within internal and external horizons of perception suggests another part; cf. EU 28. However, for better or for worse, Husserl does not explicitly explain how the intentional character of passive syntheses – and not simply hyletic data – figure in the epistemically normative, justificatory character of judgments and the relations among them. Yet, as Husserl would have been the first to admit, his analyses present a research project rather than a finished product.

54. In view of this last remark, perhaps the proper modern analogue to Husserl's approach is a Leibnizian cognitive model, at least insofar as its overriding theme is the continuity between pre-conceptual and conceptual levels of cognition.