Andrea Staiti, *Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology: Nature, Spirit and Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 28, $ 95.00, ISBN 9781107066304

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This book comprises both an inquiry into the history of German philosophy in the early 20th century and a critical exposition of Husserl's transcendental thinking. The investigation follows the method of *Konstellationsforschung* which, instead of privileging individual authors, describes "spaces of thinking". Indeed, far from being an isolated thinker, Husserl developed his own thought in constant dialogue and theoretical exchange with the contemporary German philosophy – in particular, with the Southwestern Neo-kantian School (Windelband, Rickert, Lask) and so-called *Lebensphilosophie* (Simmel, Dilthey). The book offers a historical understanding of Husserl's phenomenology as a critical (and original) answer to the main issue arising from this context, i.e. the problematic distinction between the natural sciences and *Geisteswissenschaften*. In this view, the stratified richness of the sphere of *Geist* and its intertwinement with the sphere of *Leben* constitute the points of departure of Husserl's transcendental philosophy, which reveals itself as being rooted in a "*Kantian liberation narrative*" (p.222).

The first chapter introduces an ontologically-oriented exposition of Baden Neo-Kantianism. In this context, methodological reflections about the distinction between different fields of scientific enquiry (and, first of all, Windelband's *Rektoratsrede*) were regarded as "an effort to re-establishing a distinctive theoretical space for philosophy" (p.20). Windelband's famed distinction between *nomothetic* and *idiographic* sciences entails the necessity of a correspondent ontological distinction. On this line, according to Rickert, only value-related objects can be assumed as the theme of historical-individualising science, and value-relatedness is not arbitrary. The difference between the generalizing and individualizing methods is founded on a "material distinction", situated on the side of the object, that is an *Urdualität* between sensous and non-sensous components of experience. "Original duality" does not depend upon categorical activity: rather, it is an ontologically founded difference. Before Rickert, Lask had already criticised the traditional Kantian understanding of categories by proposing an "*apology of the*

material, albeit conducted along a transcendental-critical line of thought" (p.38).
In the second chapter, the main lines of the "historically oriented life-philosophy" are introduced. "Life" is not envisaged as a biological concept; rather, it represents the general title for the supra-individual psychic existence of human beings. The author sheds light on the debt such a conceptualisation, which characterises the thought of both Simmel and Dilthey, owes towards Kant. In Simmel, the reference to Kant consists in the idea of the collaboration between the different spheres of subjectivity that acts as a prelude to Goethe's concept of *Leben*. In Dilthey, the Kantian intent is that of founding and delimiting sciences, and in particular a new kind of science: "descriptive psychology". The science of the psychic grasps *both contents and nexuses* in their immediateness, insofar as the mode of being of the psychic is that of a continuative unity of nexuses. In Dilthey's words: "*The structural nexus is available in lived-experience*" (p.74). This difference regarding the nature of the fields results in the distinction between *erklären* and *verstehen* which renders possible the construction of history as the science of the individual.
In the third chapter, the specificity of phenomenology emerges throughout a confrontation between the Neo-kantian concept of *Standpunkt* and the phenomenological concept of *Einstellung*. Both concepts share the goal of "removing the naivety of empirical research via a philosophical consideration of the tight link existing between the objects and the subjects of scientific activity" (p.84), via a clarification of the distinct attitudes which characterise the relation to the object. In the case of Neokantianism, the attitude (the *Standpunkt* as "*an impersonal teleological construction*" (p.88)) produces its object, which is therefore different for each attitude; in the case of phenomenology, "we can always switch" from one attitude to another facing the same object (pp.104-5). According to Neokantianism, attitudes are intrinsically *disjointed*; on the contrary, Husserl claims that "one and the same subjectivity cuts across all attitudes and is responsible for their orchestration" (*ibid.*). In other words, within Husserl's thought, the *Einstellungswechsel* assumes a "transcendental-constitutive role" (p.85). Husserl proposes a sharper and more stratified distinction of many opposed attitudes, and, furthermore, defines phenomenology itself in terms of the counterpoint to the

"natural attitude". The phenomenological attitude is a "leading back of everything that is present in itself to the constitutive dynamics of transcendental, non-worldly subjectivity" (p.107).
The fourth chapter extends the confrontation between phenomenology and Neo-Kantianism, presenting the critiques of *Ideen I* proposed by Rickert and Natorp. These critiques vouch for the failure of Husserl's task of "engaging the Neokantians and convincing them of the necessity to reformulate […] transcendental philosophy in phenomenological terms" (p.110). In particular, Rickert criticises Husserl's theory of *Wesensschau,* accusing it of "*intuitionism*" (p.113), while Natorp challenges the very possibility of investigating subjectivity through a static eidetic method, pointing out the necessary "*processual*" character of eidetic knowledge (pp.116-117). The author concedes that the text of *Ideen I* is vulnerable to these objections, but, nevertheless, he draws up coherent phenomenological answers to the Kantian critique and emphasizes their impact on the development of Husserl's thought. Indeed, as regards the first critique, it "offer[s] the opportunity to distinguish between vision of essence and knowledge of essence, and, thus, to clarify the kind of cognition phenomenology is" (p.135); as regards the second, it contributes decisively to Husserl's development of a sharper distinction between static and genetic phenomenology.
The fifth chapter is devoted to Husserl's confrontation with Rickert in the course lectures of 1919 and 1927 on *Natur und Geist*. In particular, the second course of lectures has a threefold importance. Firstly, in this context that Husserl renounces phenomenological terminology and "accepts to play the game according to the Neo-Kantian rules" (p.146). Secondly, Husserl's unusually detailed critique of Rickert's seminal works sheds light on the originality of the phenomenological point of view. Thirdly, the lectures contain an anticipation of the main concept of Husserl's later work – namely, *Lebenswelt*. The possibility for philosophy to undertake the *Grundlagenforschung*, the "inquiry into the foundations", is rooted in its "interest in the totality", and first of all in the "world as a whole" (*Weltganze*) (p.146). However, while according to Rickert the notion of the world-whole plays the role of a regulative ideal, according to Husserl we have pre-scientific experience of the *Weltganze* (p.148). By means of a phenomenological enquiry into this pre-scientific level it is

possible to clarify the origin of the distinction between different *regions* of being, and, consequently, of different kinds of sciences, via a regressive method which connects the given sciences to their pre-theoretical origin.
In the sixth chapter, the author considers the relationships between phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*, on the basis of Husserl's notes on Dilthey's *Ideen* and Simmel's *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (1910). After reading these texts, Husserl attenuates his harsh 1911 critiques to the concept of *Weltanschauung*; however, at the same time, he still notes a lack of radicalism affecting life-philosophers' foundation of *Geisteswissenschaften*. Firstly, the lack of a sharp concept of intentionality entails a confusion between subjectivity as historical realization and transcendental subjectivity as an operating instance which produces its own historical world. Secondly, the absence of a transcendental concept of *Einfühlung* implies the risk of a mere *Individualpsychologie*, which makes it impossible to clarify the relation between individual and supra-individual history. Thirdly, the relation between nature, psyche, and history remains unclarified, insofar as *Lebensphilosophie* does not achieve a comprehension of the psychic sphere in its peculiar closeness.
On these premises, in the seventh chapter the author turns to, Husserl's concept of life-world, a term which has a double function. On the one hand, it is a "contrastive term" which "reinforces the distinction from the idealized world of mathematical physics and from […] particular cultural worlds" (p.248); on the other hand, the word expresses "[the] world's being *aus dem Leben*, that is, growing out of life and harbouring the growth of further life within itself" (p.249). *Lebenswelt* is "a world entwined with life, a world grown out of it" (p.251). The two tasks are deeply connected, insofar as the construction of a new *Weltanschauung* presupposes the *Abbau* of its predecessor – i.e. the *Weltanschauung* of naturalism itself – the ethical consequences of which, according to Husserl, became fully visible with World War I. It is no coincidence that Husserl entitled the manuscript collecting his studies on the concept of *Lebenswelt* "*Zur Weltanschauung*".
The ethical implications of Husserl's late phenomenology are presented in the eighth chapter. "Visualizing the world as a whole […] is a transformative intellectual experience", to the

extent that it "makes us sensitive to the dimensions of the world that lie beyond the limited horizons of what we are familiar with", leading, thus, to a "universalistic view of humankind" (p.267), through a "progressive encounter between previously isolated national 'home-worlds'" (p.289). However, Husserl's "*de-centred humanism* […] "maintains a healthy critical distance from the human world" (p.289).

In conclusion, according to the author, phenomenology is to be considered as a "*scientific* life-philosophy", which "harmonize[s] two traditionally divergent desiderata in post-Kantian German philosophy: scientificity and proximity to life" (p.291). In this sense, "to be scientific in philosophy means to bring to faithful conceptual expression the transcendental structures and dynamics of life, which are responsible for the constitution of a world […]. Life itself is the transcendental, and all the categories and principles that philosophy endeavours to spell out conceptually must be drawn directly from it" (p.292). Therefore, the concept of life-world represents a renewed answer to the antinomy between *Natur* and *Geist*, or between nature and freedom.

Andrea Staiti's book has the undoubtable merit of resituating Husserl's transcendental philosophy in its historical context, in contrast with the numerous interpretations "hunting for the latent seeds of subsequent existential hermeneutics and deconstruction, attempting to expose purported aporiae that only later practitioners of phenomenology were able to fully acknowledge" (p.2). In addition, the author succeeds in yielding an original and *cliché*-defeating understanding of Neokantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*. However, the considerable scientific contribution of the work notwithstanding, one has the impression that something is still lacking in the very definition of the relationships between transcendental philosophy and ontology, which are depicted in terms of a presupposed continuity and harmony. On the contrary, we would suggest tentatively that transcendental phenomenology represents a critical view on ontology, which implies a radical challenging of the natural attitude hidden within the latter, and thus leading to a *complete* refashioning of its task.

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