

Moving Beyond Limits Together:  
Anthony Steinbock's Phenomenology after Husserl

Review of Anthony J. Steinbock's, *Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl*  
(London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 155 pages.

This cohesive collection of essays from Anthony Steinbock is vital for understanding the situation of phenomenological philosophy. Along with the exegesis of texts central to its development, he shows a way of doing phenomenology “after” Husserl, of taking up a style of philosophy that would take matters as they give themselves. And the matters treated are of perennial significance – birth and death, home and alien, as well as vocation and love. All this is done in a characteristically clear and careful manner that benefits from decades of reflection and refinement. One must keep in mind, however, that the concise formulation he has achieved indicates both previous and future work.

Here, Steinbock follows the dynamism of how matters appear at the limits of phenomenology's various methodological approaches. That is to say, he asks how matters become accessible to the phenomenologist and how they themselves might demand an approach that would account for their meaningfulness in experience. Since much of the book depends on this difference between methods, it will be helpful to give a brief overview of them straightaway.

Steinbock identifies three methods: static, genetic, and generative. Husserl explicitly recognized the first two; Steinbock finds the third incipient in Husserl's later works and explicates himself.<sup>1</sup> Each seeks to account for meaningful experience by attending to how matters are given and by grasping essential structures therein.

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1) The generative method is explicated in detail first in Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology After Husserl* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

But where the static method analyzes matters as abstracted from temporal considerations, the genetic attends to the becoming of sense and meaning for the individual. These are still abstract from development across generations and between cultures, for which the generative method might account. And it would do so critically. It proceeds from an awareness of its own socio-historical position toward a grasp of its conditions, possibilities, and, indeed, responsibilities.

It is from within these methods that Steinbock attends to the way in which matters appear and how they might demand a more concrete approach. He does so through three parts of the book, each with two chapters. Let me turn to these now, first in overview, then in detail.

The chapters of the first part introduce the notion of limit-phenomena and elucidate it through concrete examples, with a special focus on birth and death. The second part explains further the generative method, especially as the matter of generativity appears in Husserl's work, demanding a method to be taken up "after" him. Thus, the third chapter addresses the *Crisis* texts (*Husserliana* volumes VI and XXIX<sup>2</sup>), where Husserl attends directly to generative phenomena, like the home- and alienworld; and the fourth chapter brings into relief the significance of the recovery of generativity by comparing and contrasting Husserl and Hegel's understanding of phenomenology and the role of the phenomenologist. From this, the chapters of the third and final part turns to the sphere of personal and interpersonal matters and the problems of individuation, responsibility and vocation. These final chapters bring to bear the insights of the previous parts to show the personal sphere as a limit-problem in Husserl's work. It does so especially by clearly distinguishing the revelatory evidence of the personal sphere from the presentational evidence of the lived-body. Doing so, Steinbock takes up and clarifies the call for one to be oneself in relation to others.

From this overview, we might follow the argument of the book in more detail. Once again, essential to it is the insight that, for Husserlian phenomenology, matters and methods relate. While the way in which phenomenology attends to matters elicits the way they appear, the matters themselves motivate methods. Some matters appear at the limits of methods, whereas some do not appear at all, as beyond its limits or, as Steinbock says, as "sub-liminal." Their appearance may motivate a renewed approach, however, even without the phenomenologist being explicitly aware of the "how" of this change. The phenomenologist's attention and analysis may be ahead of his method, as they were in Husserl's case. Regarding this point, Steinbock does well to note our privileged perspective, as it comes after Husserl and goes back through his work. We are thus already standing within generativity, taking up meaning across generations. Such, in broad outline, is the thrust of the first chapter. Let me now show how Steinbock substantiates it through an exemplary matter.

In the second chapter, birth and death are taken as examples of limit-phenomena. They are sub-liminal to the static method, for they imply genesis, or a becoming beyond the present "now-point." They do appear within the genetic method but do so as exceeding the constitutive limits of the individual or the *monad* – the individual unity of becoming. After all, one cannot constitute one's own death, for it is yet to come; and though birth is a matter of fact, it exceeds the power of one's own memory. What is more, for Husserl, the transcendental subject is "immortal," insofar as it is self-constitutive and self-temporalizing. In contrast, the generative method finds birth and death as constitutive of meaning. The phenomena of birth, for example, means an emergence of a new possibility of objectivity, a radically unique world, as it were. Moreover, it is an entrance into a world of significance, an already meaningful world: one is born into a home that is to be appropriated or

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2) Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie, Husserliana VI*, ed. Walter Biemel. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954); Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1934–1937), Husserliana XXIX* ed. Reinhold N. Smid (The Hague: Kluwer, 1992).

transgressed. Death, on the other hand, may mean an exit from this world but in a way that memory, actions, and achievements remain significant. With these, it is possible to see Husserl beginning to account for how meaning is generated through generations.

The second part of the book turns to the appearance of generativity as the matter of generative method. The third chapter analyzes Husserl's five-part plan of the *Crisis* writings where these issues arise. Much of first three were finished during Husserl's lifetime. Indeed, he published the first two in the journal *Philosophia*; the third was submitted then retracted for edits, but since he passed away before their completion, it did not appear until the release of *Husserliana VI*. The fragments of the next two parts remained as fragmentary notes in manuscripts, many of which were published in *Husserliana XXIX*, some four decades after the others. Let me summarize these parts to elucidate Steinbock's attempt at their reassembly and fulfillment.

The first three parts of the *Crisis* are perhaps more familiar to the English reader than the final two.<sup>3</sup> The first part introduces the problematic of the crisis of science as the crisis of humanity, as the call for a life guided by rational justification is forsaken for one of mere measurement. The second part, the clarification of the modern opposition between physicalistic objectivism and transcendental subjectivism, is meant to illustrate the path of this crisis as it draws out seemingly insoluble divisions between spirit and nature. Finally, in the third part, Husserl introduces the possibility of a new way through the problematic of psychology and transcendental phenomenology. The fourth was to be an ontology of the lifeworld, which would reintroduce humanity to its constitutive role in the world of meaning. This gives the clue from which the phenomenologist may question-back into those normative structures in which meaning generates, namely, the home- and alien-world. The fifth was to provide a path to interweave the head and heart, as it were, by laying out a philosophical clarification of self-responsibility for that world.

Continuing from the issue of self-responsibility in history, Steinbock compares and contrasts the phenomenology of Hegel and Husserl in the fourth chapter. After all, not only does the former already have a concept of socio-historical development, but he understands this as a descriptive phenomenology of that development. However, where Hegel finds an apparently closed, complete structure, Husserl identifies the essential possibility of the generation of new meaning structures. What is more, Hegel's phenomenologist is incidental herein; she happens to be able to take up and describe these structures – she is taken up into the “We” of the phenomenological position. Although one may argue that this implies some sort of responsibility, Steinbock notes that one is hard-pressed to find in it notion of freedom and creativity. For Husserl, on the other hand, the phenomenologist is unique and brings her unique abilities to respond to crises and continuities. This, in turn, implies the level of person.

So, in the third part, Steinbock takes up the sphere of the person as it appears at the limits of Husserl's work. To do so, he addresses the demand for a distinction (though not a division) between presentation and revelation. He finds that Husserl's work is done largely with a focus on the former, that is, on evidence founded on the lived-body rather the heart. This point is complicated, of course, as matters of revelation still occur in experience and so may be seen both in Husserl's work and as being worked out by him. Nevertheless, he still tends to analyze them in intentional terms most suited to presentational evidence, as, e.g., he tends to analyze values as if they are founded upon objectivating and non-objectivating acts and not revelatory of a distinct mode of being.

Nevertheless, an account of the constitution of objectivity or transcendence is central to phenomenology. So, in the fifth chapter, Steinbock shows in detail how presentation of an object may be analyzed in

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3) They have been translated in Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

terms of individuation. Rather than rehearsing here the complex difference between particularization and individualization, or the instantiation of an essence and the spatio-temporal delimitation of an object, it is sufficient to note here that the style of givenness to which the phenomenologist is attending is founded on the lived-body. Revelation, on the other hand, concerns the givenness of the person to the person – it is essentially interpersonal. This style of givenness requires its own methodological sensitivity: it is tempting to fall back into familiar ways of thinking, as if personal revelation is another mode of objectivity. This is true especially since one can still grasp essential, invariant structures (e.g., the way one trusts another person); yet, concretely speaking, each person is radically unique and so one cannot pre-figure the person as person in the same way as an object. To be open to the uniqueness of the person as person is a movement of loving. And, in this respect, Husserl's attention to an "absolute ought," a responsibility to the individual as bearer of values, indicates sphere of the person, and so as working at the limits of his own thought. The value of the person does not appear as founded upon the lived-body but as from its own sphere, the sphere of the heart, toward which Husserl seems only to intimate.

Let me now venture a few critical remarks of the book. I should first disclose the fact that Professor Steinbock is my *Doktorvater*. My own attempt to take up the tradition naturally comes after his. So, much of my critique is internal, an attempt to understand from within. However, this means neither that my questions are empty nor that my answers are somehow pre-figured. To the contrary, from this tradition I have been convinced of a shared responsibility to both the true and the good, which allows the possibility of *sunphilosophiein* – of seeking together in an openness to the way things are and ought to be.

In the first place, then, there is the matter of development. If we are to account for the emergence of the phenomenological method – and so the appearance of any limit-phenomena therein – we must attend to its generation. In this respect, we must attend to the Idea of Science, as it emerges, transforms, and is fulfilled according with its limits. Further, the development of the person must also be clarified. Such a monumental task may be outside the scope of the present book and is, in fact, not precluded by it. Although it is demanded by it, i.e., the need appears from out of the work, it nevertheless remains unfulfilled.

In the second place, also left implicit in this work is how a generative phenomenology would contribute to a phenomenological metaphysics. This is an issue, for Husserl, that would have been included in the fourth part of the *Crisis*. Given Steinbock's work, perhaps an ontology of a lifeworld would provide the foundation for a critique of naïve metaphysics. Once the phenomenologist has clarified the constitution of objectivity through a critical analysis of intentionality, the structures of the transcendent world might be analyzed. To be sure, Professor Steinbock has provided the method through which such a task might be completed but has not yet explicitly done so.

In the third place, an emphasis on the tendency toward unity in Husserl's thought may be beneficial. Doing so would illustrate further the enduring need and place of phenomenology and the phenomenologist in history. This seems even more pressing given the continued fragmentation all around us, as the sciences cannot rally together to save the university or the educated personalities that are increasingly alienated from their communities. Phenomenology is still, it seems, a ground from which one could proceed. What is more, Husserl also seems to find loving as essentially unifying. He speaks of the love of mother and child as often as loving-communities. Is this a mere ideal to be cast aside or also a genuine possibility to be taken up and realized?

In sum, I highly recommend this book for scholars of Husserl, phenomenology, and philosophy in general. By returning to Husserl's work, it introduces the development of the generative approach through the demands emergent in the doing of phenomenology itself. As such, Steinbock introduces – or perhaps better institutes

– a new demand: a critical phenomenology that might respond to humanity’s crises, not just of science, but of the heart. This, it seems to me, is a *philosophia perennis* in a genuine sense. It is meant to meet problems of the time and universal to our being. Nevertheless, the book is not a place to remain but to begin. One might anticipate, then, the continuation of the recovery of the heart.<sup>4</sup>

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4) Especially in the forthcoming, Anthony J. Steinbock, *It's Not About the Gift: From Givenness to Loving* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).