Husserl on Reason, Reflection, and Attention

There is a tradition—or, as its proponents call it, a venerable tradition—that ties the exercise of theoretical and practical reason to the capacity for reflection or deliberation. According to this tradition, the conscious lives of those who are capable of reflection are characterized by a specific kind of activity or spontaneity. That is, it is argued, conscious subjects that can reflect are not just affected by their environment; rather, they exercise a certain kind of self-determination in how they believe and act which means that they have reasons to believe and act. And, it is argued, in this self-determined believing and acting, rational subjects exercise their capacity to judge.¹

Contemporary authors drawing on the phenomenological tradition have questioned the importance of reflection or deliberation and the related characterization of rationality in a number of important ways. ² And, some of these authors have shown that Husserl’s phenomenology in particular provides the resources with which to argue, for instance, that a normative account of a self that believes and acts for reasons presupposes a more basic self that has a minimal form of pre-reflective self-consciousness.³ Further, it has been argued that

¹ See, for example, Korsgaard (1996, 89; 2009a, 30, 32; 2009b, 116). While McDowell (2009, 129, 141) also underlines the importance of reflection, he has emphasized that it is not as much actually reflecting as the capacity to reflect that matters, which is more in line with Boyle’s (2011a and 2011b) account that I engage with below.


³ For arguments in favor of a minimal form of pre-reflective self-awareness that is more basic than the normative self we find in Korsgaard and the minded self that is capable of reflection in McDowell see, respectively, Zahavi (2015a, 51–62 and 2013, 335–36).
Husserl’s phenomenology shows that there is a non-discursive form of rationality that plays out in pre-predicative perception.\(^4\)

What I would like to show in what follows is that Husserl nevertheless falls within the tradition that ties the activity of reason to the capacity for reflection in at least one significant sense. Specifically, as I will develop, on Husserl’s account we exercise rationality in attentive experience, and attentive experiences are characterized by a specific pre-reflective self-awareness that can (in principle) take on the form of a reflection in which we deliberate. In this sense, then, according to Husserl, those who exercise rationality are capable of reflection. With the aim of showing that Husserl’s conception of the exercise of rationality is a viable alternative that merits consideration today, I conclude by explicating how Husserl’s phenomenological account compares to a compelling Kantian-inspired account of the activity of reason that has recently been developed by Matthew Boyle.

1. Intentionality, Sense (Sinn), and Reason (Vernunft)

While many of Husserl’s now-published writings are replete with fine-grained descriptions of the structure of our consciousness, Husserl’s main aim in providing these phenomenological descriptions is to develop an account of reason (Vernunft). That is, phenomenology is ultimately a phenomenology of reason.\(^5\) More precisely, Husserl describes ways of being intentionally aware of something with the ultimate aim of elucidating the structure of intentional experiences that are rational (vernünftig) or justified (begründet). Husserl thinks that what he calls “reason’s

\(^4\) For arguments in favor of a phenomenological account of the relation between perception and judgment in contrast to McDowell, see Barber (2008), Dahlstrom (2007), De Warren (2006), Doyon (2011 and 2016), and Dwyer (2013). For an account of the normative import of the body that draws on Husserl, see Doyon (2015b).

\(^5\) See, for example, Husserl 1950, §§23–29 and 1976, §§135–45.
jurisdiction” (Husserl 2004, 223) encompasses a wide range of intentional acts, be they cognitive acts (such as perceptions and predicative judgments), emotions, or practical engagements. And for all these different forms of intentionality, being rational amounts to the same. My way of intending something is rational, according to Husserl, if how I take something to be is true to how it in fact is. And, for Husserl, this entails that what I take to be a certain way can (in principle) manifest itself in what he calls an experience of fulfillment (Erfüllung). In this experience of fulfillment I am aware of the grounds for taking something a certain way, and I am aware that I am rational in virtue of being aware of these grounds—when, for example, I see that the previously unseen backside of the object in front of me is how I took it to be.

It is no small task to explain how exactly the intentionality of perception is distinct from predicative judgment and what the specific intentionality of the emotions and practical agency looks like, let alone to explain how exactly our concrete perceptions (which entail cognitive, emotive, and practical intentional ways of taking the world) can be justified or unjustified. To

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6 In what follows I will, for the sake of convenience, use the term “predicative judgment” to denote categorial acts, but Husserl acknowledges other forms of categorial judgment.

7 In what follows, I speak of “taking” something to be a certain way to render the positing (setzendes) character of the attentive form of intentionality that grasps (erfasst) its object. I return to this below. While Husserl also uses the term “position-taking” (Stellungnahme) to describe the positing character of experience, he uses the latter term in a more specific and limited sense to refer to the stances taken in response to a moment of doubt and after deliberation. I will use the term “stance” (following the translation by Dahllstrom in Husserl 2014) or “position-taking” in this second more limited sense, which is the sense that Husserl himself delineates when he notes in a manuscript: “die allgemeine Positionalität, wie sie speziell in Form der schlichten Doxa auftritt ist keine Stellungnahme, erst die Affirmation und die Negation, die aber eine Modalität der allgemeinen Positionalität voraussetzt” (2004, 371n5). On stance taking in this more limited sense, see also Jacobs (2010a and 2016).


9 I cannot here address all these concerns because my focus is on the activity of rationality, which relates primarily to the positing character of intentionality as I elaborate below. For an account of Husserl’s theory of axiological and practical intentionality and
account for the rationality of the intentionality of both predicative judgments and concrete perceptions, Husserl introduces the notion of sense (*Sinn*). Husserl claims that all intentional acts disclose something with a sense or, correlatively, that a meaningfully structured world is afforded in experience. That something does not just appear, but always appears with a certain sense, entails constraints for the rationality of our ways of being aware of this thing.

According to Husserl, there are two kinds of constraints governing the rationality of our ways of intending something. First, depending on the kind of object at which one is intentionally directed, there will be what one might call *ontological constraints* \(^{10}\). That is, apart from even wondering whether or not something actually is how I take it to be, to be aware of one kind of object rather than another is to be constrained by what Husserl calls the pure essence (*reines Wesen*) of something. While formal ontology spells out formal characteristics of anything whatsoever (*Etwas überhaupt*), what Husserl calls regional or material ontologies spell out what is essential to being a specific kind of object. So, for example, expressive behavior and movement are essential to being an animate object, and a specific kind of repeatability is essential to a literary object such as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Hence, being aware of an animate or literary object is constrained in certain ways, since if I do not take the object in a certain way I

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\(^{10}\) See Husserl (1939, 32, 35; 1950, §21; 1976, 330). These ontological constraints are, in part, though not entirely correlative to constraints that are formulated in a pure logic. See Drummond (2009) for the relation between logic and ontology. In what follows, I use “object” (*Gegenstand*) in the broad sense to refer to anything that can be the intentional correlate of an intentional experience.
will not be intending that kind of object. Now, when encountering something and taking it to be a certain kind of thing, it can happen that my future experience shows that my way of intending failed with respect to the kind of entity I am dealing with. This is what happens in Husserl’s oft-repeated mannequin example, where he describes taking an inanimate object for an animate being and hence failing to appreciate the kind of thing one is actually encountering.\(^\text{11}\)

But even if my way of intending something is appropriate to the kind of object I am dealing with, this does not necessarily entail that I am rational or justified in how I take this individual object to be. For, how the individual something that I experience actually (\emph{wirklich}) is also constrains how I can rationally take it to be. So, for example, I can perceive the inanimate object in front of me as made of wood, even though closer inspection would show that it is actually made of plastic. In addition to the aforementioned ontological constraints, we can, hence, speak of an \emph{actuality constraint} that governs the rationality of our intentional awareness of something.\(^\text{12}\) That is, in a rational experience an object is intended the way it actually is. As I mentioned, for Husserl my experience is rational if the object in the way in which it is intended can in principle manifest itself (\emph{sich ausweisen}) in this way for myself and others.\(^\text{13}\) But experiences such as perceptions do not only provide me with rational grounds; they also always further determine the sense that this object has for me.\(^\text{14}\) So, for example, when walking into a music performance, being familiar with the kind of thing a music performance is, and perhaps even being familiar with this particular performer or piece of music, I have a general sense of

\(^\text{11}\) See Husserl (1939, 99; 1966, 34, 59).
\(^\text{13}\) See Husserl (1976, 314–21). And it is, in turn, determined by the kind of object I am encountering in what way it can manifest itself evidently and to what extent (Husserl 1976, 330, 334, 346).
\(^\text{14}\) See Husserl (1939, 107, 137, 141–42; 1950, 83; 1966, 9, 12, 29, 41, 83).
what I will encounter in the hours to come, but the experience of the event will undoubtedly
outstrip my anticipation and bring to further articulation even those music pieces I am already
familiar with.

However important these two kinds of constraints are for Husserl’s renewed
understanding of rationality, they also leave something of crucial importance unaddressed. The
aforementioned ontological and actuality constraints that delimit how I can rationally take
something to be spell out what one might call hypothetical rules.\footnote{Crowell (1999, 48) uses this formulation. Husserl (1950, 90; 1976, 102, 330) himself also speaks of rules.} That is, only if I take
something to actually be a certain way rather than another way am I so constrained. But what
makes it that I take something to be a certain way?

In what follows, I present what I consider to be Husserl’s twofold answer to this question.
The first part of the answer points away from what constrains our rationally intending something
to the positing (Setzung) that is operative in my attentively grasping something or currently
predicatively judging something. That is, things do not just show up with a certain sense; we also
take or posit (setzen) them to be the way they show up (whether categorially articulated or not).
As I develop, on Husserl’s account of intentionality, those who posit something in this way are
(in principle) capable of critical reflection. Moreover, when not actually reflecting in this way,
we are pre-reflectively aware of how we take something to be. Importantly, because we are pre-
reflectively aware of how we take something to be, we are also sensitive to what speaks for or
against taking it being this way. And this sensitivity is nothing less than the exercise of
rationality (section 2). The second part of the answer to the question of what makes me take
something in a certain way points away from our intentional awareness at any given moment
towards the temporal, embodied, personal, and socio-historical context in which we find
ourselves. This context does not only influence how we intend something but sometimes leads to what one might call an over-determination of sense. And a closer look at a conscious experience like our own that is temporal, embodied, personal, and socially embedded—or, one that is the experience of a subject—can provide further insight into the conditions of actual critical reflection (section 3). Further, it is by considering our subjectivity that it becomes clear how this subjectivity delimits the pre-reflective exercise of reason (section 4).

2. The Capacity for Critical Reflection and The Exercise of Reason

Because of its methodological importance for the development of the descriptive phenomenological theory of consciousness, Husserl most often focuses on the kind of reflection that is an explicit second-order awareness of our conscious experiences. But Husserl also points out that we can talk of reflection in a number of different ways. The kind of reflection that matters in the context of a discussion of the exercise of reason is a reflection on how we intend something—that is, a reflection on the sense or on the “object in terms of how it is determined” for me (Husserl 2014, 260). If we were not (in principle) able to reflect in this way, it would make little sense to claim that we are aware of something with a certain sense. This is not to say that our reflectively grasping how we intend something is not dependent on our straightforwardly intending it in this way. But our doing so entails that we can in principle become reflectively aware of how we take something to be in our straightforward intentional directedness.

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16 For a defense of Husserl’s methodological use of reflection against criticisms, see, for example, Drummond (2007) and Zahavi (2007 and 2015b). On phenomenological reflection more generally, see also Jacobs (2013).


Importantly, however, not only can those who take something in a certain way (in principle) reflect on how they take it to be; their ability to do so also reveals something about their way of pre-reflectively intending and experiencing something. Specifically, the pre-reflective self-awareness that is presupposed for a reflection on how I am aware of something is not just a pre-reflective awareness of my conscious awareness of something but a pre-reflective awareness of my conscious awareness of something with a certain sense (i.e., in terms of how it is determined). And this awareness is constitutive of the exercise of rationality when not reflecting. That is, if we were not pre-reflective aware of how we take something to be, we could not be sensitive to what speaks for or against us taking something in a certain way on the pre-reflective level. But this sensitivity is characteristic of our pre-reflective experience—for example, when we see whether or not things are how we took them to be.\(^{19}\) And because I do not need to reflect on how I take something to be in order to be aware of the grounds for my taking it in that way, the exercise of rationality extends beyond the rare moments of actual reflection. It can do so because of my pre-reflective awareness of how I am aware of something.

Husserl pinpoints this form of self-awareness in a 1908 manuscript when describing a fulfilled act of predicative judgment; he writes: “To make judgments about objects is to have the meaning in ‘judgment,’ in proposition; and in the actual consciousness of judging the proposition itself is conscious as a proposition that is actually ‘had’ and stands such and so to intuition.”\(^{20}\) So, for example, when predicatively attributing a specific kind of determination (e.g., a property) to the object in front of me, I am pre-reflectively aware of how I posit the object in this act of predication (i.e., as being a certain kind of thing having a certain kind of property). And I pre-


\(^{20}\) “Über Gegenstände urteilen ist also im ‘Urteil’, im Satz die Bedeutung ‚haben’ und der Satz selbst ist dabei bewusst im aktuellen Urteilsbewusstsein als aktuell ‚gehabter’ und zur Anschauung so und so stehender Satz” (Husserl 2009, 160).
reflectively hold the corresponding proposition to be true on the basis of the object appearing to me that way, which is why I judge it to be such. And while perception is different from an act of predication in that it does not explicitly predicate something of something else, but instead encounters it as something, when attentively perceiving something we are nevertheless pre-reflectively aware of how we perceive it. Moreover, if I am aware of grounds for taking it to be a certain way, I accept that this is how the object actually is. So, as Husserl writes in a manuscript from October 1911: “A sensuous grasping, a grasping of something sensible presupposes a sensuous appearance and in this case the grasping entails an accepting, a taking on and taking up of something that already manifested itself.” As a consequence, for Husserl, the distinction between predicative judgment and perception does not line up with the distinction between activity and passivity. For, as Husserl writes in the same manuscript from 1911 “merely turning towards is also activity.” And this activity consists in the positing or, better, accepting of the sense with which I posit something on the basis of grounds—that is, it appearing to be such in perception.

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21 “Eine sinnliche Erfassung, Erfassung von einem Sinnlichen, setzt eine sinnliche Erscheinung voraus, und hier ist die Erfassung eine akzipierende, ein Annnehmen und Aufnehmen eines Vorgegebenen” (Ms. A VI 12 I/82a). Or also: “Es gibt eine ‚Rezeptivität‘ (besser sprechen wir von einem Akzipieren), ein doxisches Verhalten, das hinnimmt, was passiv vorgegeben ist, und im Übernehmen nur zugreift. Deutlicher: Ein Gegenstand drängt sich mir auf, er steht aufgedrängt da, ich bin bei ihm. Das eigentliche Erfassen, Zugreifen, als Gegenstand Setzen ist schon eine Spontaneität” (Ms. A VI 12 I/11a). I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Ullrich Melle, director of the Husserl-Archives Leuven, for giving me permission to quote from Husserl’s Nachlass.


23 One could object that this would mean that intentional acts in which I do not posit something are not characterized by the aforementioned form of pre-reflective self-awareness, even though in these experiences something is intended in a certain way
This is not to say, however, that the pre-reflective self-awareness of how we take something to be and the sensitivity for what speaks for or against our positing pervades our conscious experience. Even though Husserl broadens the exercise of rationality beyond the scope of propositional activity, he nevertheless poses limits to this exercise at any moment. Specifically, only attentive forms of intentional consciousness currently or actually (aktuell) objectify or posit something. Husserl usually uses the term “receptivity” to refer to the attentive activity in perception, which he considers to be different from the spontaneity that characterizes the activity of predication. But in a broader sense, both are forms of spontaneity in that both are characterized by a positing of something with a certain sense. So, for example, in the following passage from the aforementioned manuscript from 1911, Husserl states: “Turning toward is also to be considered as a function of spontaneity, and to that extent receiving (accepting) is also spontaneity; but we contrast this spontaneity to what we properly call spontaneity, which is a higher and creative spontaneity to the extent that not just a turning toward takes place but action in the form of thought-formation in light of new turning toward.”

Our attentive perception is active, even if not predicative, because when attentive I accept the sense with which something is afforded on the basis of it showing itself to actually be such and so. While much of what

e.g., when I imagine a centaur) and should, hence, allow for a reflection on how they take something to be. However, as I elaborate below, acts that do not posit in this way are neutralized acts. The fact that we are dealing with a neutralization and not an absence of positing accounts for why we can still reflect on how we intend something in these neutralized acts (e.g., as a centaur with a long tail) without these acts therefore entailing a pre-reflective awareness of what speaks for or against the way they take something to be.

24 See Husserl (1939, §17).

25 “Die Zuwendung ist zwar auch als Funktion der Spontaneität anzusehen, insofern ist Rezeption (Akzeption) auch Spontaneität, aber wir stellen sie die eigentlichen und höheren, schöpferischen Spontaneität gegenüber, sofern nicht bloß Zuwendung, sondern Aktion in der Denkgestaltung im Licht immer neuer Zuwendung statthat” (Ms. A VI 12 I/83b). See also Husserl (1976, 281–82).
currently appears is not attended to in this way, and hence is not actually posited, I can in principle direct my attention to what was previously in the background.\textsuperscript{26} In this sense, then, for Husserl, the “I think” can in principle accompany all my intentional experiences, even though it never actually does or could due to the necessarily limited scope of our attention.\textsuperscript{27} And when I do direct my attention towards something, I exercise reason in that I posit something being a certain way and am pre-reflectively aware of the grounds for my taking it to be that way—at least if my positing is not inhibited by doubt. And when in doubt, I often end up reflecting on how I take something to be and deliberating on what warrants my taking it to be such.

3. Conditions and Effects of Actual Reflection

I have thus far discussed how the pre-reflective exercise of rationality is to be localized in the activity of attentively grasping something or currently predicating something of something and suggested that when doing so we are pre-reflectively aware of the grounds for perceiving or predicatively judging that way. I also claimed that the having of this pre-reflective self-awareness entails that I can (in principle) also critically reflect on how I take something to be and on my grounds for taking it to be that way. I would now like to inquire into the conditions and effects of actual critical reflection. The question is not so much what motivates a specific individual to reflect here and now but rather what the features of our intentional awareness are in virtue of which critical reflection can actually arise. As previously mentioned, according to Husserl, our intentional awareness has two moments—the sense with which something is

\textsuperscript{26} Husserl (1966, 85 and 1976, §36, §92, §113, and §115).

\textsuperscript{27} I have elsewhere dealt in more detail with Husserl’s account of explicit or attentive intentionality (Jacobs 2010b). I return to what exactly limits the scope of attention and, hence, the activity of rationality in concluding.
intended and the positing that this is how something actually is. It is in the interplay of these two moments that we are to look for the conditions of actual reflection.

Husserl does not only introduce the broad notion of sense to extend rationality beyond predicative judgment; by doing so he also aims to do justice to the ways that our past perceptions, predicative activity, and other commitments, as well as what we take over from determinate and indeterminate others, shape our perceiving and acting in the world. That is, our positings (past and present, own and appropriated) determine how we intend objects and situations in the future. And due to this sedimentation or history of sense, we are presumptuous in how we take the world to be in that we do not always have grounds, let alone conclusive grounds, for taking it to be a certain way. Hence, we can find out that things are in fact different than we took them to be, and due to the aforementioned pre-reflective sensitivity we are corrected as soon as the world manifests itself differently than we took it to be. But there are also occasions where our past and appropriated positings are not that easily overturned. Instead, we are confronted with an overdetermination of sense, in that something or a situation that I encounter awakens competing horizons of sense. Specifically, given a rich history of different attitudes (e.g., aesthetic versus natural-scientific) and a rich history of determinations of sense within a given attitude, we are at times confronted with something that allows for considerable latitude in how it is taken within a given attitude or even allows for different attitudes towards it.

29 I here use the term “moments” in the technical Husserlian sense to refer to mutually dependent parts of something. See Husserl (1976, 298 and1984a, §§20–21).

29 I have discussed the phenomenon of appropriation (Übernahme) elsewhere (Jacobs 2016).


31 This can also happens when confronted with another’s disagreement, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Jacobs 2010a). Elsewhere I have argued on the basis of Husserl’s account of intentionality that in positing something as something we always already open ourselves up to being challenged by others whom we owe a response (Jacobs 2016).
When we become aware that there might be several or even other and novel ways to perceive, judge, feel, or want and end up doubting how to perceive, judge, feel, or want, we are spurred to actual reflection. What happens in these situations is that the positing that characterizes our straightforward intentionality is inhibited by the doubt and conflict that results from the aforementioned overdetermination of sense. This temporary inhibition (*Hemmung*) is not something that can remain unresolved; reflection will eventually make room for our pre-reflective acting and perceiving in the world, which is at heart attentive and positing (even if not only attentive and actually positing or only such within limits).\textsuperscript{32}

However, once a distance has opened between how we intend something and our rational grounds for taking it that way, we need to do more than reflect to prevent continued ambivalence in perception and action. If we are to prevent repeated inhibitions of our pre-reflective experience, what is required is that we make explicit the intentional horizons or implications (that is, presumptions) that shape our experience at present explicit and that we scrutinize them in light of the available grounds.\textsuperscript{33} This does not only lead to a making distinct (*deutlich*) of how I take something to be but also provides me with the opportunity to explicitly and critically scrutinize how I take something to be and what actually speaks in favor of my taking it one way rather than another. And it is in this way that I can bring about a change in what initiated the reflective inhibition. That is, articulating the intentional implications that shape the sense with which I take something and critically scrutinizing what speaks for or against it puts me in a


\textsuperscript{33} On intentional horizon and implications, see Husserl (1939, 47, 140; 1950, §§19–20).
position to affirm or deny my pre-reflective positings in the form of a critical stance (Stellungnahme). And this affirming or denying of the validity (Geltung) of my way of taking something has an effect on the doxic modality with which this something will from now on be experienced by me—that is, as indeed or after all not actually that way.

Even though critical stances and predicative judgments can both be called judgment (Urteil), they should be distinguished because they amount to two different forms of activity that have different effects on our future experience. In the case of a categorial judgment, say a perceptual judgment, an initial explication (Explikation) of the sense with which something is afforded leads to the predicative positing of S being P, which amounts to a change in the sense with which something appears from now on—that is, as predicatively articulated. In the case of a critical stance that is taken after doubting, however, the change pertains to the doxic modality with which something appears—that is, as indeed and actually (wirklich) being a certain way.

This is not to say that critical stances cannot also occur on the level of predication, and this does not imply that we could not or do not draw on or engage in predication when critically reflecting and endorsing. However, predicative judgments and stances are two different kinds of judgment: one that determines and another that affirms what was previously doubted. In the latter case, Husserl also speaks of “judgments pertaining to reflection [Urteilen der Reflexion]: what I encounter there is actual [Wirklichkeit], something evidently existing [Seiendes]” (Husserl 2005, 697n; see also 702). These judgments of reflection hence endorse (or reject) the positing or

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34 There are several places in Husserl’s published work that touch on the phenomenon of explicitly and critically taking a stance with regard to how we experience something. I have provided a list of passages in Jacobs 2016.

35 See Husserl (1939, 109–10; 1966, 38, 53; 1976, 244).

judging already operative in any attentive form of intentionality; but as such they are also a modalization (Modalisierung) of this more original positing (Urdoxa). \(^{37}\)

### 4. From Self-Consciousness to Subjectivity

I have thus far elaborated how, according to Husserl, when attentively intending something I am pre-reflectively aware of how I take it to be and of the grounds for my taking it to be such. This account of the exercise of rationality is in some important respects not unlike the Kantian inspired account that has recently been proposed by Matthew Boyle. In a number of recent articles, Boyle has shown how a position that deems the capacity for reflection to be tied to the exercise of reason need not commit one to restricting the activity of reason to moments of actual reflection. \(^{38}\) Instead, Boyle argues that those who are capable of reflection are also aware of the reasons for their beliefs when not reflecting. This is the case, Boyle argues, because those who are rational and can reflect have what he calls a tacit self-knowledge of believing that P, which is a self-knowledge that is made explicit in and through reflection and active deliberation. In both cases, however, according to Boyle, “believing that P is being in a condition of actively holding P to be true,” which is an activity that Boyle characterizes as “the actualization of our power to evaluate propositions as true” (Boyle 2011a, 236).

There are a number of respects in which Boyle’s account accords with Husserl’s conception of the exercise of rationality as I have elaborated it. That is, just as Boyle speaks of a tacit self-knowledge, following Husserl we can speak of a pre-reflective self-awareness of how we take something to be. And just as Boyle considers this tacit self-knowledge to account for our having reasons for belief when not reflecting, on Husserl’s account the pre-reflective self-

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38 See, primarily, Boyle (2011a and 2011b).
awareness of how we take something is what makes us sensitive to what speaks for or against taking something in a certain way. Further, while this pre-reflective self-awareness can, in turn, give way to the reflective process of deliberation and ensuing stance taking, Husserl, like Boyle, does not therefore restrict our having grounds for how we take something to be to moments of actual reflection.

At the same time, however, Husserl’s account also differs in a number of respects from Boyle’s account. A first difference is that, as previously mentioned, Husserl distinguishes two different kinds of judgment and activity. Specifically, Husserl usually uses the term “judgment” (Urteil) to refer to the intentional content of the predicative activity of judging—that is, to refer to a proposition—and the term “judging” (urteilen) to refer to the activity in which I predicate something of something else. But, Husserl also uses the term “judgment” in a broader sense to refer to the positing (setzen) that is operative in attentive forms of intentionality. Understood in this second sense, I do not only judge when actively engaged in predication but also when attentively perceiving something or when taking a critical stance in response to a moment of doubt. As Husserl writes in a 1910 manuscript, “thus judgment in the broadest sense encompasses all takings […] judgment in the narrow sense is apophansis, judgment in the sense of logic.”

39 The full passage goes as follows: “also Urteil im weitesten Sinn umfasst alle Positionen (Negationen) mit ihren qualitativen Unterschieden der Gewissheit oder Anmutlichkeit (Für-Seins-Haltungen, Für- möglich-Haltungen), mögen sie einfache, schlicht thetische sein oder höhere, mögen sie ferner ausdrücklich sein und damit zugleich ’erkennend’, begreifend oder nicht. Und dabei wieder partiell begreifend oder durchaus begreifend. Urteil im engsten Sinne ist Apophansis, Urteil im Sinn der Logik ist die Gesamtsphäre der ausdrücklichen Akte, die entweder apophantisch sind oder mit diesen von demselben, also apophantischen Inhalt, nur qualitativ verschieden. Urteil im weitesten Sinn ist dann so viel wie objektivierender (intellektiver im weitesten Sinn) Akt” (Ms. A VI 8 I/ 135a).
As I mentioned, this means that for Husserl the distinction between predicative judgment and other forms of intentionality, such as perception, crosses with the distinction between active and passive intentionality. Specifically, the difference between predication and other forms of intentionality is on Husserl’s account due to a difference in intentional content. Concretely, while things appear with a certain sense in the process of attentive perception, when predicating, I posit a determination P as being the determination of a subject S. In contrast, the difference between active and passive intentionality does not amount to a difference in intentional content but instead to a difference in the way of positing—which can be actualized as in the case of attentive intentionality, or not. In our attentive intentionality, the judgment in the sense of positing is actualized, and our capacity for rationality in the form of our being sensitive to what speaks for or against our ways of taking something to be a certain way is actualized with it.

While Boyle does not explicitly make the distinction between judgment as predication and judgment as positing, some of his characterizations of spontaneity indicate that the activity he considers to be characteristic of rationality is the second kind of judging. So, for example, Boyle writes with regard to propositional beliefs: “My knowing acceptance of P constitutes tacit knowledge that I believe that P” (Boyle 2011a, 236–37). Further, Boyle is willing to allow that this acceptance is operative in other attitudes. He writes: “A similar account will be available wherever it is plausible to conceive of a given kind of mental state as constituted by the subject’s knowingly evaluating a certain content in a certain way” (Boyle 2011a, 237). And this kind of evaluation seems much like the one that Husserl sees at work in current experiences in which the positing is actualized. Thus, Husserl writes: “Takings are positional experiences that, in the broadest sense, achieve an evaluation; a taking is either doxic or an emotive taking or an in the broadest sense practical taking” (Husserl 2004, 462, my emphasis). Further, in response to the
worry that his position would entail that we are tacitly aware of everything we believe, Boyle concedes that, in general, “the availability of knowledge to conscious thought can be interfered with in various ways: distraction, confusion, or temporary inhibition of memory can put us out of touch with what we know” (Boyle 2011a, 229). Hence, Boyle can account for a factual limitation of the scope of the tacit knowledge characteristic of holding a belief. Nevertheless, as I would like to suggest in concluding, Husserl’s characterization of attention as the actualization of the positing character of intentionality shows us something about the exercise of rationality that a focus on judgment in the sense of positing and on tacit self-knowledge in and of itself does not.

On Husserl’s account we can speak in two different ways of the actuality (Aktualität) of the positing character of an intentional act. And we are only sensitive to what speaks for or against how we take something to be in those intentional experiences that are actually positing in both these ways. First, intentional experience can be actually positing in the sense that the experience is not a neutralized intentional experience. Second, intentional experiences can be actually positing in the sense that the positing is actualized or current.

Husserl acknowledges a number of experiences in which we do not posit something as existing or obtaining—for example, when we merely imagine something, withhold assent when someone tells us something incredulous, or just focus on the appearance of things. But for Husserl these examples are not to be understood as experiences that are the basis on which judgment might in turn take hold (as Brentano thinks). Instead, these experiences are to be understood as modifications of intentional experiences in which we posit something. Specifically, Husserl speaks in this context of a “neutralization,” and, importantly, for him this

\[\text{See Husserl (1976, 254ff).}\]

neutralization is a modification.\textsuperscript{42} Hence, talk of sensations as mere appearances, like the talk of mere thoughts, always refers to a derivative phenomenon that results from the modification of a positing—that is, its neutralization.

Husserl, however, takes great care to differentiate this neutralization modification from the modification that a positing act can undergo when it ceases to be or becomes current. In the latter case, Husserl writes of an actualization of a latent intentional experience into a current intentional experience. To say that an intentional experience is actualized in this sense means that it is now accompanied by the “I think” and the characteristic pre-reflective self-awareness that comes with it—which is also the pre-reflective self-awareness that Boyle is interested in. For Husserl, however, this actualization is achieved by means of attention. Differently stated, attention is the actualization of the positing, and the exercise of rationality has thus to be located and limited to our attentive experiences.

Two concrete examples can make this clear. First, we often make predicative judgments on the basis of other predicative judgments. One way in which we do so is when the subject of our judgment is already the (nominalized) result of previous or merely appropriated predicative activity. And while I, when holding such a complex propositional belief, am pre-reflectively or even reflectively aware of my judging a certain way and pre-reflectively aware of what speaks for or against my doing so, this does not necessarily entail that this is likewise the case for the judgment that functions as the (nominalized) subject of the judgment that I currently hold. That is, when not attending to the judged state of affairs that functions as the subject of my current predicative activity, I am not pre-reflectively aware of what speaks for or against this judgment. Likewise, when perceptually taking something to be a certain way, the focus of my attentive

awareness is surrounded by a peripheral awareness of the environment, which is an awareness that is not characterized by the aforementioned pre-reflective self-awareness in the way my attentive awareness is. And the reason why these background experiences are not actual or current in the way our attentive judging and perceiving are is because of the limited span of our attention, which sets limitations to the scope of the exercise of rationality at any moment.

Importantly, for Husserl the limitation of the exercise of rationality by the scope of attention is due to the very structure of my conscious experience in that I am always and in principle aware of more than what I attend to.\textsuperscript{43} And our attention does not just limit the scope of the exercise of our rationality in the sense that I, at any moment, have only a limited scope of attention; I also cannot just freely direct my attention anywhere. So, as Husserl points out, in the case of perception, the freedom to redirect one’s attention is dependent on one’s bodily capacities and freedom of movement. As Husserl writes: “In a certain sense, this unity, the empirical object is accomplished in the freedom of spontaneity [...] free activity: freely walking through, free modification of ‘the position of one’s eyes,’ the free course of ‘movements of touch,’ and the free-dependent modifications of the course of appearances.”\textsuperscript{44} Further, both the personal history and social embeddedness of the experiencing subject that Husserl accounts for in terms of the aforementioned sedimentation of sense are factors that enable and limit our

\textsuperscript{43} See Husserl (1976, 73).

\textsuperscript{44} The full passage goes as follows: “In gewisser Weise ,erzeugt sich’ auch diese Einheit, der empirische Gegenstand, in einer „Freiheit” der Spontaneität, als Einheit einer spontan verlaufenden Mannigfaltigkeit. Es genügt nicht überhaupt „Erscheinung” und Ablauf von Erscheinungen, nicht das bloße Hinnehmen der Erscheinungen und eventuell ablaufenden Erscheinungen (etwa wenn der Gegenstand sich dreht), vielmehr neben dieser Passivität muss freie Aktivität da sein, eben das freie Durchlaufen, die freie Modifikation der „Augenstellung”, der freie Ablauf der „tastenden Bewegungen” und dadurch die frei-abhängig Modifikation der Erscheinungsreihe” (Ms. A VI 12 I/280a). See als Husserl (1939, 89). See also Barber (2008, 92–93) and Doyon (2016). I have elsewhere discussed the nature of the embodiment of the subject according to Husserl (Jacobs 2014).
attention more generally.\footnote{Rinofner-Kreidl (2011) has developed an excellent phenomenological account of self-deception in a social and moral context.} This means that it is due to being an embodied person among persons that some experiences are actualized while others are not, even though the latter do shape the sense with which what is in focus is experienced (i.e., they are not neutralized experiences).

Thus, what Husserl presents us with, in addition to a theory of self-knowledge similar to what we find in Boyle, is an account of the subject that exercises rationality. The contrast between Boyle and Husserl can be made clear by looking again at how Boyle responds to the objection that we are not omniscient about our own beliefs. In the face of this objection, Boyle reiterates that “what is known is accessible to conscious reflection, other things being equal,” while acknowledging that “other things are not always equal” (Boyle 2011a, 230). Husserl, in contrast, rather than limiting himself to a description of the structure of those experiences in which we exercise rationality, describes the embodied, personal, and socially embedded nature of the subject that exercises rationality within the scope of its attention. And his doing so shows how this subjectivity of the subject limits and distributes the attentive actualization of our positing (and hence the exercise of rationality) in a noncontingent way—that is, we are embodied persons that are socially embedded, and this is why things are never in fact equal. And if attention is the actualization of our capacity for rationality, as Husserl’s account of intentionality suggests it is, we do not just need a theory of self-knowledge but a theory of the subject or subjectivity to understand the nature and scope of the exercise of rationality. It is to such a theory that Husserl ultimately aspires, and I hope to have shown that Husserl’s own account is worth considering when trying to understand what we always already do (albeit within limits) when we make up our own minds—minds that are undeniably embodied, personal, and socially embedded.
References


