



# Emmanuel Alloa, Thimeo Breyer und Emanuele Caminada: Handbuch Phänomenologie

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International interest in phenomenology has grown significantly in recent decades. The *Handbuch Phänomenologie* (Handbook of Phenomenology), edited by Emmanuel Alloa, Thimeo Breyer, and Emanuele Caminada, therefore is more than welcome. The handsome volume, which is available both in cloth binding and as a thread-sewn brochure (and as an eBook), has been published by Mohr Siebeck. It comprises 563 pages, which are printed in relatively small font with narrow margins. The volume is divided into four parts: a historical part, a conceptual-analytical and methodological part and an applied part (p. 2) plus an appendix. It was written by 8 female and 27 male authors, whereby the three editors are included because, in addition to the introduction, they also (co-)wrote a number of articles.

Let us begin this book review with the 80-page appendix at the end, which not only provides a bibliography but also detailed information on editions of the so-called main phenomenological works (with the exception of Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, all in German) and references to further aids and resources. Reference is also made here (only here) to competing books, in particular *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, published in 2021 and edited by Daniele De Santis, Burt Hopkins, and Claudio Majolino (to which some of the authors of the handbook under review here also contributed), and the *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, edited by Dan Zahavi (2012) and followed by the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Phenomenology* by the same editor in 2018 (Zahavi, 2018). Of several more specific English-language handbooks now available, only the *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* published in 2010 and edited by Shaun Gallagher and Daniel Schmicking (Gallagher & Schmicking, 2010) is mentioned.

In a short introduction, the editors discuss their concept of phenomenology, provide instructions for using their handbook and describe phenomenology in

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general as a living and lively movement. They distance themselves from a strict Husserlian orthodoxy (p. 10). Rather, they claim that “this handbook [unlike others] is neither focused on individual directions within phenomenology nor on the oeuvre of one of its representatives, but rather aims to present the phenomenological movement in its historical and systematic breadth and diversity as comprehensively as possible” [i.o.: “dieses Handbuch [im Unterschied zu anderen] weder auf einzelne Richtungen innerhalb der Phänomenologie noch auf das Oeuvre einer ihrer Vertreter:innen fokussiert [sei], vielmehr soll die phänomenologische Bewegung in ihrer historischen und systematischen Breite und Vielfalt möglichst umfassend dargestellt werden”] (p. 2). Nevertheless, even in this introduction, Husserl remains not only the starting point but also the central point of reference and the benchmark. I will come back to this theme.

The introduction, which clarifies the editors’ point of view, is followed by a 130-page main section entitled *Historische Entwicklungen* (Historical Developments) (pp. 17–147), which traces the history of phenomenology. A deeper historical perspective is not attempted here, which could have pointed to parallels (and differences) with Goethe’s phenomenon-oriented research and placed Husserl’s *Wesensschau* in a broader context, as Josef König did in his dissertation (König, 1981). Instead, one is briefly and concisely informed about Husserl’s positions (pp. 18–24). However, further references were probably not elaborated because they are discussed in detail in the aforementioned English-language handbook by De Santis, Hopkins, and Majolino. This is followed by receptions of phenomenology, subdivided linguistically and geographically, which show that phenomenology radiated worldwide, albeit with specific emphases. After taking a broad inventory, it is then mentioned “that there is also an interest in phenomenology in other regions of the world [besides Europe, America and Asia], for example in Africa” [i.o.: “dass es auch in anderen Weltregionen [neben Europa, Amerika und Asien] ein Interesse an der Phänomenologie gibt, so z.B. in Afrika”] (p. 67); a somewhat irritating formulation because there is an in-depth and not only interested but interesting reception and an autonomous development of phenomenology in Africa, whose at least brief presentation would have been a good addition to the handbook (those interested in phenomenology in Africa should refer, for example, to the recently published anthology by Abraham Olivier, M. John Lamola, and Justin Sands, titled *Phenomenology in an African Context – Contributions and Challenges* (2023) or to the corresponding section in the aforementioned handbook by De Santis et al. (2021: 749–756)).

This is followed, still as an account of historical development, by a section entitled *Wendungen der Phänomenologie* (“Turns in Phenomenology”), in contrast to the handbook by de Santis et al. where the corresponding section is called *Intersections*. Even in the handbook that is reviewed here, not all the sections that appear under ‘turn’ are elaborated as such. The informative and good chapter on phenomenology and analytic philosophy (pp. 129–138) develops more of a comparison between these two main currents of contemporary philosophy. Incidentally, it could have been expanded a little, for example, to include the Hans Lipps student Albert Grote, who argues strongly in terms of linguistic analysis, or Aurél Kolnai who also represents a biographical link between phenomenology and analytic philosophy.

In the chapter entitled *Wendungen* (“Turns”), interesting and readable sketches present influential new approaches within the phenomenological movement, whereby “turns” are intended to encompass a turning towards and away from certain aspects or positions (p. 69). A total of around nine such *Wendungen* are distinguished. Some further *Wendungen* could have been presented, e.g., an anthropological one, which is identified elsewhere in the book itself (see p. 342). One wonders whether a narrative turn could have been added with Wilhelm Schapp and the researchers inspired by him, especially since Schapp always closely aligned his own position with that of Husserl. With respect to the *Neue Phänomenologie* (“New Phenomenology”), which was initiated by Hermann Schmitz (1980), one could also speak of a turn, e.g., a spatial turn in phenomenology, because space (and not time) becomes the central concept for Schmitz, e.g., consider his focus on the spatiality of feelings and the *Leib* (i.e., the lived body). With respect to the broad, dynamic and constantly increasing reception of Schmitz’s work (just think of the reception of Schmitz by Gesa Lindemann, Peter Sloterdijk, or Hartmut Rosa) such an addition would have been quite justified.

It must be conceded to the editors, however, that there is only very limited space in a handbook. Nevertheless, it remains unfortunate that, for example, a long discontinued series of publications edited by Bernhard Waldenfels is listed in the scholarly apparatus, but then neither the *Society for New Phenomenology* (*Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie*) nor the associated foundation, nor the series of publications, nor the *Hermann Schmitz Foundation Chair* in Rostock and its activities are mentioned, although all of this exists and is certainly interesting and important for students, to whom the handbook is primarily addressed. In any case, the references to research centers, societies, and archives in the apparatus appear to be arbitrary and superficial, as the numerous Sartre societies and the *Max Scheler Society* are not mentioned, nor is the *Wilhelm Schapp Research Center* at the Technical University of Kaiserslautern, etc. At least with respect to the German-speaking societies, it would have been possible to strive for completeness.

The *Wendungen* are followed by a so-called *Werkzeugkasten* (“Toolbox”) of over 100 pages (pp. 147–252), which is divided into basic concepts and methods. Contrary to what the title suggests, no “tools” or instructions for practicing phenomenology or doing independent phenomenological research are given here, but rather a historically oriented explication of Husserl’s concepts is offered. The selection and presentation of these fundamental concepts is, if one takes (exclusively) Husserl as a starting point, plausible and also clear and orienting. In the selection, one may wonder why time is dealt with (pp. 180–185), but not space (which Gaston Bachelard, Otto Bollnow, or Hermann Schmitz, for example, studied in detail); or why corporeality (pp. 192–198), which is discussed briefly and clearly, but not feelings, which have been a central theme of phenomenology from the very beginning, one thinks of Scheler, Heidegger, but also of Bollnow and Kolnai, and continue to be. The methodology presented in this section are based almost exclusively on Husserl’s concepts and reject newer methodological approaches with reference to Husserl (pp. 223–224), and one wonders whether efficiency and productivity are not more decisive for a phenomenological method than the question of whether it can already be found in Husserl.

The *Werkzeugkasten* is followed by the most comprehensive and also most convincing part of the handbook, entitled *Wirkfelder* (“Fields of Application”) (pp. 253–472), which deals with applications of phenomenology and interdisciplinary resonances. Here, in eleven sub-chapters, an attempt is made to outline the spillovers of phenomenology into other, partly philosophical, but predominantly non-philosophical disciplines. This entire section is outstandingly successful, solid and coherent and offers interesting and new aspects throughout. This section is an interesting and fascinating read because the compilation shows that phenomenology itself is a phenomenon, insofar as there is no other philosophical movement in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that had a similar impact.

The almost exclusive treatment of humanities and social science subjects is regrettable. The fundamental natural sciences of physics and chemistry are almost completely absent (only the life sciences are summarized on pp. 460–472), which is regrettable in view of the close links between phenomenology and certain developments in the field of quantum mechanics or the theory of relativity, which Harald Wiltsche, among others, has identified. There are also quite diverse links to interesting relations between phenomenology and chemistry, as the author of this review, among others, has shown. It is also worth remembering subject didactic research in physics and chemistry, and here in particular the influential branch of this that is oriented in one way or another towards the physics didacticist Martin Wagenschein, who explicitly referred to phenomenology and inaugurated a phenomenon-oriented subject didactic of the natural sciences, which had and still has a broad influence via his students, e.g., Walter Jung, and his grand-students. Phenomenological approaches are also important in the geosciences (e.g., geomorphology or meteorology) and are often explicitly referred to as such (e.g., by Henning Kaufmann, a pioneer of self-organization thinking).

Approaches to a phenomenologically oriented or inspired philosophy of nature, such as those of Gaston Bachelard or Gernot Böhme, could also have been mentioned in this context. Conversely, the influences of the natural sciences on phenomenology are also somewhat neglected in the handbook. For example, the fact that the concept of the lifeworld originally comes from biology is not mentioned, nor are the links between early environmental research and the young Heidegger highlighted. Perhaps in a future, expanded edition!

Despite this ‘gap,’ the extensive “Fields of Application” section is highly interesting throughout, and solid, and convincing in its effort to concisely yet broadly trace the radiance of phenomenology. Even in the case of the well-known influences on aesthetics and the arts, for example (pp. 432–451), unknown or little-known aspects are always mentioned; the sections on psychology and psychiatry or ethnology are also highly interesting. These are only mentioned as examples, as all the contributions are worth reading. The chapters dealing with well-known resonances, for example, the section on social philosophy and sociology (pp. 354–373), are also to be commended for their combination of brevity, depth of focus and new aspects. Particularly in light of the fact that there are already handbooks in the English-speaking world that shed light on the links between phenomenology and individual disciplines, such as the cognitive sciences or medicine, this overview is extremely valuable and stimulating. It alone makes this handbook a worthwhile read.

Looking at the entire work, one involuntarily thinks: ‘Husserl would have enjoyed it!’. Because the editors, in spite of all their efforts not to be orthodox (see the quote above), have, especially in the first half, almost consistently made Husserl’s concepts (and in part: Husserl’s dogmas) not only the starting point but also the point of reference and often the benchmark. The central reference to Husserl is, as previously mentioned, already noticeable in the first few pages, because the concept of “intentionality,” which is indeed used centrally by Husserl, is identified “as the unifying element to which most phenomenologists see themselves committed and which they use as an analytical tool in a wide variety of areas” [“i.o.: als zentrales verbindendes Element, dem sich die meisten Phänomenolog:innen verpflichtet sehen und das sie in unterschiedlichsten Bereichen als analytisches Werkzeug einsetzen”] (p. 9). I confess that this does not quite make sense to me, because if we accepted this, then the ‘phenomenological movement’ should be renamed ‘the intentiological movement’. But nobody would want to do that and this indicates that it is impossible not to recognize that the central point of reference of phenomenology is precisely that of the *phenomenon*. What is a phenomenon? The editors define phenomena as manifestations of consciousness (*Bewusstseinserscheinungen*). The aim of phenomenology, according to the editors, is to bring these phenomena to bear in a descriptive way and to analyze them with regard to their general structures and conditions of constitution (p. 7). However, this only describes Husserl’s position, and with good reason, there are alternatives to this position. Heidegger’s concept of phenomena, if one looks it up in *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1927: §7A), proves to be very different. Heidegger deviated even more clearly from Husserl in his Marburg Lectures. Or think of Jean-Paul Sartre (for instance, the first pages of *L’Être et le Néant* (1943)) or Hermann Schmitz (see the first volume of his *System der Philosophie* (1964: 139)). They all refer to a concept of phenomena that certainly cannot be reduced to ‘appearance of consciousness’.

In view of the fact that Heinrich Barth (the brother of the theologian Karl Barth) already presented a two-volume historically oriented *Philosophie der Erscheinung* in 1947 and 1959, in which not only the development of the concept of appearance (and, in this broader context, phenomenon) is traced historically, but also a systematic description is given (Barth, 1947/1959), the editors’ adoption of Husserl’s concept is not really convincing because it suggests that the concept is generally agreed-upon. Much to the contrary it is not necessary, not even recommendable to define phenomena as manifestations of consciousness. A phenomenon is something that shows itself (in contrast to something that is *merely* thought/constructed). Of course, something of the phenomenon also becomes conscious. But phenomena would not deserve this name and would not interest us if they were *mere* phenomena of consciousness. On the contrary, it could be said that they are characterized by the fact that they are not conscious in essential aspects, but embrace a potentially infinite depth of explicable but not explicit, and in this sense *unconscious*, moments. Think of the often difficult to grasp, e.g., ambivalent impression that a certain encounter can make on you. In any case, the eponymous concept of phenomena, as a thoroughly controversial basic concept, should have been discussed in the section devoted to basic concepts, whereby the versions and definitions of this central concept that differ from Husserl’s could have been discussed in detail or at least could

have been mentioned (as is done in detail in the handbook by De Santis et al., 2021: (esp.) 352–367).

It is easy to understand the motive that prompted the editors to stick to Husserl in all basic questions. The continuous Husserl orientation means that a clear textual inventory can always be defined, even if Husserl is known to have taken different positions on some important questions in the course of his development. In this respect, the close orientation towards Husserl is understandable and justifiable. However, it also has its disadvantages and shortcomings. Due to the constant recourse to Husserl, who is quoted on nearly every page of this book, the diversity of the phenomenological movement that was actually intended to be presented disappears. Certainly, the modern phenomenological discourse was founded by Husserl, to take up an expression of Foucault. However, it then went beyond Husserl very quickly, already during his lifetime. The editors are fully aware of this. Nevertheless, the handbook many times creates the impression that the contributions of the other phenomenologists are not independent and self-contained concepts, but footnotes to Husserl. Perhaps a less Husserl-oriented approach would have been better at the end of the day. At any rate, it would have shown phenomenology to be still lively, fluid and in the making.

This is related to the circumstance that in the volume, although it is explicitly aimed at students, the actual phenomenological activity, the practical research *work* that Husserl always emphasized and which, in the opinion of most phenomenologists, is a distinguishing feature of phenomenology, only comes up quite briefly after 200 pages, and then in a style that hardly encourages readers to try out the methods described for themselves. Rather, Husserl's terminology is presented, quite knowledgeably and clearly, but not in a way that encourages practicing it. This seems problematic because this form of presentation makes phenomenology appear to be something of the past that can be studied but no longer practiced.

This does not really create the spirit that was and is the basis for the success of phenomenology as a whole. Unlike other philosophical movements, phenomenology had (and still has!) the charm that it gave (and can still give!) each and every individual the feeling that they can make a contribution to philosophical discussion through methodologically sound and yet creative descriptions of everyday experiences, for example by using such descriptions to criticize traditional and therefore seemingly self-evident constructions.

Especially lateral entrants, who actually came from a different subject, were attracted by this promise of phenomenology that they could contribute to philosophy even without prior extensive reading of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, etc. The outstanding phenomenological works of the brilliant Husserl students Hans Lipps (who was a medical doctor) or Wilhelm Schapp (who worked as a lawyer, later as a notary) prove this. The art of phenomenological description should perhaps be brought more to the fore in a handbook and should be presented in a less historical and more instructive, engaging manner.

In an interview about Hans Lipps that I conducted with Hans-Georg Gadamer in the late 1990s, he said that he wished that the old art of phenomenological description would be cultivated again instead of writing about phenomenology. Contrary to these words, however, writing *about* phenomenology remains an important thing.

And yet, Gadamer is quite right that the art of description is an essential part of phenomenology. It is this that distinguishes phenomenology from other philosophical schools, and it is also due to this that it owes its influence in other scientific fields and also in the arts and literature (think of Francis Ponge or Peter Handke).

Overall, the handbook is an enormous achievement, providing all those interested in phenomenology with a new and valuable resource. It proves, especially in the first 200 pages, to be clearly inspired by the handbook edited by De Santis et al. but also deviates significantly from it again and again, often for the better. The editors have also succeeded in keeping the book relatively clear and short. Unlike the handbook edited by De Santis (which has 835 pages), it can actually be held with one hand. Despite a particular emphasis on German-language phenomenology, it nevertheless demonstrates the international appeal and the enormous versatility and interdisciplinary significance of phenomenological philosophy. May this work encourage phenomenological thinking and research!

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