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1 Introduction

This is an interesting and ambitious book, bringing Husserl’s account of constitution to bear on the enduring problem of how mind and world are related. The study does not aim to be a contribution to Husserl scholarship (though it certainly reflects deep understanding of central parts of Husserl’s work), but rather to bring aspects of Husserlian phenomenology into dialog with more recent analytic work in philosophy of mind to make philosophical progress. As the author writes:

...by developing an account that combines Husserlian phenomenology with analytic philosophy, I will show that these two traditions are not two opposite and mutually repellent poles in the history of twentieth century philosophy; they should rather be seen as allies when it comes to systematically address problems in the philosophy of mind. (1)

In this goal, the work succeeds completely, providing a paradigm of fluid work that crosses these philosophical traditions with ease and demonstrates their mutual relevance. The author draws on an impressive range of literature across the analytic and phenomenological traditions (including work by Husserl, Brentano, Wittgenstein, McDowell, Brandom, Haugeland, and Sellars) and seems equally at ease with work from both traditions. He does an outstanding job of expositing the views of these various thinkers clearly and bringing them into dialog in a way that sheds light on both traditions and on the philosophical problems at stake.
The central problem the book addresses is how to understand the (inten-
tional) relationship between mind and world, without falling into Cartesian
dualism, reductionism or eliminativism, or idealism:

The main goal of this book is to sketch a picture of the relation between
mind and world that acknowledges [their] differences without asserting
that there are two different kinds of substances (2).

The book begins, in Chapter 1, with a systematic exposition of the problem of
the relation between mind and world. Huemer traces the problem to
Descartes’ ontological dualism, which set up an apparently unbridgeable gap
between mind and world, which in turn spawned tendencies to eliminativism
and reductionism. Rather than conceiving of the problem primarily in ontol-
ogical terms, Huemer suggests, we do better to address it in terms of the
distinction drawn by Sellars and McDowell between the ‘logical space of
reasons’ and the ‘logical space of nature’. Mental episodes are “positions in
the logical space of reasons that are directed towards objects, which are taken
to be positions in the logical space of nature” (3). The challenge is then to
show how our mental episodes may have conceptual content (if they are
simply caused by processes in the natural world), and how the natural world
experienced could provide any rational constraints on or justification for our
judgments.

Having set up the problem, Huemer then turns in Chapter 2 to a history of
the notion of constitution, since, he claims, a proper account of constitution
“allows us to acknowledge the essential differences between the mental and
the physical without creating an unbridgeable gap between the two” (17). This
chapter provides the most direct contribution to Husserl studies, with a
detailed exposition of Husserl’s account of how objects and even mental states
themselves are constituted as objects of experience, showing how Husserl’s
views on constitution developed in the Logical Investigations, in his lectures
on time consciousness, and in the second book of Ideas. The Husserlian
account of constitution is then compared with Haugeland’s account, according
to which constitution of objects as objects involves commitment to certain
constitutive standards, where these constitutive standards are intersubjective
and social.

With the expository and historical background of the first two chapters in
place, the book turns next to the constructive philosophical work. Chapter 3
draws on Husserl’s account of retention in the theory of time consciousness
to “explain how our perceptual experiences can have empirical content that
is determined not only by their causal relation to the environment but also
by the holistic background of the person who has these experiences”(38).
Chapter 4 uses Haugeland’s intersubjective account of constitutive stan-
dards to argue that “mental episodes rest on a social foundation” (4) and
that “we learn to constitute mental episodes through social practices and...
as a consequence, we cannot have ineffable mental episodes” (4). I will
have more to say about these core philosophical arguments and positions
below.