

Sinnboden der Geschichte: Foucault and Husserl on the structural a priori of history

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Abstract In this paper I explore Husserl's and Foucault's approaches to the historical a priori and defend Husserl's richer notion. Foucault borrows the expression 'historical a priori' from Husserl and there are continuities, but also significant and ultimately irreconcilable differences, between their conceptions. Both are looking for 'conditions of possibility,' forms of 'institution' or instauration, and patterns of transformation (breakthroughs, disruptions), for scientific knowledge. Husserl identifies the 'a priori of history' with the 'historical a priori' and believes that the 'invariant essential structures of the historical world' (*Crisis of European Sciences*) can be identified. Foucault, on the other hand, is less interested in the Kantian inquiry into the limits or legitimization of knowledge than in the relation between knowledge and power. Foucault rejects the idea of universal and necessary a priori structures and denies that the structure of the conceptual framework ('episteme') governing an era can be fully determined. Both Foucault and Husserl contrast 'inner' history with external history, but, I argue, Foucault misconstrues Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as a form of 'absolute subjectivity' against which his 'archaeological' method reacts. In fact, Foucault's own conception of the historical a priori is ambiguous and fails to have explanatory value precisely because it misunderstands the need for the a priori to be both universal and necessary, and offers no account of the 'a priori of historicity' which, for Husserl, is essential to human cultural life.

Keywords Husserl · Foucault · A priori · History · Historicity · Archaeology

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We can now say that history [*Geschichte*] is from the start nothing other than the vital movement [*die lebendige Bewegung*] of the belonging-with-one-another [*Miteinander*] and the interweaving [*Ineinander*] of original formations [*Sinnbildung*] and sedimentations of meaning [*Sinnsedimentierung*]. Anything that is shown to be a historical fact ... necessarily has its inner structure of meaning [*innere Sinnesstruktur*]... (C, 371; Hua VI, 380; trans. modified).

Edmund Husserl is the original source for Michel Foucault's use of the expression 'historical a priori,' and there are continuities, but also significant (and ultimately irreconcilable) differences between their two conceptions. In this paper I shall trace these continuities and divergences and shall argue that Foucault misconstrues Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as a form of 'absolute subjectivity' against which his 'archaeological' method reacts. In fact, Foucault's own conception of the historical a priori is ambiguous and fails to have explanatory value precisely because it misunderstands the need for the a priori to be both universal and necessary and also has no account of the 'a priori of historicity' which is central to the Husserlian project.

Over his career, Husserl gradually expanded his original conception of the material a priori (first outlined in *Logical Investigations* 1900/1901) to include, in the *Crisis* (1936 and 1954),¹ an a priori governing history and tradition that he calls indifferently the 'a priori of history' or 'historical a priori'. For Husserl, this a priori is universal, necessary, and ultimately intrinsically rational. Foucault, by contrast, considers the historical a priori to be contingent, singular, and objective, governing its specific domain with a certain degree of necessity (how much is unclear) within a particular period but not in anyway capable of predicting what is to come or explaining how a particular configuration arose from previous ones.

To understand Foucault's peculiar sense of the historical a priori, it is necessary to explicate Husserl's own original conceptions of the a priori and of the nature of human historicity (or historicality). Husserl, following the Neo-Kantians, conceives of the science of history as governed by a priori structures than can be identified reflectively. But furthermore, for Husserl, the a priori that governs particular cultural worlds and epochs itself evolves and changes *according to an identifiable rationale*. It is possible then to trace this 'historical a priori' and display its inner rationale. This is essential if history is to have scientific value in its understanding of intentional motivation, whereas Foucault simply denies that any rationale is at work.

For Husserl, the world is historical through the 'inner historicity of individuals' (C, 372; Hua VI, 381) and their intentional comportment to one another that is governed by essential (eidetic) law. Foucault, by contrast, identifies anonymous, diffuse structures of power and knowledge out of which various collective forms of life emerge and by which they are governed until new and perhaps discontinuous

¹ See David Carr's essay 'Husserl and Foucault on the Historical Apriori: Teleological and Anti-Teleological Views of History' in this issue. Carr argues correctly that Husserl has a teleological view of history that has similarities to that of Hegel whereas Foucault simply has no place for teleology in his account of the anonymous forces at work in history.

structures replace them, which cannot be comprehended by the kind of intentional narrative Husserl proposes.

Edmund Husserl seems to have been the first person to use the precise expression ‘historical a priori’ (*das historische a priori*) and Michel Foucault’s French formulation (*a priori historique*) directly translates Husserl’s term. Neither Husserl nor Foucault, however, was the first to explicate the a priori in terms of time and history. There was an ongoing discussion of the a priori nature of the human sciences—and especially the ‘science’ (*Wissenschaft*) of history—among the Neo-Kantians, notably with Wilhelm Windelband (whose distinction between ‘nomothetic’ and ‘ideographic’ sciences is criticized by Husserl in his 1927 *Natur und Geist* lectures) (Hua XXXII, 78–86)² and Heinrich Rickert (whom Husserl succeeded in the Chair in Freiburg and with whom he was in discussion).³

1 Foucault and the ‘historical a priori’ (*a priori historique*)

The notion of the historical a priori can be traced in Foucault’s work from 1954 through 1969 and then more or less disappears in his later writings. It is treated in an exemplary chapter in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969, 1972) (AK, 126–131) and in *The Order of Things* (1970).⁴ In his ‘Foreword to the English Edition’ of that work Foucault says that traditionally French history of science has focused on the natural and formal sciences, as the human sciences seem to be too empirical to be studied formally.⁵ Foucault then asks the key question: ‘But what if empirical knowledge, at a given time and in a given culture, *did* possess a well defined regularity?’ (OT, ix). By regularity, he means here a formal structure governed by law. The empirical sciences too, their discoveries and errors, are governed by ‘the laws of a certain code of knowledge’ (OT, ix). Foucault wants to reveal these laws that he styles ‘*positive unconscious* of knowledge’ (OT, xi) rather than a negative unconscious that resists, deflects or disturbs. In this Foreword, Foucault is clear that this new framework of laws amounts to a ‘network of analogies that transcended the traditional proximities’ (OT, xi). These laws—this ‘archeological system’ (OT, xi)—have never, he claims, been previously identified. Indeed, what strikes Foucault most is the manner disciplines could suddenly change, e.g. from general grammar to philology (OT, xii) or emerge (e.g. political economy), forming new configurations. Furthermore, Foucault is explicit that identifying these configurations goes is not about investigating human subjects ‘but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse’ (OT, xiv).

² See Jalbert (1988).

³ See Staiti (2014). Husserl was somewhat dismissive of Windelband as an unsystematic and essentially unoriginal thinker (see Hua XXXII, xv).

⁴ The Foreword is only found in the English translation.

⁵ As Kevin Thompson argues in his contribution in this Special Issue, Foucault’s philosophy of science owes considerable debt to the French tradition of Jean Cavaillès and Georges Canguilhem. Foucault adopts Cavaillès’ claim to be following the phenomenology of the *concept* rather than of the subject.

Foucault specifically rejects any ‘phenomenological’ approach that gives ‘absolute priority to the observing subject’ (OT, xiv). Instead, he proposes a ‘theory of discursive practice.’ In *The Order of Things*, he portrays Husserlian phenomenology as itself limited by a certain conception of transcendental subjectivity and the cogito that could only arise at a certain point in modernity (see OT, 325).

The concept of the historical a priori can be found already in 1954 in one of Foucault’s very first publications, ‘Psychology from 1850 to 1950’ (1954) (DE1, 138)—it is worth recalling that he trained in psychology gaining his *licence de psychologie* in 1949 and a *diplôme de psycho-pathologie* in 1952—Foucault offers his very interesting analysis of the paradoxes inherent in the history of psychology as a science: Its historical a priori governs the possibility of its being scientific or not (DE1, 138). Foucault here speaks of a ‘conceptual and historical a priori’ [*a priori conceptuel et historique* (DE1, 155)]. In another early essay, his Introduction to the 1954 French translation of the phenomenological psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger’s *Dream and Existence* (*Traum und Existenz*, 1930), also discusses the ‘historical a priori,’ this time in a proximity to Heidegger’s phenomenology of Dasein.⁶ Here Foucault explains that the science of human existence is neither a positive science nor an a priori philosophical anthropology (DE1, 66).

In these two early essays, Foucault is gesturing toward a new way of explicating human existence and historicity that breaks with the conventions of the science understood in the traditional positivist manner as well as going beyond a priori metaphysics (similar to his conception of ‘Man’ as an ‘empirical-transcendental doublet’, OT, 318).

Foucault wants to identify hidden structures or orders at work—which, as he would say in the sixties, at the surface level consists solely in ‘traces.’ To see these structures, it is necessary to exclude nothing (see DE1, 499ff); one simply has to immerse oneself in the phenomena (e.g. the texts of classical medicine) for the hidden structure to make itself manifest. In his first book *Histoire de la folie* (1961), Foucault claims, somewhat incredibly, to have read *all* the eighteenth-century medical textbooks in order to get his sense of the configuration of the knowledge that defined sanity and reason in the classical age. Of course, one would have to ask what eyes Foucault brought to bear on these texts to identify the structures that framed them and this would lead to the very discussion of the phenomenology of the subject that he is seeking, according to his own declared methodology, to suppress.

In his *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), Foucault develops an account of the a priori structures governing another aspect of the human sciences. Here he tries to identify the ‘concrete a priori’ of medicine that defined its emergence as a clinical science, i.e. the a priori structures then govern the conditions under which a particular form of knowledge becomes possible or, indeed, actual, *at a specific time in European*

⁶ Miller (1991) recounts: ‘Foucault had been helping Jacqueline Verdeaux translate a paper, “Dream and Existence,” which Binswanger had originally published in 1930. When the translation was finished, Verdeaux asked her collaborator if he would like to write an introduction. Foucault said Yes. And a few months later, around Easter 1954, Foucault sent her his text. At first Verdeaux was stunned: Foucault’s piece was more than twice as long as Binswanger’s original essay. But when she sat down to read it, she recognized its brilliance.’ See also Smyth (2011).

history). Foucault writes that when modern medicine emerged with a new conception of disease determined by its historical a priori (BC, xvii). Foucault is able to proclaim: '[T]he *historical and concrete a priori* of the modern medical gaze was finally constituted' (BC, 237).

For Foucault, the cross-sectional and interdisciplinary scanning of disciplinary discourses and practices of disciplines makes this historical a priori manifest.⁷ Rather like Husserl's *Rückfragen*, Foucault's method allows for retrospective understanding. When the new forms of defining interpreting 'disease' (or other cultural phenomena) come into existence we are in a position to grasp the laws underlying the older framework. The phenomenologist, however, will always want to know what interpretative principles and intentional motivations govern this Foucauldian 'looking back' which seems to have the character of inspired intuition.

In subsequent publications, and under various names, Foucault elaborates on this new 'domain' of 'knowledge' (*savoir*) that charts the hidden underlying laws and a priori frameworks governing different disciplines or forms of discourse that make up standard scientific 'knowledge' (*connaissance*).⁸ Generally, Foucault speaks of the effort to uncover this hidden *savoir* as 'archaeology' (OT, p. xi).⁹ One can detect the classical notion of the 'a priori' as 'conditions of possibility' here; this new knowledge 'make possible' the appearance of a theory or practice. Thus, in his 1966 interview Foucault speaks of 'knowledge that I wanted to investigate, as the condition of possibility of knowledge [*connaissance*], of institutions, of practices' (Foucault 1989, 262). Note that he often uses 'conditions of possibility' and not just 'conditions of reality,' which is his preferred formulation in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (AK, 127). The implication is that these a priori conditions are specific to a particular empirical configuration and not universal or, indeed, necessary. It is, in his terms, a 'concrete' a priori; a shifting configuration of conditions that coalesce to produce a certain episteme. In *The Order of Things* he claims:

This *a priori* is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of possible knowledge [*un champ de savoir possible*], defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true. (OT, 157–58, translation modified)¹⁰

In *The Order of Things* Foucault characterizes this new knowledge as lying in the subsoil of the more formal systems of knowledge, in philosophy, medicine, law, grammar, and so on, as an unseen network of laws that pervades different cultural

⁷ For a discussion of Foucault's approach to history in terms of practices and discourses instead of periods, see Veyne (1978), 146–182.

⁸ For a discussion of the untranslatable distinction between *savoir* and *connaissance* in Foucault, see the entry by Simon (2014), 'Knowledge, *savoir*, and episteme.'

⁹ See DE1, 498–504 and Foucault (1989), 261–262.

¹⁰ Foucault does not like the term 'mentality' (*mentalité*, in use by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and French historians of science) or 'framework of thought' but this is because he defines these narrowly as the 'interests, beliefs or theoretical opinions' of an age. In fact, the term 'mentality' was used precisely for that outlook which was exhibited but not consciously acknowledged by the human agents.

practices and institutions and is not located in any one of them (or extractable from a single system of knowledge). It is the function of ‘archaeology’ to detect this substructure which is not actually hidden but goes unnoticed. In his 1970 Preface to the English Edition of *The Order of Things* Foucault similarly writes claims that he is seeking to identify ‘configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an “archaeology”’ (OT, xx–xxi).

Although the term ‘archaeology’ (see OT, 218) includes the concept of ‘origin’ or ‘source’ (*arche*), Foucault is not interested in identifying the *historical* origin of scientific breakthroughs in the usual sense (i.e. he is not interested in going back to Euclid or Pythagoras, see DE1, 772). He is interested in certain ‘*instaurations ou des transformations que des fondements, des fondations*’. He speaks of ‘archaeological mutation’ (OT, 312), ‘archaeological event’ and so on. This concept of a framework-altering event (‘a profound breach in the order of continuities (OT, 217)) seems remarkably close to Husserl’s own conception of ‘instauration’ or ‘primal establishment’ (*Urstiftung*) in the *Crisis* (see Hua VI, 10, 11, 72, 73, 75, 206, 207, and 368).

Both Husserl and Foucault, then, *are* looking for ‘conditions of possibility,’ forms of institution and transformation, for scientific knowledge. One significant difference is that Foucault calls them ‘discourses’ and suggests that the phenomena he is seeking are on the ‘surface’ of these discourses although they have previously been unrecognized (DE1, 772). Husserl prefers to talk of intentional ‘achievements’ (*Leistungen*) that become sedimented down into traditions and whose ‘original instaurations’ need to be re-animated in order to be properly understood.

In *The Order of Things* Foucault seeks to examine the emergence of these ‘discourses’ (see his discussion of natural history as a language (OT, 158)) without recourse to the subject, since the subject too is in the grip of these frameworks (hence, famously, Foucault claims that ‘man’ is an invention of eighteenth-century Enlightenment culture or what Foucault calls, rather parochially, *l’âge classique*).¹¹ This is in crucial opposition to Husserlian phenomenology understood as an a priori, transcendental (but, *nota bene*, ‘objective’ in a certain sense) science of subjectivity. All cultural forms, including the sciences that target ideal objectivity, are intentional productions and achievements and this transcendental framework of intentions must be understood, otherwise we are simply bearers of a tradition that we do not understand.

Leaving to one side Foucault’s idiosyncratic and not entirely clear distinction between *savoir* and *connaissance* (as in the quotation above from *The Order of Things*), he conceives of a form of knowledge that can be uncovered by reading (no doubt with hermeneutic suspicion that he leaves unanalyzed) across disciplines and practices, particularly focusing on periods before the disciplines branched off into their separate domains and identifying tacit operative presumptions that drives how

¹¹ Foucault writes: “It is not so long ago when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not” (OT, 322). This claim was challenged within France by both Roger Garaudy and Jean-Paul Sartre. For a discussion of Foucault’s complex and evolving conception of human beings, self-knowledge and the historical a priori of ‘Man’, see Han-Pile (2005).

these disciplines develop and individuate. This silent, ‘unconscious’ knowledge [a set of implicit assumptions, practices, intuitions, ways of acting that are somehow evident in the discourses to those who have ears to hear (OT, 326)], for Foucault, adds up to the *historical a priori*. It is a *a priori* because it provides the *necessary* (in some unspecified sense) conditions that make something like positive knowledge possible in various domains *at a given time*. The question is: What sense does it make to call such an *a priori* intellectual framework ‘historical’?

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault clarifies that this historical *a priori* cannot be thought of as a timeless formal *a priori* ‘that is also endowed with a history [*doté d’une histoire*]’. He writes:

The formal *a priori* and the historical *a priori* neither belong to the same level [*même niveau*] nor share the same nature: if they intersect, it is because they occupy two different dimensions (AK, 128; AS, 169).¹²

Foucault goes on to characterize the domain of the *a priori* not as a flat plain but as ‘a complex volume’ of heterogeneous regions. This is what he sometimes calls an ‘archive’¹³: a system that governs what can be said in a particular culture of framework of knowledge: ‘It is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements’ (AK, 130; AS, 171), the ‘totality of discourses that have been actually proclaimed’ (*l’ensemble des discours effectivement prononcés*) (DE1, 772). For Foucault, the archive cannot be grasped completely because the subject is always *within* the archive. Sometimes he differentiates by saying it is the function of archaeology to uncover this archive (AK, 131; AS, 173), although at other times, he suggests that archive is just another term for archaeology (DE1, 772). Elsewhere archive seems to be identified with what he calls ‘episteme’ (AK, 191) understood ‘the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities’ (AK, 191). Regardless of his terminological vacillations, Foucault generally understands these ‘epistemes’ as anonymous configurations, dispersed in such a way as not to form a single dominant ‘worldview’ (*Weltanschauung*), a term which—along with ‘mentality’ (*mentalité*)—he disparages as too subjective.

In the conclusion of *Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault tries to be more precise in contrasting his ‘archaeology’ with history as pursued by historians (compare the discussion in OT, 217–221). In particular he claims this historical *a priori* aims at identifying ‘thresholds, ruptures, and transformations’ rather than continuities in history. Similarly, and perhaps more crucially in opposition to phenomenology, his archaeology does not locate meaning in some kind of subjectivity (AK, 203–204).

For Foucault, factual history is in the grip of a particular episteme. To make this visible, it needs an archaeological uncovering that will make clear how a historical *a priori* emerges and becomes the dominant framework. The historical *a priori* *changes* and so it is not an eternal timeless *a priori*, but makes possible a particular

¹² It is clear then that Foucault’s contrast between the formal and the historical *a priori* is not at all isomorphic with Husserl’s distinction between the formal and the material *a priori*. Both forms of the Husserlian *a priori* are universal, necessary and thus in Foucault’s sense ‘timeless’. Husserl’s material *a priori* of history (and indeed of historicity) includes laws governing its evolution and development.

¹³ For a further discussion of ‘archive’, see Lynne Huffer’s essay in this Special Issue.

configuration of history at a certain time.¹⁴ Furthermore, it does not change according to some Hegelian dialectic or some kind of rational principle that might itself belong to that a priori. The historical contingently takes on new forms. There can be, to employ Foucault's own terms, no formal a priori of this historical a priori.

In general, Foucault is interested not so much in the Kantian inquiry into the limits of knowledge, or the question of its legitimization (which he sees from Kant to Habermas), but in the relation between knowledge and power (what he will later designate as *pouvoir-savoir*), a focus that became more intense in his mature writings (see CA, 41–82). The later Foucault (through the nineteen seventies) emphasizes more and more the all pervasive, diffuse, 'always already there' (*toujours déjà là* (DE1, 503))¹⁵ multiform character of this power that is 'co-extensive with the social body' and akin to a field of forces and relations. This vague amorphous character of power/knowledge seems to challenge the very notion that its structural a priori can ever be identified, and thereby considerably weakens the power of Foucault's own analyses (as no doubt Husserl would have pointed out to him) in so far as they are meant to exhibit the underlying rationale at work.

In his critique of Husserl, Foucault rejects what he claims is Husserl's too formalistic and timeless a conception of the a priori. He is insistent that the transcendental is not located in the transcendental subject but 'in the object'—in history and the historical formations of culture. There is, then, for Foucault, an 'objective' transcendental whereas he believes Husserl remains mired in a metaphysical subjectivity characteristic of a certain stage of modernity that belongs to the episteme of 'man.' Accordingly, in *The Order of Things*, for instance, Foucault claims that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology must eventually 'topple over' into the 'sleep' of anthropology (OT, 341).

In order to calibrate Foucault's conception of the historical a priori in relation to what I shall argue is Husserl's richer conception, it is necessary first to outline Husserl's own evolving sense of the historical a priori.

2 Husserl's original sense of the a priori and the 'a priori of history'

Husserl may be regarded as the philosopher par excellence of the a priori and indeed was praised by Martin Heidegger (in his 1925 lectures) for his 'original sense of the a priori' that rescued it from Kant's subjectivism (Heidegger 1985, 72–75).¹⁶ Indeed Heidegger insists (*pace* Foucault) that Husserl's material a priori has nothing to do with subjectivity. Geometry, for instance, explicates the a priori of spatial relations—nor is it something deduced, rather it can be directly intuited from the form of the object. Heidegger is referring to the Third *Logical Investigation* (1901), where Husserl distinguished a formal and a material a priori. All 'material' scientific or

¹⁴ See Oksala (2005), 69.

¹⁵ Interestingly, this conception of the 'always already there' (*immer schon da*) is precisely the way phenomenology (both Husserl and Heidegger) characterize the a priori.

¹⁶ Foucault too recognizes this anti-subjectivist character of Husserl's critique of psychologism but seems to think Husserl relapsed into subjectivism in his transcendental phenomenology.

epistemic domains have an a priori. In *Ideas I* (1913) Husserl says that the a priori is too confused a term to use accurately and it should be reconceived as the eidetic (*Ideas I*, 7; *Hua III/1* 6). In many respects, Husserl is sharpening the concept of the a priori and removing various subjectivist and ‘psychological’ characterizations of it that he associated with Neo-Kantianism.

Although it is not until his *Crisis* texts that Husserl talks explicitly about the ‘a priori of history’ (*Apriori der Geschichte* (*Hua VI*, 362–63; 380)) as well as ‘the concrete historical a priori’ (*das konkrete historische Apriori* (*Hua VI*, 380; 383; 553)),¹⁷ he had been concerned about the nature of historical knowledge (and the human sciences more generally) already in his *Logos* essay, ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’ (1910/1911), where his target is historicism (targeting Dilthey without naming him). He subsequently gave a series of lectures on *Natur und Geist*, 1927, where he discusses figures such as Windelband and Rickert. The question of the meaning of history becomes more prominent in Husserl’s *Crisis* project, as is evident from the recent Husserliana Volume (*Hua XXXIX*) on the life-world (where the life-world is identified with the historical world, and he even speaks of the possibility of an ‘historical way’ to the reduction (*Hua XXIX*, 401)). It is evident that Husserl had been concerned with the problematic of communal living in history and the issue of ‘historicity’ (for which he employs more or less indiscriminately two terms: *Geschichtlichkeit*, *Historizität*)¹⁸ quite independently of, but also in dialogue with, Heidegger. Indeed, it is more likely that Husserl’s conception of spontaneous, absorbed ‘living-in’ (*Dahinleben*—cf. *Ideas I*, *Hua III/1* 59; and *Hineinleben*) influenced Heidegger’s conceptions of human collective living in the historical ‘we-world’ (Husserl’s *Wir-Welt*) rather than the other way around. Indeed, crucially, Husserl speaks not just of the historical a priori and the a priori of history but of the ‘a priori of historicity’ (*Apriori der Geschichtlichkeit* (*C*; *Hua VI*, 381)) which is, as in Heidegger, an essential structure of human life (*Leben*), (cf. *Hua XXIX*, 45; *Lebenswelt* as a priori, *XXIX*, 152).

Husserl—contra Foucault—understands history as having an intentional and teleological character. The *Crisis* is a ‘teleological historical reflection’ (*C*, 3; *Hua VI*, xivn3) that involves an intellectual ‘reconstruction’ (*Hua VI*, 20; 21; 354) and ‘backwards questioning’ [*Rückfragen*, (*Hua VI*, 185)] of the history of western culture, a process not unlike Foucault’s archaeology, as we have earlier intimated. In his draft ‘Foreword for the Continuation of the *Crisis*’ (*Hua VI*, 435–445), Husserl speaks of a ‘teleological-historical way’ into transcendental phenomenology and even asserts there that the *historical* mode of exposition of the *Crisis* is ‘not chosen by chance’ but rather is central to his task (*Hua VI*, 441) since he wants to exhibit the whole history of philosophy as possessing a ‘unitary teleological structure’ [*eine einheitliche teleologische Struktur*, (*Hua V*, I 442)]. Husserl in fact talks of the ‘unity of historicity’ [*Einheit der Geschichtlichkeit*, (*Hua VI*, 196)].

¹⁷ It is clear that Husserl identifies the ‘historical a priori’ and the ‘a priori of history’. His concept of the ‘a priori of historicity’ seems to be closer to the Heideggerian idea of historicity as an existentials of human existence.

¹⁸ The term ‘*Geschichtlichkeit*’ appears occasionally in Dilthey; he does not employ the term ‘*Historizität*’. The term in Husserl’s writings seems to be more or less independent to Heidegger’s explorations of historicity in *Being and Time*.

Foucault, on the other hand, as David Carr has shown in his essay in this Special Issue, regards teleology as belonging to an outmoded phase of the philosophy of history and rejects all stories of progress and uniform advance. But as Husserl asks in the *Crisis*: ‘Can we live in this world, where historical occurrence is nothing but an unending concatenation [*Verkettung*] of illusory progress and bitter disappointment’ (C, 7; Hua VI, 5).

3 Husserl’s conception of ‘inner history’

In a text from 1934, entitled ‘The History of Philosophy in Connection with the Historical Science and with Culture’, Husserl defines history as: ‘the science of the coming-to-be of humanity, understood in a personal sense, and its surrounding life-world [*Lebensumwelt*], as it has come to be in this genesis ... in the ongoing shaping of the standing cultural world’ (Hua XXIX, 53; my translation). This is quite close to the formulation in ‘The Origin of Geometry’ where Husserl says his ‘investigations are historical in an unusual sense, namely, in virtue of a thematic direction which opens up depth-problems [*Tiefenprobleme*] quite unknown to ordinary history’ (C, 354; Hua VI, 365). The emphasis here is on history understood in terms of the shaping of personal and interpersonal existence and the peculiar ‘interweavings’ (*Verflechtungen*) of the time-consciousnesses of living historicizing subjects.

Husserl’s ‘The Origin of Geometry’ was first published in a French journal in 1939,¹⁹ and thereby influenced French philosophy enormously. Husserl is here not interested in what he calls ‘factual history’ (*Tatsachenhistorie*), ‘as it really happened’ or ‘external history’—which is a positive science with its own rules—rather he wants to explore ‘inner history’ (*innere Historie*, (Hua VI, 386)) with its ‘inner historicity’ [*innere Geschichtlichkeit* (Hua XXIX, 399; 417)], i.e. how a sense of history and historical connectedness comes to be established, how humans situate themselves in unified cultural contexts and holistic traditions. Husserl wants to identify the necessary a priori features that make possible such historical living, making thematic ‘the general ground of meaning [*den allgemeinen Sinnboden*] upon which all such conclusions rest, has never investigated the immense structural a priori [*strukturelle Apriori*] which is proper to it’ (C, 371; Hua VI, 380).

Husserl is looking for the ground of meaning-constitution that makes history possible—not so much as a science but as living organized dynamic system—that in and through which humans grow and develop, are born, live and die, live and strive. Scientific systems such as geometry need to be understood in terms of their meaning-genesis (which is not the same as their empirical origination—neither Husserl nor Foucault are interested in the question of who was the first geometer or first discoverer of a new paradigm). Husserl thinks we can truly understand history only if we can understand how we constitute the time of the present *as present*. The

¹⁹ This text was edited by Eugen Fink and published in an issue of the journal in memoriam of Husserl who died the previous year. It is likely that Fink added the title which translates as ‘The Origin of Geometry as an Intentional-Historical Problem’.

present intentionally implies the past. Here there are necessarily essential structural laws [*Wesensstruktur* (Hua VI, 262; 306); Husserl speaks of discovering the ‘invariant essential structures of the historical world’, *die invariante Wesensstruktur der historischen Welt* (Hua VI, 363)]. Thus he writes in ‘The Origin of Geometry’ that ‘only the disclosure of the essentially general structure [*wesensallgemeine Struktur*]... can make possible historical inquiry [*Historie*] which is truly understanding, insightful, and in the genuine sense scientific. This is the concrete, historical a priori [*das konkrete historische Apriori*]’ (C, 371–72; Hua VI, 380).

The concrete historical a priori is actually the a priori of being human, of the peculiarly human manner of living in time, of being historical. This indeed has an invariant essential structure—a necessary way that the present unfolds from the past and the future is enfolded in the present. There are essential laws that can be uncovered here that govern the human historical process as such. Husserl wants to chart ‘essential’, ‘a priori’ or ‘eidetic history’, including identifying its hidden goal (*telos*) and ‘motivation’ (C §5, 11; Hua VI, 9). Husserl even refers paradoxically to the ‘essential structures of absolute historicity’ (*die Wesenstrukturen der absoluten Geschichtlichkeit* (C §72, 259; Hua VI, 262). For Husserl, human historicity or historicality is governed by absolute necessities and universal truths. This is what Husserl means when he talks of the ‘history of essence’ or ‘essential history’ (*Wesenshistorie* (C, 350; Hua VI, 362) and of a universal ‘a priori of history’ (*das Apriori der Geschichte* (C, 349; Hua VI, 362; and C, 351; Hua VI, 363). Husserl writes in another *Crisis* supplement:

When we methodically and systematically bring to recognition the a priori of history, is this itself a facticity of history? Does it not then presuppose the a priori of history [*das Apriori der Geschichte*]? The a priori is related to the being of humankind [*Das Apriori ist bezogen auf das Sein der Menschheit*] and the surrounding world that is valid for it in experience, thinking, and acting. But the a priori is something ideal and general [*das Apriori ist doch ein ideales Allgemeines*], which on the one hand refers to men themselves as objects and on the other hand is a structure within men, in us who form it (C, 349; translation modified; Hua VI, 362).

Independently of Heidegger, Husserl developed his own unique conception of historicity.

4 Husserl on historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit, Historizität*) as a universal a priori

Husserl’s mature phenomenology seeks to describe the a priori constitution of human cultural forms. Like Foucault, he recognizes the plurality of historicities at different ‘tiers’ or ‘levels’ that may or may not cohere into a single coherent narrative. How is the historical world constituted? Husserl’s answer is that human activities cohere together into traditions and shape specific cultures with their own particular ways of developing and unfolding that Husserl usually calls ‘historicities’ (*Geschichtlichkeiten, Historizitäten*) in the plural. *Historicity*, for Husserl, means

the way in which human groupings constitute and live out, across the interchanges and transmissions of the generations, a common history. There are different trajectories nevertheless there are universal a priori laws governing how individual histories will develop. These historicities evolve according to pre-established laws and also interweave with one another in complex ways that are similarly governed by a priori forms. In similar vein, Husserl claims there is an a priori structure of the life-world underpinning the actual life-worlds of different peoples, which have an undeniable relativity. Each historicity is a ‘unity of becoming’ (*Einheit des Werdens*). Moreover, every social grouping has its own ‘historicity’ or structural way of evolving its history (C; Hua VI, 504; my translation). There are different ‘levels’ (*Stufen*) of historicity, although these should not be understood simply as temporal stages, rather they indicate different levels of sophistication in the overall organization and outlook of a society. He writes in a *Crisis* supplementary text:

Historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] in the most general sense has always already been in progress [*in Gang*] and in this progress, it is rightly a universal, which belongs to human existence. It is a unitary becoming [*ein einheitliches Werden*] ... that can be seen as the unity of an organism (C; Hua VI, 502; my translation).

For Husserl, ‘historicity in its most universal sense’ is a necessary property belonging to human existence as such. In accounting for the process of the formation of a community and a tradition, Husserl often speaks of ‘communalization’ [*Vergemeinschaftung* (C, 262; Hua VI, 265; cf. also 322; 357). Humans ‘live-with-one-another’ (*Miteinanderleben* (C, 163; Hua VI, 166; see also C §28, 108; Hua VI, 110)) and cooperate as ‘co-subjects’ (*Mitsubjekte* (Hua VI, 167))] belong within a ‘co-humanity’ [*Mitmenschheit* (Hua VI, 168)] or ‘we-subjectivity’ [*Wirsubjektivität* (C, 109; Hua VI, 111)]. Persons grow and develop and have a shared sense of a common world formed by *tradition* (even if that tradition consists entirely of erroneous beliefs, as Husserl remarks [C, 326; Hua VI, 305]). A people (Husserl uses the word *Volk* to which the National Socialists gave a very particular intonation) live in a world of tradition, a ‘traditional world,’ a world of personal and social *interests* and involvements that is a priori for them. A community consciousness also engenders the sense of belonging to the *one, shared world* (and Husserl here recognizes the important contribution of a shared *language*).

For Husserl, human beings, as temporal historical agents, experience their lives as meaningful primarily because of historical, communal engagement with others, both the living and the dead (in the case of philosophers, perhaps predominantly with the dead). Our lives are directed towards ‘goals’ (*Zwecke*)—either ones we explicitly set ourselves (as our ‘life-vocation’, *Lebensberuf*) or ones we simply drift into and accept unquestioningly (see C, 379; Hua VI, 459). Husserl writes ‘that being human is teleological being and an ought to be’ (*das Menschsein ein Teleologischsein und Sein-sollen ist*) and ‘that this teleology holds sway in each and every activity and project of an ego’ (C, 341; Hua VI, 275–276). He considers history –and more particularly the history of philosophy—to be guided by purposiveness or what he calls ‘teleology’ (*Teleologie*) and the task of philosophy ‘is to make comprehensible the teleology in the historical becoming [*in dem*

geschichtlichen Werden] of philosophy' (C §15, 70; Hua VI, 71). It is not enough to identify the various goals at work in human history, it is also important to understand how human intentional agents are bearers of these goals.

Each communal history has a *telos* or goal. There must be "“meaning” or reason in history' (C §3, 9; Hua VI, 7). But, Husserl insists, there is a *telos* 'inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy' (C §6, 15; Hua VI, 13), namely, the idea of people seeking to live by philosophical reason, breaking with myth and tradition. Husserl raises the question whether this *telos* is illusory or merely an accidental accomplishment, one among many in the history of civilizations or whether it is, as he himself clearly believes: 'the first breakthrough [*Durchbruch*] to what is essential to humanity as such, its *entelechy*' (C §6, 15; Hua VI, 13). According to Husserl, moreover, and this has proved controversial, only Europe has a *teleology* in the strict sense, i.e. a driving force aiming at a universal goal, namely, the theoretical life (see C, 278; Hua VI, 323; and, earlier, Hua XXVII, 207). This European absolute idea is *theoria*, the purely theoretical attitude, effecting a break with cultural particularity and self-enclosedness and embracing infinite tasks. The theoretical attitude opens up a world of infinite tasks and unites humans together on the quest for rational 'self-responsibility' [*Selbstverantwortung* (C, 197; Hua VI, 200; and C, 283; Hua VI, 329)]. Henceforth human life has to be lived as an absolutely self-critical constant re-evaluation of all its aims and achievements. There is a 'concealed unity of intentional interiority' (*verborgene Einheit intentionaler Innerlichkeit*) in philosophy in a text (Hua XXIX, 362–420), written in 1936–1937. This conception is, of course, completely at odds with Foucault's view that the inner structures driving a particular episteme are intentionally constituted.

5 Conclusion

Despite his recognition of historical contexts and relativities, Husserl remains universalist and rationalist through and through. He would have been dissatisfied with Foucault's account of epistemes as discontinuous, subject to rupture and irruption. The identification of the historical a priori never leads to relativism for Husserl. Although Husserl does historize the a priori in a specific sense, at the same time he always emphasizes the invariant character of the laws that give birth to specific historicities. The meaningfulness of the historical world owes to the actions of human subjects who have their own a priori ways of projecting meaning into the future and taking up the remembered past. There have to be invariants in the structures of the relation of present to past. Human beings construct their cultural worlds according to the a priori structures governing historicity, generativity, and life in tradition. Of course, power and knowledge structures belong essentially to this life in tradition, but there is the possibility of epoch-transforming 'break-through' (*Durchbruch, Einbruch*) such as that carried through by a 'few Greek eccentrics' (C 289; Hua VI, 336). Finally, although in one sense cultural traditions constitute distinct worlds, in another more important sense, all cultures belong to the *one* world (all worlds are variations of *the* world) that provides their a priori

framework and maps their distinctive possibilities. Husserl would have regarded Foucault (as he earlier judged Dilthey) as having fallen prey to historicism and, ultimately, to irrationalism, and as having abandoned the genuine will-to-science which drives all human cognitive endeavor.

Appendix 1: Husserl abbreviations

Husserliana (Hua)

- Hua III/1 (1976). *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*. Karl Schuhmann (Ed.). Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua VI (1954). *Die Krisis de Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie*. Walter Biemel (Ed.). Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Hua XXVII (1989). *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*. Thomas Nenon & Hans Reiner Sepp (Ed.). Den Haag: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Hua XXIX (1991). *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1934–1937)*. Reinhold D. Smid (Ed.). Den Haag: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Hua XXXII (2000). *Natur und Geist. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1927*. Michael Weiler (Ed.). Den Haag: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Hua XXXIX (2008). *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916–1937)*. Rochus Sowa (Ed.). New York: Springer.

Translations and other texts

- C *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. David Carr (Trans.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Ideas I *Ideas Pertaining to A Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. D. Dahlstrom (Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014.

Appendix 2: Foucault abbreviations

- AS *L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.
- AK *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
- BC *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- CA “Qu’est-ce que la critique? (Critique et Aufklärung),” *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie* 84 (1990): 35–63.
- DE *Dits et écrits*, 1954–1988, 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1994.
- OT *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage, 1970.

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