

Experience and History

*Phenomenological Perspectives
on the Historical World*

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I

The Varieties of Experience

1. On the Concept of Experience and Its Curious Fate

Appealing to experience will have a familiar ring to anyone acquainted with the history of philosophy. The call, usually expressed as a call *back*, to experience has rung out at several key points in this history. One can see it in Aristotle's reaction to his mentor Plato, and thus as a founding motif of the entire Western tradition—but I will confine myself here to the modern period. This call is issued typically in opposition to the threat of too much *distance* between us and the world, the truth, the others, reality—a distance created by too much emphasis on reason, thought, abstraction; a distance that seems to leave us *out of touch* with what we seek. *Experience* is called upon to re-establish a contact that has been lost. The term “experience” is of course explicitly evoked in the initial proclamation of British empiricism by John Locke, in opposition to the excesses of continental rationalism. And the term returns to prominence in the American pragmatists' rejection of the heady atmosphere of late 19th-century British and American neo-Hegelian idealism. The term “*Erfahrung*” is central in Kant's philosophy, and it figures prominently in Hegel's early reactions to Kant, as we shall see. And it can be argued that something like the “return to experience” is part of the original impulse behind Husserl's phenomenology and the movement it spawned. The motto often associated with Husserl's phenomenology, “back to the things themselves,” really means *back to experience*. In Hegel as in Husserl, interestingly, “experience” and “phenomenology” are closely linked.

But by contrasting the appeal to experience with the focus on representation and memory, I do not mean to suggest that this appeal is without its problems. Anyone familiar with the history of modern philosophy knows that “experience” has meant many, widely different things. So different are the various meanings of this term that many are skeptical that a coherent meaning can be found and suspect that the term even harbors an internal contradiction. There is evidence that internal conflict in the application of this term led to the introduction in German of the distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* to deal with this disparity—a point we shall return to later. But two terms may not be enough to accommodate

the disparity. In a recent book called *Songs of Experience*, Martin Jay (2005) forswears attempting to find a unified meaning and turns his attention instead to the question of why people ever thought there was one: “My intention is not to provide yet another account of what ‘experience’ really is or what it might be, but rather to understand why so many thinkers in so many different traditions have felt compelled to do precisely that” (p. 1).

Partly as a result of this multiplicity of meanings, the term “experience,” so important in Western philosophy prior to the mid-20th century, has more recently fallen on hard times, to the point of almost disappearing entirely from sophisticated philosophical vocabulary. The term's vagueness may have been partly responsible for the fabled linguistic turn, mentioned above. Talk about language seemed capable of a great deal more clarity and precision than talk of something as messy and ambiguous as experience. In the early stages of analytic philosophy, language also seemed closer to formal logic, a subject which made great progress in the early 20th century. Later, many analytic philosophers mounted an attack on “foundationalism” in epistemology, and “experience,” at least in one of its senses, had played a key role as the supposed foundation for knowledge. We shall return in Section 8 to the relation between experience and foundationalism.

There is a further problem with the concept of experience for our topic in particular: “Experience” has meant many different things in philosophy, but one thing all its meanings seem to have in common is the idea that experience is rooted in the present. It is of the present, it is in the present, it opens us to the present, maybe the future as well. But experience of the past? If there is any sense to this, doesn't it just mean memory? If history is truly about the past, if history is the past, then experience seems excluded as a mode of access to it. Hence the need for representation: We need to *represent* it because we can't *present* it—that is, we can't experience it. Thus even if we can find a unified meaning in all the senses of experience, it would seem to be unrelated to, or unhelpful for, an understanding of history.

In the face of all this skepticism I am nevertheless convinced that the concept of experience *can* serve a useful function in philosophical inquiry and that it constitutes an authentic motif for approaching certain problems, particularly in the philosophy of history. My answer to Jay's implicit query is that so many thinkers pursued this meaning because they were on to something genuine and important. I will try to show that the term's notorious ambiguity can be reduced, if not to a single meaning, then at least to a manageable array of meanings that point to something real. As for the connection between experience and the present, that will have to await the conclusion of the historical examination we propose. My first project, then, before turning to the philosophy of history proper, is to undertake a brief but detailed examination of *experience*. Naturally my account cannot

be exhaustive—this is one way in which my project differs from Jay's—for the term has been used, often quite loosely, by many thinkers for all kinds of purposes. But for many key figures in the history of modern philosophy the term has played a central role, and it is to these thinkers that I shall turn my attention.

It may be thought that a historical account of the uses of the term "experience" is at odds with the phenomenological "return to experience" that I propose to offer here. Doesn't the phenomenological approach demand that we turn directly to our experience and describe its essential structures, rather than wasting out time exploring how our key term has been used? But my purpose in this chapter is as much analytical and historical. My point is to derive from historical examples a notion of experience that can serve as our focus in the phenomenology of history. Language, including philosophical language, has its history, and we need to be aware of the history of some of the key terms we use. My detour into the history of this term derives in part from my belief that the term "experience" is used rather too loosely by phenomenologists, especially those who write in English, and they (we) need to be aware of the hidden multiplicity of meaning we bring with us when we use this important term.

2. Experience and Innocence: The Empiricists

Martin Jay (2005, p. 1) derives the appealing title of his book from that of a poem cycle by William Blake, who published it in 1794 together with another cycle called *Songs of Innocence*. This pair of titles gives us a clue right away of what we are up against. When we encounter the opposition of *experience* and *innocence* we understand immediately what it means. Yet when we look at the way "experience" has been used in philosophy, especially and precisely in the British philosophy of the 18th century, we find that it means something very much like innocence, rather than its opposite.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke (1979) begins by attempting to reduce to absurdity the central idea of the rationalists, that of innate ideas. But if the mind is not born with any ideas, "How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store . . . Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From *Experience*." In his most famous metaphor, he supposes the mind to be, "as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters" (p. 104). Experience takes the form, first, of sensation, from "external, sensible Objects," and then reflection, from the operations of our own minds.

Experience, then, as Locke understands it, provides our first, innocent encounter with the world. It may be thought that our supposed infantile and totally blank minds are in fact our last and only state of innocence, and that our first

experience begins the long process of its loss. But this would be to overlook the normative and hortatory function of concept of experience in British empiricism. Already in the introduction to his essay, Locke introduces the tone of caution and modesty that motivates his inquiry. He wants to "enquire into the Original, Certainty and Extent of human knowledge," including "the Grounds of those Perswasions which are to be found amongst Men, so various, different, and wholly contradictory; and yet asserted some where or other with such Assurance and Confidence" (p. 44). By discovering the powers of the understanding, and "*how far they reach*," he may prevail on the mind of man "to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its Comprehension; to stop, when it is at the utmost Extent of its Tether" (p. 45).

Here we hear the tone of irritation, continued in the sarcasm of the attack on innate ideas in the next chapter, directed against those who claim to know it all. This theme of discovering the limits of human knowledge, and of deflating the pretensions of those who ignore them, will be continued, as we shall see, in Hume and Kant. Their work bespeaks a philosophical attitude that is a world away from that of the early modern rationalists. And for all three, the cure for the excesses of philosophy is to be found in the notion of *experience*. Here experience represents innocence in contrast to pretense, hypersophistication, needless complication, abstraction. If we modestly adhere to what is provided by experience, we can avoid these excesses. In this sense the call (back) to experience is a call for a return to innocence.

If we consider the primary features of experience, as the concept is used by Locke and his successors, we can see how the sense of "innocence" is attached to it, especially if we contrast these features with their opposites. Experience is *direct* rather than *indirect*, *immediate* rather than *mediated*. Nothing roundabout, then, no circuitous route to be traversed, no filter to be passed through or third term to be negotiated; just a plain confrontation between me and the thing (whatever it is), between the mind and its object. Experience is *passive* or *receptive* rather than *active*; it provides us with the *given* (to invoke Kant's later contrast) rather than the *thought*. It counters the danger, then, of the mind's constructing something out of its own resources, or of the imagination's conjuring up some fantasy, that might obscure the thing or intervene between me and it, that might substitute for the thing itself. Experience thus serves as the restraint on the mind's infatuation with its own abstractions, the wishful thinking that allows it to see what it wants to see. Experience can perform this function because it belongs, at least in the first instance, to *sense* rather than *intellect*, and sense is related directly, and causally, to the things it experiences. The *tabula rasa* receives the stamp, or imprint, of things (Plato had already used the metaphor of the wax tablet in the *Theaetetus*), which suggests that the guiding experience here may not be vision, as is often claimed, but *touch*: the *feel* of something

impinging directly on the skin. As we said before, experience puts us directly *in touch* with the world.

What strikes us here in the initial proclamation of empiricism is its decided anti-intellectualism, its suspicion of the activity of the mind, whose salient feature seems to be its constant temptation to construct something illusory, and in doing so to lose *touch* with the real world. The purpose of philosophy in this tradition is not to enhance, but primarily to restrain, the intellect.

This motif is intensified in Hume's work (1977). Like Locke he asks after the origin of our ideas, and answers that they come from *impressions*, those perceptions distinguished by their "force and vivacity," of which ideas are but the secondary, derived, and less vivid copies (p. 10). The term "impression," which Hume often uses interchangeably with "sensation" (p. 13), recalls Locke's *tabula rasa*, receiving the imprint of the outside world. But Hume has been chastened by reading Berkeley and knows the pitfalls of trying to infer the external object from the experience. The "universal and primary opinion of all men" that their experiences link them to "an external universe, which depends not on our perception," can find no proof or demonstration, certainly not by the "very unexpected circuit" of Descartes' appeal to the divine veracity; but it is also not supported by appeal to experience itself (p. 104). Causality is still involved in Hume's notion of impressions, but it is not that impressions are caused by the outside world; it is merely that ideas are engendered by impressions. Both "perceptions" belong entirely to the mind.

But this does not prevent empiricism from exercising its cautionary surveillance of the intellect. No sooner has Hume introduced impressions as the origins of ideas than he converts the derivation into a hortatory principle. It turns out that it is "but too frequent" that philosophical terms are "employed without any meaning or idea." When we suspect that this is happening, "we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?* And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion" (p. 13). Thus suspicion of the pretenses of philosophy turns out to be the motivating force, even more in Hume than in Locke, for the enunciation of empiricist principles. Hume had already warned us, in his discussion of "the different species of philosophy," that much metaphysics is "not properly a science; but arise[s] either from the fruitless efforts of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the human understanding, or from the craft of popular superstitions" (p. 5).

We know, of course, what Hume has in mind here, and this sentiment takes him a large step beyond the concerns of Locke. When popular superstition takes over from the inadequacies of human understanding, the result is *religion*—or at the very least the attempt by philosophers to shore up the doubts of the believer by rational arguments. The theme of religious faith and its relation to reason was at the center of early modern philosophy at least since Descartes, and will

continue to be so through Kant and Hegel. Reason and faith enter in, of course, because there seems universal agreement that religion can receive no warrant from *experience*. This will change later, as we shall see, but for the moment experience serves the philosophers' interest in caution, modesty, and severe misgivings about exceeding human capacities.

Since English usage is an important factor in understanding these philosophers, it is helpful to look at some of the OED's (1971) entries on "experience." *Sense three* is closest to Locke's "sensations" and Hume's "impressions": "the actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge." But *sense one* is "the action of putting to the test; trial" (pp. 429–430). These two senses come together in Locke and Hume: the claims of philosophy, religion, or metaphysics are put to the test by requiring that they conform to the actual observations provided by sensations or impressions.

But an interesting and, for us, all-important terminological shift has occurred in Hume's work. In the *Enquiry*, as in the first pages of the *Treatise*, as we have seen, Hume uses the terms "impressions," and sometimes "sensations," in conformity with Locke's notion of experience. But Hume himself does *not* use the term "experience" in this context at all. Instead, he introduces this term later in answer to another question. After asserting that the relation of "Cause and Effect" provides us with our only knowledge of "matters of fact" "beyond the evidence of our memory and senses" (1977, p. 16), he then asks "how we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect." He answers emphatically that "the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience" (p. 17). Now the opposition between "reasonings *a priori*" and "experience" might seem to conform to Locke's use of the latter term. But in fact, without telling us that he is doing so, Hume, whose mastery of the English language is unsurpassed, is opting for a *different sense of the term "experience"* from that used by Locke.

We can see this in the continuation of the sentence we just quoted. Knowledge of cause and effect "arises entirely from experience, when we find, that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other" (p. 17). "Constant conjunction," which becomes the central theme of Hume's analysis of causality in what follows, is something we can "find," not by a single, direct, and unmediated sense-impression, à la Locke's sense of experience, but by a repeated exposure to similar phenomena over time. Not only must we be aware of many phenomena, and recognize their similarity, we must also hold the past instances of these phenomena in our memory so that we can identify them with the present case. In the *Treatise* (1965) he puts it this way:

The nature of experience is this. We remember to have had frequent instances of the existence of one species of objects; and also remember,

that the individuals of another species of objects have always attended them, and have existed in a regular order of contiguity and succession with regard to them. (p. 87)

The temporality and complexity of experience in this sense, especially the involvement of memory, are thus far removed from the experiences of sensation, in Locke, and the "impressions" of Hume himself. We seem far removed, in other words, from the *innocence* to which we are enjoined to return by Locke and Hume in order to curb the excesses of metaphysics and theology.

But we are not far removed from an ordinary, English-language sense of the term "experience." This is the sense of experience that turns up when we say "she is an experienced mechanic," "he has learned from experience the value of thrift," etc. This is the kind of experience we lack as children and gain as we grow older. It accumulates over time and gives us a strong sense of what to expect and what to predict in the future. It derives from long-term acquaintance, not only with the things and people around us but also with our own capacities. In this sense we come to know ourselves, too, by experience.

We have obviously now returned to Blake's *opposition* between "experience" and "innocence," which, as we said, we can understand without any difficulty, which accords perfectly well with a sense of "experience" familiar to any English speaker. But it is important to recognize that this sense of experience differs radically from the one Locke uses to launch the empiricist movement, which is, I would argue, equally part of ordinary usage and common sense. Locke's "experiences," at least those of sensation, are characterized, as we saw, by simplicity, immediacy, directness, and passivity. Hume's "experience" is complex, mediated by time, indirect because it must traverse the accumulation of the past, and active at least in the sense that it involves the mind's act of identifying past and present instances. And it is not merely a matter of *sensation*, because it calls at the very least on another faculty, that of memory. While this is the way Hume uses the term "experience," it is important to remember that he retains both the concept and the role of "experience" in Locke's sense, calling it however by the name of "impression."

The distinction that we have uncovered in Locke and Hume between these two senses of the word "experience" raises many questions, most obviously that of the relation between them. Is Hume's "experience" made up or compounded of "experiences" in Locke's sense? We shall return to this and related questions. For now it is important to note that *two senses of experience* play an important role in the course of subsequent modern philosophy, sometimes more or less clearly distinguished, sometimes confused.

3. Experience in Kant and Hegel

Hume was a major influence on Kant, as Kant tells us in many places, and one of the most profound results of this influence was a prominence for the term "*Erfahrung*" that it had not had in the German- (and still partly Latin-) language world of continental rationalism in which Kant was trained. There seems little doubt that in many instances when he used this term, Kant thought he was using it in the empiricist sense that he had acquired from reading translations of Locke and Hume. As a result, *Erfahrung* has the same senses in his work that "experience" had accumulated by this time in English. But then Kant adds a third sense that goes beyond both, and is more than just a combination of the two.

I have no intention of surveying the many uses of the term "*Erfahrung*" in Kant's work, but the main outlines can be sought out in a few key passages. Consider this famous sentence, from the introduction to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1956, p. B1): "There is no doubt whatsoever that all our knowledge begins with experience [*Erfahrung*]; for how else should our faculty of knowledge be awakened to action, if not by the objects that touch our senses, and in part bring forth representations on their own, and in part set our capacity for understanding in motion so as to compare, tie together and separate these representations, and in this way to work up the raw material of sense impressions into a knowledge of objects . . . ? . . . Though all our knowledge begins *with* experience, however, it does not for that reason all arise *from* experience."

The echoes of both Locke and Hume are clear: In the first place Kant is agreeing with Locke that there are no innate ideas, in the sense of ideas *before* experience, and considers "experience" to mean the affection of the senses by external objects so as to produce "representations." (There is even something like the Lockean "ideas of reflection" in those mental activities of comparing, tying together, and separating, which are "set in motion" by the causality of experience, and applied to the "raw material" of sense.) And the latter, of course, are called by the Humean name of "impressions" (*Eindrücke*), a term Kant employs many times throughout the *Critique*. There is absolutely no doubt that the part of this sentence that I quoted *identifies* "experience" with causally produced "sense impressions."

The use of "experience," in the *Humean* sense of the accumulated observation of like cases over an extended time, is harder to find in Kant, but a hint of it may be found in this reference to Hume, also in the second edition: Since Hume did not think the understanding could produce concepts, like causality, from its own resources, he derived them from *Erfahrung*, "namely, from a subjective necessity arising from frequent association in experience . . . that is, *habit*" (p. B127). Thus Kant was fully aware that when Hume tried to found our understanding of

causality on "experience," he had this extended sense in mind. But Kant believed that experiences in the Lockean sense of sense-impressions could not be combined over time, through association, without the aid of another faculty, the understanding, which was capable of the activities of "comparing, tying together, and separating" mentioned in the earlier passage. In fact yet another faculty, that of the imagination, seems also to be involved. One of the big differences between Hume and Kant lies in the latter's insistence on a plurality of mental faculties that is not present or at least not made explicit in Hume. The "joining (*conjunctio*) of a manifold [of sense] can never come to us through the senses" (p. B129). Thus the unifying activity of the understanding must enter into a meaningful sequence of sensations, and we have already left the realm of both Lockean and Humean experience behind.

This opens the door to the *third* sense of *Erfahrung* in Kant, which becomes the dominant one. It even emerges at the end of the passage quoted above about all knowledge beginning with experience. Sensation produces impressions in us and sets in motion the activity of the understanding to "work up the raw material of sense impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called *experience*" (p. B1, my emphasis). Thus the very same sentence contains two distinct senses of the word *Erfahrung*. First, as we saw, it is identified with the impressions of the senses, as in Locke; and second it is identified as the "knowledge of objects" that results when the "raw material of sense impressions" is "worked up" (*verarbeiten*: worked on or worked over) by the activity of the understanding. There can be no doubt that two senses of *Erfahrung* are involved here, and that the sentence contains an embarrassing and confusing ambiguity. "Sense impressions" by themselves do *not* constitute knowledge of objects for Kant. But if *Erfahrung* is the knowledge of objects, then it makes no sense for Kant to say that not all knowledge arises from *Erfahrung*, since then he would be denying that knowledge of objects arises from knowledge of objects—which doesn't make much sense, in the context.

Thus Kant uses the empiricist, and specifically the Lockean, sense of "experience" to launch his account of knowledge and to attack empiricism as an account of it. But then he uses the term "*Erfahrung*" to designate the "knowledge of objects" which results when passively given sense-impressions are "worked over" by the spontaneous activity of the understanding. Between these first and third senses of experience the second, specifically Humean sense of experience, seems to be squeezed out of his account. Any temporally extended and cumulative sense of experience would involve the activity of the understanding; but Kant's treatment of the understanding is so focused on the role of judgment and the categories that time scarcely enters in. Even in the "schematism of the concepts of the understanding" where the temporal predicates of objects and events are correlated with categories, there is no sense of the cumulative sense of experience

described by Hume. Causality is disposed of in two sentences by referring to temporal succession (p. A144/B183). The "I think" in Kant is indeed a unity through time and change (both as inner sense and as unity of apperception), but nothing changes about the I; nothing accumulates.

Thus in a certain sense experience loses its temporality as this third and dominant Kantian notion of *Erfahrung* emerges. Something else is lost as well. Because of Kant's stress on the "activity" and even "spontaneity" of the understanding, experience has lost much (but not all) of the *passivity* associated with it in empiricism. While the understanding depends on the given of sense to make its empirical judgments true, and while the range or scope of the understanding is limited by what it can possibly sense, Kant views the mind as primarily active, legislating to nature, and laying down the conditions under which anything can count as an object. In one way this is odd because the German word *Erfahrung* strongly suggests passivity, even more than the English "experience." In some cases it suggests what happens to or befalls us, as opposed to what we do.

However, there is also a great gain over the empiricist notion in Kant's concept of *Erfahrung*: as "knowledge of objects" it places us in relation to the "real world" around us and not merely to private sense-contents of our own minds, as suggested in empiricist accounts.

But if the temporally extended and cumulative character of experience in the Humean sense gets lost in Kant, it is found again in Hegel. His *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1952) bears the subtitle *Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewußtseins*. As Hegel uses the term "*Erfahrung*" it has almost nothing to do with the empiricist (and Kantian) notion of sense-impressions. "Sense certainty" is discussed by Hegel, but only to be quickly surpassed in the development of consciousness as a false attempt to ground itself on something solid (pp. 86–87). In fact, *Erfahrung* in Hegel's sense here is a long series of mostly false starts through which consciousness slowly and painfully advances to an awareness of itself. It is the pathway of doubt, "or more properly the pathway of despair" (p. 67), in which consciousness repeatedly thinks it has hold of reality "in itself" (*das Ansich*), only to find that it has only an appearance. "Phenomenology," as the name implies, is the account of these (mere) appearances, but it is also the account of consciousness' constant dissatisfaction with appearance and its drive to go beyond it. Consciousness bears within itself the standard (*Maßstab*) for distinguishing between appearance and reality (p. 71), so phenomenology has no need to impose standards of its own; it can merely stand back and observe the process (p. 72). Phenomenology does however provide a display (*Darstellung*) (p. 66) of the "sequence of shapes which consciousness runs through on this pathway," a "detailed story [*Geschichte*] of the *elevation* [or education, *Bildung*] of consciousness itself into science" (p. 67).

Hegel's use of the term "*Bildung*" has led commentators to see the *Phenomenology* as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age narrative. *Erfahrung* is the long process of maturation through temporal accumulation, trial and error, learning from mistakes. This is very close to Hume's sense of experience, but it adds the negative element, the recurring role of mere appearance and error, that Hegel calls the "dialectical movement" (p. 73). It is also to be noted that the protagonist of this narrative has acquired a name not found in previous British or French philosophy—though it is already important in Kant. "Consciousness" (*Bewußtsein*), called in its initial stages "natural consciousness," is what goes through or has this experience. In the long process of experience, however, this protagonist will gradually change its name, first to "self-consciousness" and then, finally, to *Geist*, its final destination and fully mature form, so that Hegel's work can in turn fulfill its own destiny and live up to its name, as a phenomenology, not of consciousness, but of *Geist*.

4. So Far: Three Concepts of Experience

Let us take stock of this brief survey of the development of the concept of experience from Locke to Hegel. We can simplify our already simplified historical account by saying that three distinct concepts emerge as the primary senses of the terms "experience" and "*Erfahrung*."

The *first* is closely tied to the senses, and is thus passive, direct, and causal in nature. To return to the terms suggested by Martin Jay's borrowing from Blake, this is experience *as innocence*. Some version of this concept of experience is found in Locke, Hume, and Kant. The *temporality* of experience in this sense does not on the whole come into play, or at least is not thought to be a significant aspect of its nature. Presumably this sort of experience does take place in time, but its temporality or temporal extension, at least in the sense of its growth or change over time, is not part of the role that it plays in mental life. Primarily connected with knowledge and with epistemology, experience in this sense is thought to *ground* knowledge by connecting the mind directly to what it knows.

The *second* concept of experience, found primarily in Hume and Hegel, puts temporality at the center of significance. And this is temporality not just in the sense of taking time or taking place over time, but in the sense of temporal accumulation and change or growth over time. This concept of experience is also related to knowledge, but whereas a single sense-experience can ground some knowledge-claims (I know it's raining because I see it raining), extended examples of related cases observed over time are required for others—as in Hume's analysis of our knowledge of cause and effect. This is the sense of experience that

is *opposed to innocence*. Know-how, skill, savvy, and sometimes wisdom are associated with experience in this sense. It is hard to say whether experience in this sense should be counted active or passive. Repeated exposure to certain phenomena, like the behavior of billiard balls, in Hume's example, can produce certain habits in us, which we both acquire and apply to new cases quite automatically. Hegel's account of experience as trial and error, by contrast, suggests scientific inquiry and the activity of experimentation. Whereas passivity, as opposed to activity, is an important feature of experience in the first sense, what counts about experience in this second sense is not whether it is active or passive.

Kant's "full-fledged" and eventually dominant concept of *Erfahrung* goes far beyond the first concept by adding the contribution of the active or spontaneous faculty of understanding to the mix. This concept of *Erfahrung* should actually count as our *third* sense of the term that goes beyond the other two, and which we shall henceforth mostly ignore. But this Kantian concept nevertheless contains within itself this first "empiricist" sense of experience in a very important role, that of limiting the pretensions or ambitions of knowledge. When Kant talks of our knowledge being *limited* to experience or possible experience, he is referring to the passive and direct—"intuitive" or "given" in his sense—component provided by "sensibility."

Part of the confusion surrounding the term "experience" is that none of these philosophers ever clearly distinguishes the three concepts we have uncovered here. That is precisely why it is necessary to undertake the present investigation. But the distinction itself is clear enough. While these three main concepts of experience are distinct from each other, they are also clearly related to each other, although again, none of the authors we mentioned gives us a hint of what that relation might be. The simplest way to express the relation between the first two senses is to say that experience in the second sense is made up of experiences in the first sense. Thus for Hume, an "impression" of billiard balls colliding (an experience in the first sense), added to many impressions of the same kind over time, produces the sort of experience (in the second sense) that can lead to our idea of causal connection.

5. Dilthey, Husserl, and a New Word: *Erlebnis*

So far we have been speaking of the two *nouns*, in English and German, "experience" and "*Erfahrung*," generally thought to translate each other. In the post-Hegelian period of German philosophy, however, the German language already had at its disposal two roughly synonymous *verbs* that can be translated as "to experience:" *erfahren*, obviously the basis for *Erfahrung*, and *erleben*. Containing

as it does the root *leben*, to live, the latter term lends itself to the translation "to live through." H. G. Gadamer, who traces the use of this word back as far as Goethe's time, says that it conveys above all the "immediacy with which something real is grasped," as opposed to what one knows through hearsay, inference, or conjecture (Gadamer 1965, p. 57). Eventually the verb is substantivized as *Erlebnis* (sometimes translated into English as "lived experience") and is widely used, along with the earlier standard term "*Erfahrung*," by philosophers up to the present day. So common is the use of the two terms in 20th-century philosophy that Gadamer notes with surprise that the term "*Erlebnis*" itself did not come into wide use until the 1870s, and that it is totally unknown in the 18th century and even in Schiller and Goethe. According to Gadamer it is Wilhelm Dilthey who, though he did not invent it, is primarily responsible for the prominence of the new term. He gave it a key conceptual function in this thought, used it in the title of a popular book (*Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*), and elevated it to point where it became a fashionable term and was even occasionally employed as an untranslated foreign word in other European languages (p. 58).

It is easy to conjecture, though it is only conjecture, that the term "*Erlebnis*" comes to the fore as a response to the ambiguity surrounding the term "*Erfahrung*." Kant and Hegel were the most important philosophers in Dilthey's background, and it cannot have escaped him that these two philosophers were using the term in radically different ways. The Hegelian sense of *Erfahrung* seems to have won out in Dilthey's usage, and it turns up in such expressions as *Lebenserfahrung* (life-experience), linked to such key terms as *Lebensverlauf* (the course of life) and *Lebenszusammenhang* (the coherence of life) (Dilthey 1970, pp. 159ff.). The emphasis is on the long term and cumulative, then, and Dilthey needs a word for the direct, immediate episodes of consciousness in the short term. This is where *Erlebnis* comes in, and the term plays a significant role in his account of human life. In many ways it seems to correspond to our *first* sense of experience, the one closest to Locke, Hume, and some uses of Kant.

Gadamer's interpretation of Dilthey bears this out. *Erlebnis*, he writes, signifies for Dilthey "the immediately given, which is the ultimate material for all imaginative constructs" (Gadamer, p. 59). It is that which "precedes all interpretation, construction [*Verarbeitung*] and mediation" (p. 57). It occupies the place held by "sensation" in earlier (and some later) epistemologies, in the sense that it is foundational and prior to and innocent of all conceptual mediation. Dilthey shares with other epistemologists the idea of the *Aufbau*, that of an edifice of knowledge, applied in his case not to the natural but to the human sciences. Here *Erlebnisse* are the ultimate building-blocks of which the whole thing is constructed. Yet they are not meaningless imprints or causal impulses for Dilthey, but ultimate units of meaning (Gadamer, p. 61).

This determines the unique relation they bear to the longer span of the life to which they belong. "The course of a life [*Lebensverlauf*] consists of parts, of lived experiences [*Erlebnissen*] that are inwardly connected with each other" (Dilthey 1970, p. 240). "It is only because life itself is a structural nexus [*Strukturzusammenhang*] in which lived experiences stand in experienceable relations that the connectedness of life is given to us" (p. 241). The key idea of the connectedness or coherence of life (*Zusammenhang des Lebens*) exemplifies the most important relation in Dilthey's thought: "the relation of whole and parts" (p. 241). Reflecting on biography and autobiography, as the attempt to grasp the coherence of the whole of a life, Dilthey compares life to a melody in relation to the notes that make it up, or a sentence in relation to its component words (pp. 272, 290). As much as the whole owes its meaning to the parts that make it up, the part derives its meaning from the whole to which it belongs. We engage in individual experiences which we take to be parts of longer-range plans, and these in turn are vaguely grasped against the background of our life as a whole. Yet this whole is not static, but is constantly subject to reshaping (*Gestaltung*, pp. 245, 292) as our experiences and our plans change. Thus if *Erlebnisse* are building-blocks, they are not detachable, not independent parts that could exist without the whole to which they belong. Dilthey may want to consider them prior to conceptual mediation or explicit interpretation, but as meaningful units they are nevertheless determined in their sense by the whole.

From these basic elements, Dilthey moves on to the activities of understanding and interpreting experience, life, and its expressions that make up the human sciences. It is here, of course, that he articulates the well-known principle and problem of the hermeneutical circle: "we must form the whole from the parts, and yet it is the whole that imparts meaning and that accordingly assigns the part its place" (p. 324f.). It can easily be seen that this pattern of understanding, at the theoretical or "scientific" level in the humanities, is just a replication on a higher plane of the form of experience itself.

Another philosopher for whom the term "*Erlebnis*" is important, and who insists on the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, is Edmund Husserl. Though Husserl (1859–1938) was a generation younger than Dilthey (1833–1911), the two interacted significantly in the last decade of Dilthey's life. At the explicit level, strangely enough, the younger man influenced the older: Dilthey praises Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–01) as offering an important methodological foundations for his own work, whereas Husserl seems puzzled by this praise coming from a philosopher about whose work he has significant reservations. But Husserl may have been subject to the unacknowledged influence of Dilthey's use of *Erlebnis*. In fact, he uses the term in a very similar way, though he acknowledges that there is also a "popular" sense of *Erlebnis* that he wants to avoid (Husserl 1968, p. 351). For Husserl *Erlebnisse* are real mental "episodes" or

"events" (*Vorkommnisse, Ereignisse*) which, "changing from moment to moment, connected and interrelated in different ways, make up the internal unity of consciousness of each psychic individual. In this sense perceptions, imaginative or pictorial representations, acts of conceptual thought, conjectures or doubts, joys and pains, hopes and fears, wishes and willings, just as they occur in our consciousness, are *Erlebnisse*" (p. 347). He says that this is the sense used by "the modern psychologist" and mentions Wilhelm Wundt by name, not Dilthey. But it is clear that Husserl, like Dilthey, has in mind the simplest and most basic units of consciousness when he uses *Erlebnis*, not the longer-term sweep of experience in the Hegelian or Humean sense of *Erfahrung*.

Husserl's notion of *Erfahrung*, on the other hand, does not quite fit into our classification so far. It is certainly not the Hegelian-Humean sense at all. We can understand it best by starting from Husserl's *Erlebnisse*, and the list of examples he gives of them above. These are first classified as intentional or non-intentional, i.e., with respect to whether or not they refer essentially to an object, whether or not they are of something. Pains, sensations, and certain other feelings, according to Husserl, are *Erlebnisse* that are not intentional—that is, they do not have an object: we just *have* them (pp. 391ff.). All the other items on the list are essentially intentional: We perceive *something*, wish or hope for *something*, doubt, enjoy, or fear *something*, and so on. These are then all *intentionale Erlebnisse*, which Husserl also calls *akte* (*Akte*). Of these *only perceptions* (seeing, hearing, touching, etc.) would count as *Erfahrungen*, in Husserl's terminology. Thus all *Erfahrungen* are *Erlebnisse*, but not all *Erlebnisse* are *Erfahrungen*. Husserl's sense of the latter is in fact closest to Kant's *second* or "full-blown" notion of *Erfahrung*, as it connects us not just with sensations but with objects in the world. At the same time he would reject Kant's notion that experience is somehow sensation fitted into concepts, or concepts latched onto sensations; Husserl will insist (for example in his late work *Erfahrung und Urteil*) that perceptual experience is flowing and infused with sense, but at the same time pre-conceptual and pre-judgmental. One of the best ways to think of Husserl's phenomenology is to see it as an attempt to find a terrain between Kant's starting point of "blind" sensations and "empty" concepts, and the resulting false problem of how to bring them into relation with each other.

The closeness of Husserl's and Dilthey's concepts of *Erlebnis* suggests that Dilthey was right to see a deep affinity between their works, in spite of obvious differences of temperament and style. They share not only the idea of what an experience is but also their idea of its context and its relation to the whole to which it belongs. Gadamer expresses this affinity well: "Just as Dilthey starts with *Erlebnis* only in order to arrive at the concept of psychic coherence (*Zusammenhang*), so Husserl sees the unity of the stream of experience (*Erlebnisstroms*) as prior and essentially necessary for the individuality of experiences (*Erlebnisse*).

The thematic investigation of the life of consciousness must overcome the initial point of departure, the individual experience, [for Husserl] exactly as for Dilthey. In this sense there is a genuine commonality between these two thinkers. Both return to the concreteness of life" (Gadamer, p. 236).

6. From Mysticism to Pragmatism: Buber, James, Dewey

This holistic relation between the *Erlebnis* and the life of consciousness or stream of experience as a whole, found in both Husserl and Dilthey, is of great importance, and we shall return to it shortly. In the interest of completeness, however, we should pause to consider two other concepts of experience that made their appearance in the early 20th century. Gadamer notes that the newly coined term *Erlebnis* became "fashionable" and Husserl alludes to a "popular" notion of experience from which he wishes to distance himself. Thus the word took on a meaning of its own apart from its more or less technical use by these two philosophers. Gadamer notes its use to indicate a particularly intense, almost mystical sort of experience, associated with the romantic reaction to "the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment" and a "protest against modern industrial society." He says that the concept implies a connection to totality, to infinity, that is available to the individual outside the bounds of reason and the understanding. At the beginning of the 20th century the words *Erleben* and *Erlebnis* "became slogans with an almost religious tone. The revolt of the Youth Movement against bourgeois *Bildung* and its forms of life stood under this sign, the influence of Nietzsche and Bergson took this direction," as did the Stefan George circle, not to mention the "seismographic finesse of Georg Simmel's reaction to these developments" (Gadamer, p. 59). Martin Jay speaks of Martin Buber's "cult of *Erlebnis*" in the years leading up to World War I. According to Jay, Buber had already acquired the concept of *Erlebnis* by studying in Berlin with both Dilthey and Simmel, but then went on to associate it with the piety and mysticism of the Hasidic Jews of Eastern Europe (Jay, pp. 122ff.). Walter Benjamin later explicitly attacked Buber's and similar valorizations of *Erlebnis* and urged a return to the sense of *Erfahrung* as building up gradually over time, of the sort he associated with the "walker in the city" or *flaneur* (p. 334). For Benjamin as for Buber we somehow were supposed to choose between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, and Benjamin and Buber were on opposite sides. (See also Tengelyi 2004.)

This sense of *Erlebnis* is far indeed from Dilthey and Husserl, as it is from most of the senses of experience that we have encountered so far, not only by its mystical tone and religious direction, but also because it has become a valiative concept—not the stuff of everyday life but an exceptional state of consciousness that we strive to attain: a release from the everyday. In the English-speaking

world something similar occurred when William James started writing about the *Varieties of Religious Experience*. James (2004) writes as a philosopher and psychologist, but, as is well known, is in part drawing on his own religious sensibilities and his family background in Swedenborgian pietism. In any case the word "experience" is being used here in a sense that was rigorously denied it in the British Empiricist tradition and in Kant, as well as in the neo-Kantian and neo-positivist European philosophies of the day (see p. 39 and his remarks on Kant, pp. 58–59). But James' interest in experience, and his use of the term, goes far beyond its relevance for religion, especially in his late works. The posthumous collection *Essays in Radical Empiricism* includes the essay "A World of Pure Experience." Here and in other late essays James (1971) seems to be in search of a primitive, unmediated union with the world, prior to any conceptual or linguistic divisions, prior even to the distinction between subject and world. Here his work is closest to that of Henri Bergson's notion of pure duration.

Meanwhile a follower of James in the American pragmatist tradition, John Dewey, accorded a central role to the word "experience" in his own thought. In the hands of Dewey, in such works as *Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience*, the emphasis is partly on the *methodological* character of experience, already found in art and science, and now advocated for philosophy as well. Determined to overcome the Cartesian opposition of subject and object, Dewey claims that experience "is of as well as in nature" (Dewey 1958, p. 4a). It includes "what men do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also how men act and are acted upon . . . in short, processes of *experiencing*" (p. 8). He opposes the reduction of experience to knowledge "at the expense of objects of enjoyment and trouble, friendship and human association, art and industry" (p. 32). What he proposes is not so much a study of philosophy as "a study, by means of philosophy, of life-experience." An empirical philosophy is "a kind of intellectual disrobing" where we attempt to "divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our time and place." Of course we can never fully carry off this "recovery of primitive naiveté." But a "cultivated naiveté," an "artful innocence and simplicity" is, he says, attainable (pp. 37f.).

And so we seem to have come full circle, with the return to experience as the return to innocence! And yet it is easy to see that Dewey's incredibly broad, almost unmanageable concept of experience includes elements of much that we have encountered so far. Clearly his concept shares certain features with *Lebensphilosophie*, and is perhaps closest to what we have identified as the long-term, cumulative, trial-and-error sense of experience found in Hume and Hegel. What is certainly excluded is the Lockean notion of sense-impressions, certain aspects of which survive in Hume and Kant. In fact Dewey explicitly opposes the

sense-data theory (see pp. 16f.). Likewise the Diltheyan–Husserlian notion of *Erlebnis* is definitely not what Dewey has in mind, and his concept is closer to that of *Erfahrung*, especially in the Hegelian sense. But Dewey would insist, against the neo-Hegelianism that he knew quite well in its late 19th-century form, that his is a naturalistic, not an idealistic philosophy.

7. Taking Stock Again: How Many Concepts of Experience?

In Section 4 we summarized our discussion of Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel by saying that we had isolated two *main* concepts of experience: *Sense one* is exemplified by the largely passive sensations or sense-impressions in Locke, Hume, and Kant, and *sense two* corresponds to Hume's "experience" and Hegel's *Erfahrung*. We also had to admit a *third* in Kant's "full-blown" sense of *Erfahrung*, which combined sensation and concept, passivity and activity. In the last two sections we discussed several more philosophers, primarily Dilthey, Husserl, Buber, James, and Dewey. How do their concepts of experience compare with what we found before?

I think it is fair to say that the quasi-mystical, quasi-religious sense of *Erlebnis* that Gadamer associates with the romantic reaction to rationalist modernity, and that Jay describes as Buber's "cult of *Erlebnis*," together with what James describes as "religious experience," stands apart from the other senses we have discovered. It is not generally attributed a temporal spread and cumulative character, but is more likely to be episodic and singular (see James 2004, p. 70, where he speaks of the "brief duration" of religious experiences). Indeed it may involve an experiential escape from the temporal altogether. It is also linked to feeling and sentiment, and is thus perhaps related to the senses rather than the intellect. To this extent it is closer to the empiricist notion (*sense one*) of experience; yet its object, conceived as Totality, Infinity, or God, is completely unlike the narrow focus mostly attributed to experience by the empiricists and by Kant. Indeed for these latter thinkers, whatever the status of these *transcendent* objects, as Kant would call them, they are *not* available to experience. Finally, as we have seen, this notion of experience belongs in a normative scheme in which it is accorded great value in contrast to other, more mundane types of experience. For all these reasons I think we can call this a *fourth sense* of experience that needs to be kept apart from the others.

But what of Dilthey, Husserl, and Dewey? We have already noted the similarity between Dewey's concept of experience and that (*sense two*) of Hume and Hegel, in spite of his talk of a "return to innocence." The same can be said of Dilthey's use of *Erfahrung* when he speaks of *Lebenserfahrung* in connection with other important concepts like *Lebensverlauf* and *Zusammenhang des Lebens*. We

have also noted a Husserlian sense of *Erfahrung* which is very close to Kant's "full-fledged" sense of experience (*sense three*).

What of *Erlebnis*, then, as used by Dilthey and Husserl? We have noted that, as Gadamer points out, there are many similarities between Dilthey's use and the empiricist concept based in sensation (*sense one*): *Erlebnisse* are immediate and direct; they are episodic units with the flow of consciousness and to that extent can be considered the building-blocks of an edifice of knowledge. Husserl's *Erlebnisse* share many of these features, though they figure in a much more complex philosophy of mind that diverges from Dilthey's, in part because it wants to be more than just an epistemology of the human sciences.

8. Experience and Foundationalism

Without too much distortion, then, we can assimilate Dilthey's and Husserl's *Erlebnisse* to *sense one* of experience. But there is a major qualification that must be mentioned. One of the roles accorded to *sense one* of experience in the epistemologies of the empiricists and Kant is that of a *foundation* for knowledge. Sensation in particular, as envisioned by Locke, Hume, and Kant, is a passively received "impression" and as such, at least for Locke and Kant, constitutes a causal link between us and the world. It provides the *given* with which our knowledge begins and against which all our knowledge is measured. It is, in a word, what can make our judgments about the world true. In this sense, experience sets up severe limits to the scope of our knowledge and constrains what we can claim to know about the world. In this role experience maintains its "innocence," as we saw, in the sense that it is uncontaminated by interpretation, conjecture, or bias; and we can always return to it for verification of our knowledge-claims. In the post-Humean Empiricist tradition extending up to the neo-positivists and the logical Empiricists of the 1930s, "experience" continued to play this foundationalist role.

It is well known that, in this very same tradition, after World War II, this notion of experience came in for severe criticism. Sellars (1963) attacked the "myth of the given," and for Quine (1980) this was one of the "two dogmas of empiricism." Epistemological "foundationalism" was severely criticized, and in the philosophy of science the idea of pure observation, or observation sentences that were not in some sense theory-laden, was called into question. Thomas Kuhn's influential work (1996) on theory-change in science contributed to this view. The anti-foundationalist trend can be said to go hand in hand with the "linguistic turn" in both the analytic and the continental traditions, since it is language that is thought to get in the way of anything like pure experience and to impose on it a conceptual framework. The metaphor of language games,

introduced by Wittgenstein (1964)—the idea of different games, of rules and their application, of the interplay of languages games—which has been central to the development of analytic philosophy since World War II, leaves no more room for the idea of experiences in the empiricist sense. Thus there are few who still wish to defend the foundational role for "experience" in this sense, though the debate continues, especially in the social sciences, where post-empiricism and post-foundationalism join hands with post-modernism and raise the specter of relativism. (See Joan Scott 1991 and John McDowell [1994] in this regard.) The idea of an extra-linguistic and hence extra-conceptual access to reality, providing a foundation for our theoretical claims, has fallen on hard times. And with this one of the key roles for experience in *sense one* has been undermined.

It is odd that this battle was still being fought in the 20th century, since in a way the foundational role of sensation had already been questioned by Hume and Kant. For Hume both "impressions" (our *sense one* of experience) and long-term, cumulative experience (*sense two*) only seem or pretend to provide foundations for claims about the external world and about "necessary connection," i.e., causation, respectively. But in fact they do no such thing. We have already noted that for Hume our experience can provide no ground for our natural belief in the external world, and with regard to causality, all we have is the strong belief that the future will be like the past, a belief which our past experience is never enough to justify. But the positivists who so admired Hume did not subscribe to his deep-rooted skepticism.

As for Kant, a certain skepticism animates his attack on traditional metaphysics as well, and what he says about sensations or impressions is that they can never ground or found our judgments about the empirical world. The objectivity of these judgments requires that they be subsumed under *a priori* concepts or categories that come from the understanding, not from the world. And the objectivity they do permit applies only to appearances, never to things-in-themselves. Thus the late 20th-century attack on foundationalism has its antecedents in the work of Hume and Kant.

One way of putting the result of this development is to say that certain experiences we *have* do not provide the foundation or guarantee for knowledge that philosophers traditionally claimed for them. But don't we still *have* those experiences? One of the results of the anti-foundationalist trend, and of the linguistic turn in general, is that philosophers act as if these experiences—perceptual experiences, for example—no longer exist or take place at all, or perhaps never did—we only thought they did! Philosophers no longer want to talk about them, preferring to talk about language, language use, the conceptual schemes that go with it, etc., because that is where the focus of epistemology now lies.

And yet a case can be made that we still have the same experiences we always did, which possess many of the characteristics ascribed to them under *sense*

one—simplicity, directness, passivity—experiences which *seem* to or, more strongly, are *felt as* putting us in immediate touch with the real world around us. One must remember that there are two related but different concerns that have animated the treatment of “experience” in modern philosophy: One is traditional epistemology, concerned with the legitimacy and extent of our knowledge; and the other is a theory of mind or consciousness, which seeks to map and describe the different functions that make up our mental life. It can be argued that philosophers have never completely separated these questions, and that the concerns of one domain have affected the concerns of the other. The present example is a case in point: Once the epistemological–foundational role of experience in *sense one* was denied, this sort of experience vanished from the map of the mind as if it had never been!

Returning now to Dilthey and Husserl and their concept of *Erlebnis*, it must be said that both philosophers had little interest in the foundational role of experience and were focused instead on the theory of mind or consciousness. This may seem a strange claim in view of the fact that both identified their enterprise as epistemological. For Dilthey the idea of *Erlebnisse* as building-blocks in an *Aufbau* of knowledge might seem to fit into the foundationalist scheme. But this metaphor fits as well with the theory of mind as it does with the foundationalist enterprise. Dilthey is interested more in how we arrive at the idea of the historical world, starting with *Erlebnisse*, than with the validity or objectivity of our judgments about it. As for Husserl, the manner in which perceptual experiences provide the intuitive “fulfillment” for perceptual judgments is of great interest to him, but perceptual experiences are for him always “inadequate,” i.e., one-sided and corrigible, and always predetermined by the intention they are meant to fulfill. Especially after he introduces the “*epoché*” of the phenomenological reduction in 1913, the whole question of the existence of the “real world” is bracketed (Husserl 1950, pp. 57ff.). But *Erlebnisse*, perceptual and otherwise, as basic elements in the makeup of conscious life, retain their importance from a non-foundational perspective. He can still describe these experiences as carrying the meaning of directness, of a felt contact with the real, and he can talk about how the different senses corroborate each other in perceptual experience, without as an epistemologist making the claim that they offer up certain and unassailable foundations for our judgments about the world.

The distinction that I am employing here between epistemology and philosophy of mind is admittedly my gloss on these developments and does not stem from the philosophers themselves, Dilthey and Husserl included. In fact, like many philosophers before and since, they did not clearly enough distinguish between the questions proper to each, and their terminology does not help. As noted, Husserl describes phenomenology early on as a contribution to epistemology, and both he and Dilthey make liberal use of the terms “foundation,”

“grounding,” etc. Both are interested in questions of evidence, verification, and objectivity. These are traditional epistemological concerns, and to the extent they deal with them, they are still doing epistemology. But I am using the terms “epistemology” and “foundation” in the strict sense inherited from Descartes, i.e., the project of “proving” the existence of the “external world” and providing unassailable validation of our scientific knowledge of it. Kant called it the “scandal of philosophy” that the former had never been achieved. His readers have never been convinced that he accomplished it himself, and the truth is that he contributed instead to undermining the validity of the very project. Heidegger said that real scandal was that anyone ever thought of this as a problem and in this, in my view, he expresses the implicit view of his predecessors Dilthey and Husserl.

It is true that a move away from foundationalist concerns and toward a descriptive theory of mind can lead to important revisions in our account of experience. The classical empiricist notion of sensations, for example, is assailed by Husserl as descriptively inaccurate and conceptually confused. The *red* of this apple is a feature of the object in the world, not of my mind—which is neither red nor any other color. The use of the causal/imprinting metaphor as a way of somehow getting the external world into my consciousness is a case of distorting the descriptive character of experience in order to save the foundationalist enterprise. Merleau-Ponty (1945, pp. 9ff.), following Husserl’s lead, carries this critique of empiricism even farther, arguing that “sense-data,” as they have been used by empiricists, are theoretical constructs rather than anything we actually experience. They are meant to explain, rather than describe, our experience, and justify our knowledge. Thus the concerns of explanation and justification have been confused with and contaminated the project of description. Yet both philosophers want to hold on to some notion of sensation or sensing as a genuine feature of experience. Sensation, according to these phenomenologists, while sharply distinguished from the *sense qualities* or *properties* of objects, is a non-intentional element or component (*reel enthalten*, in Husserl’s language) of the intentional experience of sense-perception.

Sensation thus retains a role in the descriptive theory of mind, but in the phenomenological tradition it has been decoupled from the foundationalist role it played in the development of epistemology. And *Erlebnisse*, as understood by Dilthey and Husserl, while it includes sensation, is a much broader class of mental phenomena.

9. Summing Up: Four Concepts of Experience

Let us return to our main task, the attempt to reduce the multiplicity of senses of “experience” to a manageable array. I have come up with four senses:

1. The "innocence" of Locke's sensations, Hume's impressions, and Kant's first sense of *Erfahrung*. To this we can add, without too much distortion, *Erlebnisse* in Dilthey and Husserl, provided they are decoupled from their foundational role in epistemology.
2. The temporally extended and cumulative sense of experience found in Hume, along with its negative and dialectical version in Hegel, and Dewey.
3. Kant's second sense of *Erfahrung*, empirical knowledge of objects.
4. The mystical-religious sense of *Erlebnis* in Buber and "religious experience" in James.

II

Experience and History

1. The Two Relevant Senses of Experience

So much, then, for our survey of different senses of experience in modern philosophy. Our purpose, it will be recalled, was to reduce these many senses to a manageable array, and to explore the usefulness of these concepts of experience for the philosophy of history. Having accomplished the first of these tasks, I turn now to the second. In order to do this, I propose now that we set aside the third and fourth senses of experience, and focus our attention henceforth on *sense one* and *sense two*.

In doing so I am taking a different path from another recent attempt to relate history and experience, that of Frank Ankersmit (2005) in *Sublime Historical Experience*. This fine work shares many of the same motivations which have led me to the present undertaking. Ankersmit wants to revive the concept of experience as an antidote to the emphasis on representation in the philosophy of history, especially when representation is interpreted as linguistic representation. He takes a radical view of the difference between language and experience, declaring them "mortal enemies" which permit of "no compromise" (p. 11). Like me he forswears any foundational role for experience, going so far as to say that experience "lives in a universe different from that of truth" (p. 231).

In the course of his book, however, the emerging importance of the term "sublime" makes clear that Ankersmit's sense of "experience" is actually closer to the *fourth* sense that we introduced above. Discussing the difference between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, he says the latter is closer to his meaning (p. 145), but it soon becomes clear that he has in mind something very close to that heightened intensity of feeling that Gadamer associates with the neo-romantic reaction to modernity. A self-confessed romantic (p. 189), indeed, Ankersmit turns for examples to the poets (Goethe, Eichendorff) who glimpse the past through the contemplation of the present. And he adduces historians (Burkhardt, Huizinga) who find their inspiration in works of art and other aesthetic experiences. Ankersmit uses "sublime" in the Kantian sense of that which escapes our reason's capacity to comprehend. His sense of experience is not so much mystical and