

Husserl

Ideas : General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology

(1913)

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Chapter 6 The Phenomenological Reductions

Chapter 9 Noesis and Noema

Chapter 12 Phenomenology of the Reason

Phenomenology: A Science of Consciousness

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) German

Studied Mathematics, physics and philosophy, but was intrigued by astronomy and optics. He received an elite education.

Doctoral Dissertation was on the theory of the calculus of variations at age 24.

Studied more math, lectured and attended lectures by Brentano in philosophy.

Next he studied psychology and published many works on numbers before he began his work developing the phenomenological method.

Known as the Father of Phenomenology - A Science of Consciousness. He was not the first to use the term "phenomenology, but he was undoubtedly the father of the phenomenology movement.

The idea was to develop the phenomenological method as its own distinctive and rigorous science. He insisted that the study of consciousness must be very different from the study of nature. This was a critique to Naturalism (where everything belongs to the world of nature and can therefore be studied by the scientific method). Information and insight do not come from large amounts of data, but emerges from an intense study of experiences, performed through the phenomenological method.

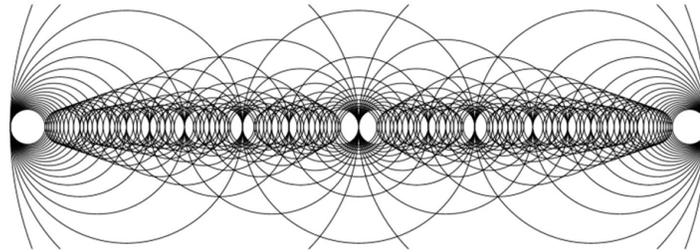
What is phenomenology?

Husserl argued that phenomenology did not deny the existence of the real world, but sought instead to clarify the *sense* of this world (which everyone accepts) as actually existing.

Husserl lays out what we already have going on: Typical acts of consciousness- he assigns them as two spheres: they are worldly; they are "psychological".

The Two Spheres:

Material / Factual
Unity of Things



Formal /
Unity of
Essence

The two spheres are connected only by the mind's ability to pass between them as easily as it can meander around and through them; the mind also can combine, linger within, focus and disperse.

Husserl believes there is a third unity - that of the consciousness, where experiences and intuition act out their part.

Husserl's task is to get from these spheres and into this other field that is quite unlike them: he calls this the sphere of absolute consciousness and it encompasses the Living unity of **Consciousness** as it flows along in a stream of *experiences*.

Each of these three unities has and exhibits its own distinctive kind of identity and persistence.

For example, you can tell when the object occupying your consciousness is a physical thing because it does not present itself all at once. Instead, you are invited into a perspective, to move around from one side to the other, to perceive some more about the thing. All the while, the thing keeps its unity to itself, as the reference point of all the angles it gives you.

However, the essences give themselves to you all at once. You do not have to consider the north face of a building and then a south face to get the whole picture.

But the third unity, consciousness, while it can present itself as essence or fact, it is always contextualized as a foreground.

The faint image arises in consciousness, but it is more than a progression of life bites strung together in a series. The stream is not a sum or aggregate; It presents a unity unlike the others.

To get to the sphere of absolute consciousness, you have to let the worldly go away and then inhabit what's left. To inhabit what's left, you must look to the Phenomenological method.

What is the phenomenological method?

Husserl tells us why we need the method of Phenomenological Reduction:

PAGE 163

A general example of the concept of reduction can be taken from a piece of wax: The wax appears to be flat, opaque, hard and extended to certain dimensions in space. Most of these quantities can be negated as necessary to the piece of wax continuing to be a piece of wax. The smell, taste, texture, if heated will continue to be the same piece of wax, however the smell, taste and texture will obviously have changed. The only things that remain (mass, chemical makeup) are the things that are required for its existence. (reminds us of Plato's gold shapes in Timeus).

Husserl uses eidetic Phenomenological Reduction: he calls it Bracketing away / suspending / disconnecting. It seeks to momentarily reduce, effectively erase the world of speculation by returning the subject to their primordial experience of the matter, whether the object of inquiry is a feeling, an idea or a perception.

Bracketing (epoche) is the act of suspending judgement about the natural world. The systematic removal (SLIDE: The peeling onion) one by one, of the inessential aspects, the symbolic meanings, context, to get to the core: leaving only the essence of what constitutes the thing.

Thus, one's subjective perception is the truest form of experience one can have in perceiving it. This allows one to examine phenomena as they are originally given to consciousness.

It involves setting aside the question of real existence, as well as questions about its physical nature; these questions are left to the natural sciences. For example, the experience of seeing a tree qualifies as an experience, whether the tree appears in reality, in a dream or in a hallucination. (reminds us of mythopoeic thought). We are to suspend belief in what we ordinarily take for granted.

Husserl tells us we need to reduce the natural world to its pure consciousness, so that what we are left with is a pure framework with which to consider the mindset and methodology of phenomenology.

The procedure of bracketing is essential: the phenomenological reduction helps us to free ourselves from prejudices and secure the purity of our detachment as observers, so that we can encounter "things as they are in themselves" independently of any presuppositions. The goal of phenomenology for Husserl is then a descriptive, detached analysis of consciousness in which objects, as its correlates, are constituted.

Husserl calls for a bracketing or disconnection *first* from the natural sciences - and then continues on with a list of those things that we must put into brackets:

Not only is this how Husserl sets us up to understand our own mindset with regard to the rigors of phenomenal reduction, but he tells us that this is indeed the method that can be used for any inquiry of pure consciousness - whether it is an object, a dream or a memory; and that there is an important relationship between the real object and the perceptual experience. He calls them Noesis and Noema.

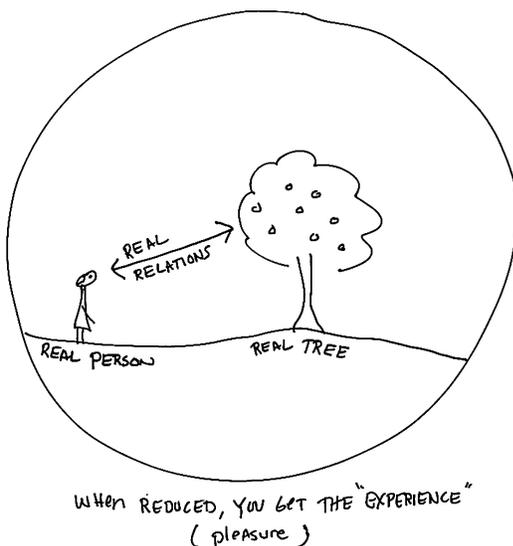
Noesis and Noema: the dependent relationship between the real object and the essence of it (the perceptual experience)

Noesis: the real content, real character, the part of the act that gives the character to a thing

Noema: the ideal essence of the character; the full noema is a complex structure comprised of at least a noematic sense (the ideal meaning) and a noematic core (the object to which the meaning refers).

Husserl gives us an example:

TREE Story Page 238-239.



Empathy and Intersubjectivity

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/#EmpIntLif>

Empathy:

involves experiencing another person as a subject rather than just as an object among objects. In doing so, one can experiences oneself as seen by [the Other](#), and the world in general as a shared world instead of one only available to oneself.

Among the fundamental beliefs thus uncovered by Husserl is the belief (or expectation) that a being that looks and behaves more or less like myself, i.e., displays traits more or less familiar from my own case, will generally perceive things from an *egocentric* viewpoint similar to my own (“here”, “over there”, “to my left”, “in front of me”, etc.), in the sense that I would roughly look upon things the way he does if I were in his shoes and perceived them from his perspective.

This belief allows me to ascribe intentional acts to others immediately without having to draw an inference, by analogy with my own case. So the belief in question must lie deep within the essence of my personal belief system. It forms a part of the already pre-given (and generally unreflected) intentional background, or “lifeworld”, within which the concept of intersubjectivity can emerge.

Intersubjectivity:

a condition somewhere between subjectivity and objectivity, one in which a phenomenon is personally experienced (subjectively) *but by more than one* [*subject*](#).

Roughly, Husserl’s argument goes as follows. In order for me to be able to put myself into someone else’s shoes, on some level, I must assume that this world coincides with my own; although the aspects under which the other subject represents the world must be different, as they depend on his own primordial viewpoint. Therefore, I must also suppose that the objects forming my own world exist independently of my subjective perspective and the particular experiences I perform; they must, in other words, be conceived of as part of an *objective reality*.

And So, while phenomenology is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection and analysis of the structures of consciousness, it is to take place from a highly *modified* “first person” viewpoint: studying phenomena not as they appear to “my” consciousness, but to any consciousness whatsoever. Husserl believed that phenomenology could provide a firm basis for all human knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and could establish philosophy as a rigorous science.

Husserl’s self described role as the Explorer

In his later years, Husserl remarked that “he can look down across that land that he has discovered, but that others will enter”. He compares himself to Moses, who led the people to the promise land, but did not enter it himself.