

Husserl on Intentionality as an Essential Property of Consciousness

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Introduction : Is Intentionality an *Essential Property* of Consciousness?

It is commonsense that beliefs, perceptions are intentional, i. e., that they direct to *something*. Throughout the philosophical tradition, intentionality of some (types of) conscious states is generally recognized. For instance, as Brentano has pointed out, Aristotle and some scholastic philosophers have recognized that some conscious states possess intentionality and that they are related to some kind of objects. (Brentano 2008,106-107)

However, intentionality is of much more significance for philosophers in the phenomenological tradition. For them, intentionality is much more than just one property of *some* conscious states; it becomes an essential or defining property of consciousness. As a result, they generally share the following two seemingly *problematic* and thus controversial theses about consciousness and intentionality.

(T1) Intentionality is an essential property of consciousness.

(T2) All intentional states are directed to (are intentional-

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ly related) objects.

It is necessary to say few words about T1 before we continue. According to Husserl's view concerning essence and essential property, if a property *F* is said to be an essential property of consciousness, then this property *F* is an invariable property of all the instances of consciousness. Conjunctively, these two theses entail T3.

(T3) *All conscious states are directed to objects.*

In the pursuit of the defining characteristic of "mental phenomena" (pyschische Phänomene), Brentano is probably the first philosopher in the phenomenological tradition to propose and defend both theses. He asks in *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*:

What positive mark (Merkmal) shall we now be able to provide? Or is there perhaps no positive determination (Bestimmung), which holds true of all mental phenomena generally? (Brentano 2008, 106)

Brentano's answer to this question is all too familiar to us. According to Brentano, "We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves." (Brentano 2008, 106) As conscious mental states are definitely mental phenomena, it should be doubtless that Brentano will accept T1, T2, and their conjunction T3.

Sartre is also quite explicit in accepting intentionality as the essential and defining feature of consciousness, as he writes in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, "Indeed, *consciousness is defined by intentionality.*"^① Sartre also accepts that intentionality is the defining property of consciousness, and that every conscious state necessarily transcend to be directed to its (transcendent) object (existent or non-existent, perceptual or imagined).^②

① Sartre 1960, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p.38.

② Sartre is so thorough about the intentional nature of consciousness, to the effect that he holds that even the Ego is neither the bearer of consciousness, nor the ideal unity of conscious states, nor the inhabitant within consciousness. Furthermore, for Sartre, the Ego together with its states (eg. Hatred, Love), dispositions (eg. Bravery), and actions are all transcendent objects constituted by consciousness. Consequentially, like Brentano, Sartre would also accept T1, T2 and T3.

As it will also be shown later, Husserl would agree with both his teacher and his French student in accepting both theses and their implication concerning consciousness and intentionality.

Despite the wide acceptance of T1 and T2 in the phenomenological tradition, it is not clear how to understand those theses properly, and most importantly, whether their truth can be philosophically justified in the face of reasonable objections. However, even if it's true that intentionality is widely accepted as an important feature of consciousness in the contemporary phenomenological literature, this does not mean that this phenomenological position does not have to face objections from other less than sympathetic philosophers outside the phenomenological tradition. Besides, as we shall see later, Husserl and Brentano themselves are bewildered by the problem whether consciousness is indeed essentially intentional.^①

It's the task of this essay to clarify and defend Husserl's view concerning intentionality as an essential property of consciousness, as well as the intrinsic directness of intentional states toward correlative objects. There have been two most pressing problems concerning the phenomenological picture of consciousness and intentionality.

(i) *There seem to be non-intentional conscious states.*

(ii) *There seem to be objectless intentional states.*

Nevertheless, it turns out that Husserl somehow managed to recognize and even expect these problems. Moreover, he also certainly has reasonable responses to both problems.

This paper will unfold as follows. In Part I, I will draw upon Husserl's discussion of "feeling" (Gefühl) to tackle the problem of non-intentional conscious states. In Part II, I will explain the second problem fully and try to make sense of Husserl's view that all intentional states are related to intentional objects. Part I and II together explicate and defend the Husserlian view concerning consciousness and intentionality.

It is important to point out, although concepts such as "meaning", "noema",

① This is intended as a response to an anonymous referee, who points out correctly that the essential intentionality of consciousness does not strike one as a contested issue in the contemporary phenomenological literature.

“noesis”, “constitution” are absolutely central in Husserl’s theory of intentionality, this paper will not deal with them. In addition, although I believe Husserl’s view concerning intentionality as presented here remains essentially the same in different stages of his thinking, my interpretation relies primarily on *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*. Husserl returns to the concept of intentionality and expands on early writings in later writings, but this paper cannot deal with those later writings. However, this paper does not pretend to be giving a comprehensive exposition of Husserl’s complex account of intentionality. If intentionality can indeed be philosophically justified from a (early) Husserlian perspective, this paper achieves its original aim.^①

1. Intentionality as an Essential Property of Consciousness and the Problem of Non-intentional Conscious State

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl spells out a (the third) concept of *consciousness as intentional experience*. According to the *analysis* of this third concept of consciousness, the phenomenological field (extension) of the concept of consciousness and mental act (intentional experience) coincide, i.e., *every conscious state is an intentional state*. (LU II/1, A344/B₁363) Intentionality is recognized as the essential and defining property of consciousness.

After the transcendental turn, Husserl continues to insist that intentionality is an essential property of consciousness. He writes in *Ideas I*:

Intentionality is an essential peculiarity of the sphere of mental processes taken universally in so far as all mental processes in some manner or other share in it...Intentionality is what characterizes consciousness in the pregnant sense and which, at the same time justifies designating the whole stream of mental processes as the stream of consciousness and as

① Two anonymous referees point out correctly that this paper does not take Husserl’s later account of intentionality into consideration. I do not think it has to come to Husserl’s later writings to explicate the essential intentionality of consciousness, although doing this would certainly shed light on interesting dimensions of intentionality.

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the unity of one consciousness. (Ideas I, 168)

It is clear from this passage that Husserl holds that intentionality is an essential and defining property of consciousness.

However, some philosophers would not agree with Husserl in accepting intentionality as the defining and essential feature of consciousness. According to them, there are essentially two kinds of conscious states: (i) Conscious states that are intentional; (ii) Conscious states that are obviously non-intentional. They hold that there are obviously some kinds of non-intentional conscious states, such as “sensations”, and some forms of emotions, etc. If this were true, Husserl would be wrong to hold that intentionality is what defines consciousness.

David Rosenthal agrees that mental states such as thoughts and desires are intentional; they have “intentional properties”. But his view differs from both Brentano and Husserl by holding that some conscious states lack intentionality:

Sensations, such as pains and sense impressions, lack intentional content, and have instead qualitative properties of various sorts.^①

According to Rosenthal, conscious states such as pains and sense impressions have only “qualitative properties”, that is, they only have some kind of “raw feel”, “qualitative character” or what Thomas Nagel would call “What-it-is-likeness” of experience (Nagel 1974). For Rosenthal, unlike beliefs and perceptions, conscious states such as sensations do not seem to have intentional content, and they are not directed to any object.

John Searle also explicitly claims that there are many types of non-intentional conscious states:

Not all mental states and events have Intentionality. Beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires are Intentional; but there are forms of nervousness, elation, and undirected anxiety that are not intentional... (Searle 1983, 1)

Many conscious states are not intentional, e.g., a sudden sense of elation

① David Rosenthal, ‘Identity theories’ in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind* ed. Samuel Guttenplan (Oxford: Blackwell 1994) p.349.

tion, nervousness and undirected anxiety need not in that way be *about* anything. (Searle 1983, 2)

To be fair, Searle only claims that some forms of nervousness, elation, anxiety are non-intentional, he does not exclude the possibility that some other forms of nervousness, elation and anxiety can be intentional.

But anyhow, there seem to be two kinds of strong counterexamples to the phenomenological idea that intentionality is a defining and essential property of consciousness:

(i) Sensations such as pain, itch, etc. When one is in pain, it seems to be pointless to say that one's pain is directed to some object.

(ii) Emotions such as forms of anxiety, nervousness, or enduring depression. To illustrate: there are persons who suffer from melancholia; they are constantly depressed for no obvious reason. It seems to be sensible to say that their depression seem to be directed to no object and therefore non-intentional.

In a way, Husserl manages to expect the difficulties concerning non-intentional cases of sensations and feelings. He is concerned with the question whether experiences of the same phenomenological kind "may at times have an intentional relation to some object, and at times have none." (LU A366.)

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl has considered the much-debated case of "feelings" (Gefühl), and explicitly asks the question whether there are non-intentional feelings? (LU V, §15)

We may now ask more generally whether, in addition to the intentional varieties of feeling, there are not other non-intentional species. (LU II/1 A369/ B₁ 392)

This is exactly the kind of question Searle and Rosenthal might have asked. And surprisingly, Husserl himself has expected the kind of answer Searle and Rosenthal have to offer: "It may seem at first that an obvious 'Yes' is the right answer." (LU II/1 A369/ B₁ 392)

Surprisingly still, Husserl has considered the two kinds of counterexamples (sensations and emotions) Searle and Rosenthal have presented.

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Firstly, it seems that “in the wide field of so-called sensory feelings, no intentional characters can be found. The sensible pain of a burn can certainly not be classed beside a conviction, a surmise, a volition etc. etc.”(LU II/1 A369/ B₁ 392)

Secondly, Husserl also sees difficulty in the fact “that desire does not always seem to require conscious reference to what is desired, that we are often moved by obscure drives or pressures towards unrepresented goals...”(LU A376/B₁395-396)

Husserl has put sensory feelings (feeling-sensations) and seemingly undirected desires, obscure drives or pressures in the same category of “feeling”. So far, we can see that Husserl’s observations coincide with Searle’s and Rosenthal’s. As a consequence, we seem to be confronted with an argument against the essential intentionality of consciousness, which roughly goes as follows:

P1: If intentionality is an essential property or defining feature of consciousness, then every conscious state is intentional.

P2: As demonstrated by strong counterexamples, it is not the case that every conscious state is intentional.

C: Therefore, intentionality is not an essential property or defining feature of consciousness.

This is a simple and logically valid argument, as the conclusion follows logically from the premises. However, its soundness remains to be examined.

As we already know, Husserl insists that intentionality is an essential feature and defining property of consciousness. As the argument above is valid, we must prove at least one of the premises false, in order to prove it unsound. We won’t dispute the truth of the first premise, as it is trivially true given Husserl’s view concerning essence. So there is no way out but to prove that the second premise is false. And to do this one must consider different counterexamples concretely. Husserl has several different strategies for different cases. In what follows, I will formulate several Husserlian responses.

Before the first response can be offered, we must clarify the term “feeling” (Gefühl) as Husserl understands it. According to Husserl, the term “feeling” seems to refer to two kinds of things: (i) Feeling as intentional act. For instance, one can

be happy about some event; and (ii) Feeling sensations (Gefühlsempfindungen) as will be described. Husserl clarifies the second sense of “feeling” as follows:

It is rather the case that our sensations are here functioning as presentative contents in perceptual acts, or (to use a possibly misleading phrase) that our sensations here receive an objective ‘interpretation’ or ‘taking-up’ (gegenständliche Deutung oder Auffassung). They themselves are not acts, but acts are constituted through them, wherever, that is, intentional characters like a perceptual interpretation lay hold of them, and as it were animate them. (LU II/1, A370 /B₁392)

Sensations (Empfindungen) as clarified above are only “presentative contents” of intentional acts, which are called “feeling-sensations” (“Gefühlempfindungen”). The perception of an apple is an intentional act, in which various sensual contents are present, e.g. visual sensations of redness and shape, when one touches the apple, one has tactual sensations, and so on so forth. All these sensations are “presentative contents”, they are “taken up”, “interpreted” by intentional act. As a consequence, sensations in this sense are what constitute an intentional act; they are dependent moments or parts of intentional act.

But how does this distinction between feeling-act and feeling-sensations help us to solve the problem? It is certain that feeling-sensations are non-intentional, then how are they not counterexamples to the statement that all conscious states are intentional?

The answer is rather straightforward, because feeling-sensations are not really conscious states. Therefore, they cannot serve as genuine counterexamples to the claim that all conscious states are intentional. After all, it is absurd to consider some sense data or “Empfindungen” apprehended in an intentional act a conscious state. Instead, a conscious state must be a complete intentional act. Furthermore, Husserl goes even further to claim that feeling-sensations can be considered as Brentanian “physical phenomena”, which are essentially different from any psychic (mental) phenomena and conscious state. (LU II/1, A372/B₁394) Therefore, the non-intentionality of some feeling-sensations does not amount to counterevi-

dence to the view that intentionality is an essential property of consciousness.

Thus far, our considerations seem to be fair. But when it comes to some concrete cases of “feeling”, e. g., pain, itch, etc, the argument as presented above sounds quite strange. After all, as Searle claims “If I am conscious of a pain, the pain is not intentional, because it does not represent anything beyond itself” (Searle 1983, 84) Well, depending how we understand the term “pain”, I think there are at least three ways to respond to this kind of objection.

As Husserl sees it, the term pain is also equivocal, he agrees with Brentano at this point:

He draws a distinction, in sense if not in words, between sensations of pain and pleasure (feeling-sensations) and pain and pleasure in the sense of feelings (Gefühlen). (LU II/1, A372/B1394)

Firstly, pain can be feeling-sensations functioning as presentative contents of some intentional states. In this sense, these presentative contents function as dependent parts of some intentional act. As such, a pain-sensation is not a conscious state, but it functions as contents of a conscious state. Then the question would be, what kind of intentional and conscious state can have pain-sensation as its contents? Well, when I feel pain, I am typically conscious of my body or part of my body as being affected in a way. In this case, I have intentional act that is directed to my body or typically certain part of my body. For instance, if I feel pain in my hand, I am actually conscious of my hand, as it is being in a mode--being affected in some way. Pain-sensations function as presentative contents which make me conscious of my “hurt hand” or “painful hand”, much in the same way as red-sensations function as presentative contents which make me conscious of a red apple.

Secondly, Husserl has also followed Brentano in allowing the term “pain” to refer to the entire intentional act that involves pain-sensations. In this case, some “pain” can just mean “consciousness of my hand being in pain”. We can use German to illustrate pain as intentional act further. In German language, there is an expression “es schmerzt mir, dass...“(it pains me, that...), in which case we certainly

have an intentional conscious state. Pains in the intentional sense we have described certainly do not amount to counterexamples to intentionality as essential property of consciousness.

Thirdly, pain might just be the “intentional object” which I am conscious of. For example, when one has excruciating pain, pain becomes the centre of his/her attention. It might be a mode a bodily part is in, but it becomes the *object* of one’s intentional act. In this case, pain is also not a conscious state, but the object of which a conscious state is conscious. Furthermore, pains of various kinds can be the objects of various conscious states. I can remember my headache as it happened yesterday. I can identify a pain in the same part of my body as *the same pain*, and I can expect it to occur in the future. Once again, it is clear that pain in the sense of “intentional object” does not count as a counterexample to the claim that all conscious states are intentional.

Now, what about some forms of nervousness, and seemingly undirected anxiety Searle has mentioned? Husserl himself thought that such obscure desires and pressures are in fact directed to something, even if this “something” is indeterminate. Husserl remarks:

Here we are dealing with intentional experiences, but with such as are characterized by indeterminateness of objective direction, an ‘indeterminateness’ which does not amount to a privation, but which stands for a descriptive character of one’s presentation. (LU II/1, A373/B₁396)

What Husserl says here is that obscure desires, and undirected anxieties only seem to be non-intentional, actually they are directed to something, though that something might be “indeterminate”. But what is an indeterminate object? Well, when I am expecting to see next person to enter this room, I am not expecting any particular person. In this sense, the object of my intentional act is indeterminate. When I am anxious, depressed, there can be various “indeterminate objects” of which I cannot say which is which.

Moreover, there can be another response. When a person is in some kind of “mood”, such as “groundless” depression or anxiety, one’s consciousness may not

have any particular thing as its intentional object. In this case, we may still reasonably say that one's life or the world is appearing to this person in a certain way. After all, there are times when we are confronted with life and world in its totality. When I feel sad, it is the world that appears to me as a darker place to be.

Therefore, after we have examined the various strong cases of allegedly non-intentional "feelings", "moods", etc., we have shown that they do not really prove that intentionality is not an essential feature of consciousness. Because these cases are the strongest counterexamples presented, after they are accounted for and successfully dismissed, it is justifiable to hold that intentionality is an essential property of consciousness, that all conscious states are intentional.

2. Intrinsic Directedness Toward Correlative Objects and the Problem of Objectless Intentional State

Apparently, Husserl might not accept Brentano's idea that all intentional acts are directed to some "intentional inexistence" or "immanent object". Nevertheless, like Brentano, he accepts T2, that all intentional states possess essential and intrinsic directedness to some objects. As he remarks in *Logical Investigations*:

This 'reference to an object' belongs peculiarly and intrinsically to an act-experience, and the experiences manifesting it are by definition intentional experiences or acts... (LU, A388/B₁413)

According to this passage, every intentional act is related the object. Husserl's standpoint does not change a bit in his *Ideas I*:

This 'reference to an object' belongs peculiarly and intrinsically to an act experience, and the experiences manifesting it are by definition intentional experiences or acts. (*Ideas I*, 64)

Again, according to this passage, intentional experience is "consciousness of something", i. e., it is intentionally related to something. This "something" is the

so-called intentional object. For Husserl, every intentional experience has “its *essential relation (Wesensbeziehung)* to intentional objects”. (LU II/1, A344/B₁363, my italics)

Before we deal with the problem of intentional relation to an object, it is necessary to understand what Husserl means by the term “object”. Husserl generally uses “object” or “objectivity” in the widest sense of the terms. Husserl writes, “I often make use of the vaguer expression ‘objective correlate’ (*Gegenständlichkeit*, ‘objectivity’) since we are here *never limited to objects in the narrower sense*, but have also to do with *states of affairs, properties, and non-independent forms* etc., whether real or categorial.” (LU II/1, A39/B₁39, my italics)

It is clear that Husserl holds the view that *all intentional states are related (directed) to intentional objects*. However, there are cases where the objects of some intentional states do not and even cannot exist in reality. For instance, when one imagines a unicorn, or when one hallucinates about a red apple, the intended object in question does not exist. Consequently, it is problematic to hold that every intentional state is related to an intentional object. Husserl seems to be confronted with a dilemma thus formulated:

- (i) All intentional states are related to intentional objects.
- (ii) Not all intentional states have corresponding intentional objects.

If one accepts the first horn of the dilemma, there occurs the difficulty of explaining how is it possible for intentional acts like imagination and hallucination to relate to intentional objects. However, if one accepts the second claim, then one needs to explain what makes intentional states like hallucinations, false beliefs intentional if they have no intentional objects. Either way, one needs to explain what accounts for the intentionality of some intentional acts that do not seem to possess objects.

There are generally two approaches to resolve this dilemma; we will call them “object-approach” and “relation approach”. As I will show later, none of which seems satisfactory.

Object Approach: The first approach is the classical “object-approach”, as Smith and McIntyre has called it. According to them, theories based on object-approach “assume that relations of intending are ordinary relations, differing from

others only in that the objects of intention are entities of some unusual sort.” (Smith&McIntyre 1982, 40) This approach insists that some intentional states have some unusual kinds of intentional objects, even in the cases of hallucination and imagination. If objects can be equally assigned to all intentional states, then there should be no difficulty in accepting that all intentional states are related to intentional objects.

There are many such classical theories based on object-approach. According to Smith and McIntyre, early Brentano and Meinong have adopted this approach to solve the problem of intentionality.

According to Smith and McIntyre, early Brentano takes “the objects of consciousness to be mind-dependent entities, immanent entities ‘existing in’ the events of consciousness in which they are intended.” (Smith & McIntyre 1982, 48) This theory has advantage of assigning corresponding objects to intentional states such as hallucination and imagination.

However, this theory faces insurmountable difficulties. It is absurd to assume that intentional objects exist “in consciousness”, even when the corresponding intentional object does not exist. For instance, a child may want to see a unicorn, though unicorn does not exist in reality. According to Smith & McIntyre’s interpretation, in Brentano’s theory, there should be a unicorn as intentional object existing *in* the child’s consciousness.

However, there is no way to find such thing in the child’s consciousness. In addition, what the child wants to see is a unicorn “in reality”, not a unicorn in his consciousness. If a unicorn can be found in his consciousness in such a manner, then simply by wishing to see a unicorn, he would have already seen one.

According to Smith and McIntyre (1982), Meinong also offers a theory of intentionality based on “object approach”. Meinong insists that all intentional states are directed to intentional objects, and he denies not all intentional states have intentional objects. Then what are the intentional objects of hallucination, imagination, and contradictory representations? According to Meinong, there are non-existent objects as well as impossible objects which are “beyond being”, etc.

The difficulty of Meinong’s theory and Russell’s classic criticism is familiar. Smith & McIntyre also remarked, “that Meinong’s ‘objects’ deserve to be afforded

any legitimate ontological status is not obvious”. (Smith&McIntyre 1982, 57)

In short, the “object-approach” tries to solve the dilemma by assigning some unusual sort of objects to certain kinds of intentional states. This approach fails, because generally it is difficult to account for the special or curious status of the strange entities in question.

Relation Approach: The second approach to solve the dilemma can be called “relation-approach”. Roderick Chisholm, Dagfinn Føllesdal, and Smith&McIntyre advocate this approach in solving the dilemma concerning intentionality. They have also interpreted Brentano and Husserl’s theory of intentionality in the spirit of “relation-approach”, which I think is extremely problematic.

In theories based on “relation-approach”, intentional relation is conceived as a special kind of relation. According to Smith &McIntyre’s characterization:

What distinguishes intentional relations from others is not that the objects, of intentional relations belong to some unusual ontological category; it is rather that intentional relations themselves exhibit characteristics that, in comparison with ordinary, non-intentional relations, appear to be metaphysically anomalous. In particular, we shall see that intentional relations, unlike ordinary relations, are independent of the existence of objects to which they relate conscious subjects and are in each case dependent on a particular conception of the intended object. (Smith&McIntyre 1982, 11)

It is claimed that intentional relation is metaphysically anomalous, because unlike normal kind of relations, it has two distinguishing features.

Firstly, an intentional relation is independent of the existence of the intentional object. For instance, to imagine a unicorn does not require that the imagined unicorn exists.

Secondly, an intentional relation is dependent of a particular conception of the intended object. When Plato was enslaved, he was simply enslaved; there is no question of under what conception he was enslaved. However, when one thinks of Plato, one thinks him under certain conception, e.g., as a Greek Philosopher, as the

author of *Republic*, ect.

Nevertheless, as appealing as this “relation-approach” sounds, it is not without difficulties.

The first problem is that the term “intentional relation” as Smith & McIntyre uses it seems to be ambiguous, it seems to refer to two kinds of relations instead of one single type of relation.

The first kind of relation seems to be just normal relation. They write: “...in many typical cases intentional relations seem to relate persons to quite ordinary sorts of objects, paradigmatically, physical objects and concrete states of affairs involving physical individuals.” (Smith & McIntyre 1982, 10) This amounts to say that in many typical cases, intentional relation is just a normal relation to normal objects, paradigmatically physical objects.

The second kind of relation, even if there is such a relation at all, seems to be extremely problematic. As Føllesdal comments on Husserl’s way to resolve the dilemma concerning intentionality, “Husserl resolved this dilemma by holding that, although every act is directed, this does not mean that there always is some object toward which it is directed.”^① It is difficult to see how to make sense of this claim. *Firstly*, “directedness” is the kind of relation between the “directing” and the “directed”, if there is nothing to be directed, then the relation of direction cannot exist. Therefore, it seems to be nonsensical to state, “every act is directed, but there is no object toward which it is directed”. *Secondly*, even if there is such a relation of directedness that requires no object, it faces the difficulty to explain what kind of relation it is.

The second problem can be explained more briefly. It is just that by claiming intentional relation being “metaphysically anomalous” is just as problematic as claiming intentional objects to be “unusual sort of objects”. If the “object-approach” could not stand, why should the “relation-approach” succeed in solving the dilemma concerning intentionality?

Consequently, neither “object-approach” nor “relation-approach” seems to be able to resolve the dilemma of intentionality as presented above. However, as it

^① Føllesdal 1969: “Husserl’s Notion of Noema”, 681.

will be shown later, if a phenomenological understanding of intentional object and intentional relation is adopted, this dilemma can be smoothly resolved.

Husserl's view about the essential relation of intentional states to intentional objects can be roughly expressed in the following four statements:

- (a) All intentional states are essentially related to intentional objects.
- (b) All intentional states possess correlative intentional objects.
- (c) From a phenomenological point of view, intentional objects are phenomena (appearances) present to consciousness.
- (d) The intentional relation^① should be simply understood as “consciousness-of”, or interchangeably “appearance-to”.

It is already clear that Husserl holds (a). In what follows I will explicate and defend the remaining theses. If properly understood, I think these theses can reasonably capture the phenomenological conception of intentional relation and intentional object. Furthermore, if we adopt such a picture, the dilemma surrounding intentionality can be easily resolved.

For “realistically minded” philosophers, intentional objects can only be those “ordinary objects”, paradigmatically physical objects. If this is the case, then intentional states such as imagination and fantasy cannot have intentional objects.

Searle writes in *Intentionality*: “an intentional object is just an object like any other; it has no peculiar ontological status at all.” (Searle 1983, 16) Thus, an intentional object can only be “ordinary object” without any peculiar and therefore doubtful ontological status. As we have already seen, this view coincides with Føllesdal's and Smith & McIntyre's interpretation of Husserl's theory. McIntyre also remarks: “Husserl surely does recognize ‘realist’ elements in the conditions of satisfaction for acts such as ordinary perceptions. In these acts we intend objects as being physically real, as existing independently of us and having properties not

① Husserl has used different terminology to express the same relation. Richtung auf einen Gegenstand, Richtung auf eine Gegenständlichkeit, Richtung auf ein Gegenständliches, gegenständliche Beziehung, gegenständliche Richtung, Beziehung auf ein Objekt, intentionale „Beziehung auf einen Gegenstand“. Gegenständliche Beziehung, intentionale Beziehung von Erlebnisse auf ein Objekt.

currently perceived but perceivable”^① This explains much of why they have offered the kind of interpretation of Husserl they have offered.

However, if intentional object can only be “ordinary objects” (typically physically real objects), then it entails that intentional states such as imagination and fantasy only possess “intentional content”, but do not have intentional objects. According to the interpretation Føllesdal, Smith and McIntyre have offered, this is also Husserl’s view. The realistically minded theorists of intentionality (or some such minded interpreters of Husserl’s theory of intentionality) only want to allow ordinary objects to be intentional objects, because they want to have a healthy ontology for a theory of intentionality, and refuse to take in curious and strange ontological entities.

It should be admitted that objects with peculiar ontological status should not be summoned to solve the problem of intentionality. However, the realistic theory of intentionality (and the realistic interpretation of Husserl’s view) made a problematic assumption about intentional object. It assumes that the only way to avoid entity with peculiar ontological status is (i) to allow only *ordinary* object for intentional states such as veridical perceptions, true beliefs, etc.; and (ii) to deny that intentional acts such as imagination and fantasy can have intentional objects.

Husserl certainly would not accept problematic entities in his theory. Nevertheless, he undeniably holds that all intentional states---veridical perceptions as well as imagination and hallucination---have intentional objects. But somehow, Husserl’s phenomenological approach makes it possible to allow intentional object for all intentional states without positing peculiar entities and relations. Otherwise, his approach would certainly fail as the “object-approach” and “relation-approach”

For the realistically minded philosophers, intentional acts such as imagination, fantasy simply do not have intentional objects. However, this is definitely not the case for Husserl. Husserl writes uncompromisingly that all intentional states have its own objects as its nature requires:

Each act has its own appropriate, intentional, objective reference:

① McIntyre 1993: ‘Review, *Husserl* by David Bell’, 114.

this is as true of complex as of simple acts. (LU II/1, A377/B₁401)

The following passage directly confirms that even the intentional states with “non-existent” objects also certainly possess their own intentional objects. It is implied that even imagination and fantasy have their corresponding objects.

Und natürlich kann solch ein Erlebnis im Bewusstsein vorhanden sein mit dieser seiner Intention, ohne dass der Gegenstand überhaupt existiert und vielleicht gar existieren kann; der Gegenstand ist gemeint, d. h. das ihn Meinen ist Erlebnis; aber er ist dann bloß vermeint und in Wahrheit nichts. ...Stelle ich den Gott *Jupiter* vor, so ist dieser Gott vorgestellter Gegenstand... (LU II/1, A352/B₁373)

Furthermore, Husserl even states that from a phenomenological point of view, whether the represented (intended) object exists or not, the “given” for the consciousness remains essentially similar:

If, however, the intended object exists, nothing becomes phenomenologically different. It makes no essential difference to an object presented and given to consciousness whether it exists, or is fictitious, or is perhaps completely absurd. (LU II/1, A353/B₁373)

One may wonder, what remains essentially similar in intentional acts of fantasy and perception? It certainly is not the object, because it is certainly imagined and thus “unreal” and the other might be “real”. However, it is certain that one factor which remains the same is that they equally share the same intentional structure, that they equally possess intentional objects. Thus Husserl writes, “I think of Jupiter as I think of Bismarck, of the tower of Babel as I think of Cologne Cathedral...” (LU II/1, A353/B₁373)

Now, a problem for Husserl arises. How is it possible to attribute intentional objects to all intentional states, especially imagination, hallucination, false beliefs, without positing ontological oddities? For Husserl, the answer lies in understanding of consciousness and intentionality from a phenomenological perspective. But

what constitutes a phenomenological perspective? I think, in the *Logical investigations*, one can find at least three related features that count as characteristically phenomenological.

First-person Perspective: Contemporary philosophers, especially those in the analytic tradition, generally tend to adopt a third person, “objective” and naturalistic standpoint to study consciousness and intentionality. However, there is a growing anxiety among philosophers that this approach might miss consciousness and true intentionality altogether. It is argued that there is a fundamentally subjective, first-personal dimension of consciousness that cannot be accounted for from a purely naturalistic and objectivistic standpoint.

Phenomenology has adopted a different approach from the very beginning. It intends to study consciousness from a first-person perspective using the method of phenomenological reflection:

Instead of becoming lost in the performance of acts built intricately on one another, and instead of (as it were) naively positing the existence of the objects intended in their sense and then going on to characterize them, or of assuming such objects hypothetically, of drawing conclusions from all this etc., we must rather practice ‘reflection’, i.e. make these acts themselves, and their immanent meaning—content, our objects. ... These acts, contrariwise, though hitherto not objective, must now be made objects of apprehension and of theoretical assertion. We must deal with them in new acts of intuition and thinking, we must analyze and describe them in their essence, we must make them objects of empirical or ideational thought. (LU II/1, A10/B₁10)

Three steps are crucial for the phenomenological study of consciousness and intentional act: (i) To withdraw from the natural attitude, to suspend all existence-positing and other related naturalistic preconceptions; (ii) To reflect upon what is directly given in consciousness to the reflecting consciousness; (iii) To apply the method of essential analysis to treat the phenomenological data given in consciousness, in order to obtain essential insight. After all, phenomenology is not primarily

concerned with particular conscious states and random phenomenological data given in consciousness. Instead, it is concerned with the essential structure of consciousness, especially the general structure of intentionality and its various forms.

Metaphysical Neutrality: For Husserl, in phenomenology, “from the beginning, as at all later stages, its scientific statements involve not the slightest reference to real existence: no metaphysical, scientific and, above all, no psychological assertions can therefore occur among its premises.” (LU II/1, A21/B₁21) As a consequence, the question of “external world” is dismissed as a metaphysical problem, which should have no place in phenomenology. ”(LU II/1, A20/B₁20) As we shall see later, Husserl’s commitment to metaphysical neutrality has significant implications for his theory concerning intentionality.

Phenomenological Description: Husserl uses phenomenological reflection as an epistemic tool to get essential insight about the nature of consciousness and intentionality. Correspondingly, phenomenological description is a philosophical tool to present and express those insights. For Husserl, because of his commitment to metaphysical neutrality and phenomenological reflection, he can no longer adopt a naturalistic view of consciousness and intentionality. Consequently, what remains to be described is what Husserl called “pure phenomena”, which are what appear to consciousness and accessible solely from first person perspective.

It must be emphasized that what can be described from a phenomenological perspective must include objects of consciousness, i.e., intentional objects. Husserl has emphatically pointed out that it is impossible to describe intentional states without describing its object:

One has, further, to employ expressions which stand for what is intentional in such acts, for the object to which they are directed, since it is, in fact, to describe referential acts without using expressions which recur to the things to which such acts refer. (LU II/1, A10–11/B₁10–11)

After all, when we describe one’s conscious states, we always describe it as having certain objects. How can we describe perceptions, imaginations without also describing the objects? Consciousness, as Moore and Tye have pointed out, is

transparent. When we try to describe it, we actually look through consciousness, just to “see” its objects. Tye describes the phenomenon of transparency as follows:

Intuitively, you are directly aware of blueness and squareness as ... features of an external surface. Now shift your gaze inward and try to become aware of your experience itself, inside you, apart from its objects. Try to focus your attention on some intrinsic feature of the experience that distinguishes it from other experiences, something other than what it is an experience *of*. The task seems impossible: one’s awareness seems always to slip through the experience to blueness and squareness, as instantiated together in an external object. In turning one’s mind inward to attend to the experience, one seems to end up concentrating on what is outside again, on external features or properties. (Tye 1995, 30)

Husserl will definitely refuse to accept Tye’s naturalistic view concerning intentionality. However, it is doubtless that Husserl also accepts that when we reflect on consciousness, we cannot describe conscious states without taking their objects into account.

Given the above characterization of phenomenological perspective, we can begin to explicate the concepts of intentional object and intentional relation from a phenomenological point of view.

Intentional Object as Phenomena [Phenomenal Object]: Husserl certainly holds that all intentional states, fantasy, imagination, false beliefs included, possess intentional objects. However, given Husserl’s phenomenological method, it is also clear that intentional objects cannot be ordinary objects characterized as “real”, “physical” objects, even when it comes to intentional states such as veridical perception and true beliefs about states of affairs. For according to Husserl, in phenomenological description, the intentional object has “undergone a change of sense, in which of now it belongs to the sphere of phenomenology.” (LU II/1, A11/B111) Now, all the objects can no longer be objects in the normal sense, they become “phenomena” or “appearances” (Phänomene, Erscheinungen) for consciousness.

A remark about the term “phenomena” or “appearance” (Erscheinung) is necessary. Husserl has pointed out that “Erscheinung” is an ambiguous term with three different senses: (i) “The concrete intuitive experience (the intuitive presentness or representedness of a given object for us)”; (ii) “The intuited (appearing) object, taken as it appears here and now, e.g. this lamp as it counts for some percept we have just performed.” (iii) “In misleading fashion we also call the real (reellen) constituents of appearances in sense 1, i.e. those of the concrete acts of appearing or intuiting, ‘appearances’.” (LU II/2, A714/B₂243)

Among the three senses, it should be emphasized that when I say intentional objects are phenomena or appearances, I use “phenomenon” in the second sense of the term.

Let’s consider the “objects” of intentional acts such as imagination and fantasy? How is it possible to attribute intentional objects to them, without positing ontologically odd entities? According to Husserl, “it makes no essential difference to an object presented and given to consciousness whether it exists, or is fictitious, or is perhaps completely absurd.” (LU II/1, A353/B₁373) This is because from a phenomenological point of view, even in imagination and fantasy, and perhaps especially in them, intentional objects understood as phenomena are present to consciousness. These phenomenal objects are not posited as any kind of ontologically strange entity. Instead, they are just what is present to consciousness---they are just phenomena.

But what are phenomenal objects from a phenomenological perspective? I think they have the following features: (i) phenomenal objects are necessarily objects of conscious and intentional states; we cannot identify anything as intentional object without also referring to the intentional act that directs at it. As a consequence, it would be nonsensical to say that intentional objects are independent of consciousness. This is certainly not the case with the so-called physical and normal objects; they are exactly what can be independent of consciousness. (ii) Phenomenal objects are also transcendent. Although it makes no sense to consider phenomenal objects as independent of consciousness, it is also absurd to assume that they are “abstract moments” of stream of consciousness. Actually, they are precisely what intentional acts are directed to. In this sense, even the intentional objects of

imagination and fantasy are transcendent, because in imagination, what one imagines is not what lies in one's stream of consciousness, but exactly the objects imagined. The imagined object is as transcendent to consciousness as its perceptual counterpart.

Consequently, from a phenomenological point of view, all intentional states, veridical perceptions and hallucinations, share the same kind of objects, i.e., phenomenal objects. Phenomenal objects are just phenomena present to consciousness, which are definitely not ontological oddities, this is because to say something is a phenomenon is just to say that it is what is present to consciousness. In such a way, Husserl manages to allow intentional objects for all intentional states without risking taking in strange entities.

A reasonable doubt may arise. Doesn't it seem absurd to assume that imagination and perception have the same kind of "objects"? After all, an object of veridical perception is "real", but the object of imagination is "unreal".

Well, Husserl might have responded as follows. In a certain way, whether the intended object is "real" or "unreal" makes no difference (LU II/1, A353/B₁373), from a purely phenomenological point of view, they are equally "phenomena" without any ontological status. They are neither real nor unreal, nor beyond being. However, this does not mean we cannot have different types of phenomena with different "being-modality" (Seinsmodalitäten) (Ideas I, 214). After all, some phenomenal objects can be evidently given in various intuitive intentional acts in a coherent way, and therefore acquire the "modality" of "real". While other phenomenal objects cannot be given in intuitive acts or cannot be given coherently, and therefore acquire other modalities such as "hallucinated", "impossible", "unreal", "non-existent" etc. In short, all intentional objects are phenomenal objects, but phenomenal objects can have different "being-modalities".

Intentional Relation: We have seen that the "relation approach" to intentionality fails precisely because it is difficult to make sense of intentional relation when there are no intentional objects. However, as it has been shown that all intentional states possess intentional objects, it is not at all problematic to state that all intentional states are *related* to corresponding intentional objects.

The remaining problem now is to explain what intentional relation is from a

phenomenological perspective. Of course, this relation cannot be “substantial-causal”, which Searle and other realistically minded philosophers prefer. Husserl has denied intentional relation can be causal:

Closer consideration shows it to be absurd in principle, here and in general (*hier und überhaupt*), to treat an intentional as a causal relation, to give it the sense of an empirical, substantial-causal case of necessary connection. For the intentional object, here thought of as ‘provocative’ is only in question as an intentional, not as an external reality, which really and psycho-physically determines my mental life. A battle of centaurs, seen in a picture or framed in fancy, ‘provokes’ my approval just like some beautiful, real landscape...(LU II/1, A369/B₁391).

Therefore, for Husserl, a causal account of intentional relation not only fails in the case of intentional states like imagination and hallucination, it also fails in general. As a consequence, from a phenomenological standpoint, even in the cases of intentional states (e. g., perceptions) that are directed to “physical objects” (as phenomena), there cannot be a causal account of intentional relation.^① This sounds quite bizarre. And the question is, what then, is intentional relation from a phenomenological perspective?

I think the answer is quite straightforward. Because intentional objects are just phenomenal objects, it seems to be analytical that the intentional relation is just the relation of “consciousness of ...”, which holds between the intentional states and its phenomenal objects, and conversely “appearance to...” in which an intentional object is present to intentional consciousness.

It should be noted I intend this relation to be an intrinsic one. In a intrinsic relation, it is implied that: (i) neither of the related can be present when the other part is absent; and (ii) if either of the related things is present, then necessarily, the other thing is present.

According to this characterization, the spatial relation “being on...” is not an intrinsic relation. Although “my computer is on this desk” holds at the moment, this

① Mohanty has an insightful paper on the topic of intentionality and causality. See Mohanty 1984, *Intentionality, Causality and Holism*. In this paper, Mohanty has rejected a causal account of intentionality.

desk will not cease to exist simply because my computer is destroyed. In addition, the existence of my computer certainly does not imply that the desk necessarily exists.

However, from a phenomenological point of view, (i) there will not be intentional states if there are no intentional objects (as phenomenal objects), and *vice versa*; (ii) if there is an intentional state, then it implies that there necessarily is at least an intentional object, and *vice versa*.

In sum, neither the “object-approach” nor the “relation approach” can resolve the dilemma about intentional relation and intentional objects, because both approaches posit either problematic entities or questionable relations. Husserl is able to solve this dilemma from a phenomenological standpoint. According to Husserl, all intentional states are related to intentional objects, where intentional objects are phenomenal objects, while intentional relation is the intrinsic relation of “consciousness of···” or “appearance to···”

Conclusion: All Conscious States are Essentially Intentionally Directed to Intentional Objects

Husserl and other philosophers in the phenomenological tradition have considered intentionality as an essential and defining property of consciousness. This implies that all conscious states are intentional states (T1). Also, from a phenomenological point of view, all intentional states have corresponding intentional objects understood as phenomenal objects with different “being-modalities” (T2). Thus, all conscious states are essentially related to intentional objects understood as phenomenal objects. (T3)

From a phenomenological point of view, consciousness is no longer defined by “qualitative feel”, “non-extensionality”, “immateriality”, “idea”, etc. Instead, when we reflect upon consciousness phenomenologically, we can find that consciousness is essentially something that transcends itself toward its objects and the world. By investigating intentionality, we can understand consciousness. Furthermore, although all intentional states are directed toward intentional objects, the objects and relations should be understood in such a way as not to commit any ontological and naturalistic fallacy. Husserl has shown that if we understand intentional objects as phenomena, and the intentional relation accordingly, we will have a reasonable theory of intentionality that is free from metaphysical fallacies.

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