

An Investigation into Husserl's Phenomenology: A Study of the Role of Intentionality in Perception

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Abstract

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is a distinctly philosophical approach that emphasizes the significance of direct observation and the description of conscious experience. Unlike traditional approaches that concentrate on abstract concepts and theories, phenomenology seeks to understand the concrete and immediate nature of experience. The concept of intentionality, which refers to how consciousness is directed towards an object or phenomenon, is a key feature of Husserl's phenomenology. The notion of intentionality carries profound implications for how we comprehend perception, as it suggests that perception is not a mere passive process, but rather an active and engaged interaction with the world around us. By emphasizing the significance of lived experiences, Husserl's thoughts provide a nuanced and profound understanding of the complexities of human consciousness. Phenomenology sheds light on the finer details and subtleties of our subjective reality by careful analysis and reflection on these experienced experiences. This paper delves into the emphasis on present consciousness, offering a potent prism through which to examine the intricate interplay between the subject and the outside world, all while considering the notion of intentionality.

Keywords: Husserl, phenomenology, intentionality, perception, consciousness

Introduction

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), widely regarded as the founder of the phenomenological movement, focused on consciousness and saw phenomenology as a descriptive endeavor aimed at identifying the underlying structures that define our conscious experience of the world. The emphasis on the first-person perspective

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implies that the phenomenologist examines their own experiences as an observer of consciousness from the standpoint of actively living through them (Gallagher 7). Sokolowski defines phenomenology as "the study of human experience and the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience." (Sokolowski 2).

According to postmodernism, appearance is subjective and fragmented, whereas phenomenology contends that parts can only be understood in relation to wholes. Phenomenology holds that appearances contain identities and that absences are meaningful only in relation to presences. Phenomenology emphasizes that objects have inherent identity and intelligibility and that our ability to perceive and understand them defines us as observers. By investigating how things are, we not only discover objects, but also ourselves as recipients of disclosure. Phenomenology allows us to think not only about what we experience, but also about ourselves as thinkers. In essence, phenomenology is the process by which reason discovers itself in the presence of intelligible objects (Sokolowski 4). "All consciousness is consciousness of something," Husserl famously said, rejecting the passive philosophy of immanence that relies on compromise and physical alterations. Instead, transcendence philosophy exposes us to danger and tremendous revelation, forcing us along a difficult path (Sartre 3).

The main central part of Husserl's phenomenology is the idea of intentionality. So, Husserl's phenomenology is a philosophical framework that investigates the nature of consciousness and our perceptions of the world. At its foundation is the idea of intentionality, which refers to awareness' innate directedness toward things. According to Husserl, all consciousness is consciousness "of" something, which means that our mental processes are constantly oriented towards things or occurrences in the external world or inside our subjective experiences. Intentionality enables us to see, think about, and interact with the universe, so forming our perception of reality. Husserl hoped to acquire deeper insights into the nature of human cognition and perception by investigating the purposeful structure of consciousness. We will go into Husserl's phenomenology and its focus on the function of intentionality in perception in this examination. We hope to obtain insights into the complicated workings of our conscious experience in our daily lives by adopting a phenomenological approach. The idea of intentionality, which emphasizes our awareness' intrinsic directedness toward objects and processes, is central to this perspective. We may learn about the delicate interplay between our

subjective perception and the objective world by studying intentionality. We seek to expose the basic aspects that affect our vision, cognition, and holistic knowledge of reality via this perspective.

Phenomenology and Intentionality

Husserl described phenomenology as the science of pure phenomena. According to Husserl, gaining a clear understanding of the essence of knowledge requires firsthand experience, where it is directly presented to us in its unadulterated form through the act of "seeing." In order to comprehend knowledge at its core, we must delve into its immanent nature by engaging in a pure act of observation, immersing ourselves within the unaltered phenomenon and the realm of "pure consciousness" (Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology* 35). The first step in phenomenology is to attempt to free oneself from all preconceived beliefs and impositions on experience, whether derived from religious or cultural traditions, ordinary common sense, or science itself. Explanations should not be imposed until the phenomena is understood from inside. Husserl did not start the phenomenological debate. It may be traced back to intellectuals like Lambert, Fichte, Kant, and Hegel. They attempted to discuss consciousness from either a subjective or objective standpoint. Franz Brentano's philosophy influenced Husserl's work significantly. Husserl inherited from Brentano a broad admiration for the British tradition of empiricism, particularly Hume and Mill, as well as a dislike for Kantian and Hegelian idealism. Husserl also adopted the belief that philosophy is a rigorous science and that philosophy consists in description rather than causal explanation. For Husserl, as for Brentano, philosophy is the description of what is provided in direct self-evidence' (Moran 7-8). Husserl's intention was to understand the nature of psychology as science within the function of consciousness.

Husserl's phenomenology is founded on the idea of intentionality, which is seen as a necessary characteristic of consciousness. If a property F is stated to be an essential property of consciousness, then this property F is an invariable property of all instances of consciousness, according to Husserl's theory on essence and essential property. Intentionality becomes a fundamental or defining quality of any state of consciousness, rather than only a property of some conscious states (Zhongwei 88).

So, Intentionality is the ability of the mind to be concerned with anything other than itself. It is the ability to guide one's mental states toward things or situations of events in the world. Husserl considered intentionality to be the fundamental feature of consciousness and that all conscious experiences are directed at objects.

Husserl's idea of objectivity-for-subjectivity was founded on consciousness' purposeful structure. He expanded on Brentano's concept of deliberate inexistence to argue that all conscious experiences contain "aboutness," or are oriented towards things. Whether or whether the thing exists, it has meaning and importance for awareness. Husserl regarded phenomenology as a consciousness science concerned with clarifying the intentional structures of acts and their objects. Phenomenology sought to bridge the subject-object split by resurrecting Descartes' bold quest. Instead of delving into the ontological nature of the thinking substance, Husserl emphasized the intentional structure, describing it as the relationship between the self, its conscious acts, and their objective correlates. Later phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Levinas opposed Husserl's subjective philosophy. They attempted to depart from the metaphysical assumptions that underpin phenomenology and offered more radical methods. Levinas sought to overcome self-centered subjectivity by focusing on the experience of others. Sartre still considered phenomenology to be a branch of Cartesian philosophy. Levinas and Sartre misconstrued Husserl's intentionality as a direct contact with an emotionless and all-encompassing entity that rejects consciousness. Levinas sought methods to transcend this being, whereas Sartre regarded consciousness as always seeking to become a pure being but inevitably failing. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, highlighted the inextricable link between human awareness and existence. He defined the "chiasmic" interaction of humanity and the world, emphasizing their inextricable entanglement (Moran 17).

Husserl studies the phenomenological world of consciousness through rigorous eidetic analysis. We dive into the fundamental nature of consciousness, particularly in regard to its knowledge of the natural world, through this profound comprehension. This extraordinary sphere of awareness, unhindered by any phenomenological exclusion, serves as the foundation for phenomenology, a completely new science. Such a science had gone unnoticed until the possibility of adopting a phenomenological attitude and technique for grasping its objectivities became apparent. Prior to this discovery, the natural world dominated human

awareness, and the phenomenological domain was barely acknowledged, if at all (Husserl, *Ideas* 66). In Husserl's phenomenology, intentionality and consciousness are intertwined features that are critical to comprehending human experience and consciousness. The directedness of attention towards objects that allows us to be aware of and experience the world is referred to as intentionality. Consciousness is an active process that transcends the subject-object duality by being self-aware and oriented toward things. Evaluation includes subjective elements that shape our perceptions depending on previous ideas and feelings. Husserl's phenomenological technique involves "phenomenological bracketing" to suspend personal prejudices in order to examine consciousness objectively. This framework provides insightful information on the link between these aspects and the structure of consciousness.

The investigation of our consciousness begins with our intentionality. Because of the essential role language plays in forming cognitive processes, it is important to begin logical studies with linguistic study. It is critical for logical research to investigate the meaning of propositions, and linguistic dialogues clarify logical objects to avoid misconceptions. As a philosophical subject, pure logic necessitates a grasp of the cognitive processes involved in formulating ideas as well as their objective validity. Linguistic discussions are essential for preparing for pure logic because they involve a broader objective theory of knowledge and phenomenology of thinking experiences. Pure phenomenology serves as a basis for many sciences, explaining experiences in their core generality, assisting empirical psychology, and illuminating the origins of fundamental notions and principles of pure logic. The ultimate goal is to clarify fundamental concepts and rules underlying the objective meaning and theoretical unity of all knowledge (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 166).

Although the word "conscious" is frequently used, there isn't a clear, comprehensive framework for research, which makes theorizing about consciousness difficult. Similar to this, "intentionality" is frequently used in conflicting and confusing ways, especially given how different it is from common language usage. The characteristic of mental states or occurrences that entails their being about things, such as what you're thinking of or about, is known as intentionality. It is the focus of the mind on things, occasions, or situations. Franz Brentano and other kindred thinkers' thinking heavily included this idea. The usage

of terms like "about," "of," or "directed" in many situations, such as describing physical activity or personal traits, must be distinguished from this intentionality. There are extra difficulties in comprehending how thoughts refer as opposed to names and descriptions, as well as how intentionality relates to the senses. In general, the idea of intentionality prompts difficult inquiries on the character and range of its use (Siewert).

Perception and Intentionality in Husserl's Phenomenology

The contrast between perception and the perceived object is the main topic of Husserl's investigation. He contends that although we constantly change our perspective, the seen object, such as a table, stays the same. Further, he claims that sensory attributes like color and shape do not naturally exist inside perception but manifest in continuously changing patterns to generate what he calls "sensory fields." These sensory modalities play a crucial role in determining the genuine nature of experience. Husserl acknowledges the difficulty in defining different stages of vision within the context of "cogitatio." According to Husserl, an empirical consciousness of the same thing that looks "all-round" its object and in doing so is continuously confirming the unity of its own nature, essentially and necessarily possesses a manifold system of continuous patterns of appearances and perspective variations, in and through which all objective phases of the bodily self-given that appear in perception manifest themselves perspectively in definite continua (Husserl, *Ideas* 77).

A central focus is on exploring how perception comes to life within consciousness. This facet of his philosophical framework is intricately connected to the concept of intentionality, which plays a pivotal role in deciphering the structure of our conscious experiences. Below, we analyze how perception takes form within consciousness according to Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenological approach rests upon the notion of intentionality, signifying that consciousness is perpetually directed towards an object. When we engage in perception, our consciousness deliberately orients itself towards that object. This inherent directedness constitutes the essence of perception within Husserl's philosophy. For

instance, when you gaze upon a tree, your consciousness doesn't exist in isolation; instead, it is purposefully directed towards the tree in a distinct manner.

Husserl introduced the concepts of "noema" and "noesis" to elucidate perception further. The "noema" embodies the objective content of an intentional act (e.g., the tree as it is perceived), whereas the "noesis" represents the subjective act of consciousness directed at the noema (e.g., the act of seeing the tree). In perception, the noesis and noema intertwine, and it is this interplay that gives rise to the perceptual experience. Husserl posits the existence of a transcendental ego, a foundational form of consciousness that imparts unity and coherence to our conscious experiences. This transcendental ego assumes responsibility for constituting objects within consciousness, including those encountered through perception. It functions as the unifying thread connecting various intentional acts and their corresponding objects. To fathom how perception unfolds within consciousness, that is why he put an emphasis on phenomenological reduction or "epoché." This process entails suspending our natural attitude and temporarily setting aside the existence of the external world. Through this practice, we can focus exclusively on the structures of consciousness itself and how they bestow meaning and form upon objects within the realm of perception (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* ch.8).

The extension of the concept of fulfillment to perception is not immediately obvious. Significant intentionality, which deals with judgments and symbolic representation, is easy to understand in terms of fulfillment because the concepts involved determine the criteria for success or failure of a judgment. For example, in the judgment "The moon is at the horizon," the concepts involved dictate what kind of experience would confirm or refute its truth. However, perceptual intentionality is quite different. It is individual, non-symbolic, and pre-predicative, making it less clear where the notion of fulfillment fits in. How can fulfillment in perception play a role in establishing the unity of perceptual acts involving the same object? For instance, why should the experience of looking at a candle from a different angle be considered a fulfillment or improvement over an earlier view, rather than just a subsequent occurrence? Husserl aims to describe the inherent normativity within perception itself, but it might seem like he has introduced this normativity by using logical language to explain the perceptual process (Crowell 131).

We can see that perception encompasses not only the apprehension of objects but also the temporal and spatial constitution of these objects. The manner in which we perceive objects entails a synthesis of temporal and spatial dimensions within consciousness. Husserl explores how these dimensions interact to generate the distinct experience of an object in a specific context. Therefore, perception is not a passive reception of sensory data; rather, it is an active, intentional act of consciousness. It emerges through the directed nature of consciousness, facilitated by the interplay of noema and noesis, under the guidance of the transcendental ego, and is comprehensible through the lens of phenomenological reduction. The temporal and spatial aspects contribute further to the complexity and depth of perceptual experiences. A grasp of these elements is crucial for comprehending how Husserl's philosophy illuminates the nature of perception within consciousness.

The Role of Intentionality in Shaping Perception

Husserl's theory of intentionality consists of three key elements: intentional act, intentional content, and intentional object. The intentional content refers to how a subject perceives or thinks about an object, always from a specific perspective or with certain attributes. It is like a mental description or set of information that characterizes the object in the subject's thoughts. Importantly, intentional content is not inherently linguistic, according to Husserl, and even language use is analyzed in terms of underlying intentional states. The distinction between intentional object and intentional content is elucidated by considering examples from the philosophy of language, such as informative identity statements. This distinction helps explain cases where different content is associated with the same object. It also plays a crucial role in addressing thought about and reference to non-existent objects, such as perceptual illusions or fictional characters. Husserl's differentiation between intentional content and intentional object allows him to account for meaningful thought about non-existent entities without resorting to the idea of non-existent objects (Spear).

Husserl claimed that directedness or aboutness are fundamental characteristics of intentionality, which is a component of consciousness. The focus object and the act of directing attention toward it are its two primary components. Husserl's idea of

intentionality is fundamentally two-sided, taking into account both the objective side of the experiencing subject and their mental processes and the presented contents. So, he makes a similar distinction between two fundamental approaches when talking about conscious content: the intended object or content presented and focused upon in consciousness and the intrinsically inherent aspect linked to the subjective act. His more general concept of intentionality is in line with this dual understanding of content. In phenomenology, perception is influenced by intentionality, which involves the directedness of consciousness toward objects. Husserl distinguishes between two aspects of perceived properties, such as the color red: the sensuous impression (hyle) and the represented property within intentional content. This duality can lead to skepticism about the necessity of positing hyletic data, especially with the contemporary transparency thesis suggesting that introspection reveals only intentional contents. Critics have challenged Husserl's concept of un-animated hyle as a theoretical abstraction from phenomenological reflection. Husserl acknowledges this concern but does not claim that pure sense data can be found upon reflection. He later emphasizes the synthetic unity of hyletic data as "fields of sense." Husserl's distinction between really inherent content and presented content clarifies his position. Presented content refers to what is consciously made available, while really inherent contents are an essential but non-intentional part of experience. Hyle belongs to the category of real inherence. To justify the positing of hyletic "real contents," some contemporary philosophers draw on insights similar to Husserl's. For instance, Crane discusses the Müller-Lyer and waterfall illusions, suggesting the need for two levels of simultaneous representation. Dretske separates systemic and acquired representations, illustrating this with conditioned dogs that respond differently to the same sound. These examples provide support for the concept of hyletic data in understanding perception (Van Mazijk 503-505).

In Husserl's *Ideas I*, hyletic data of sensation are intrinsic to intentional acts but lack intentionality themselves. They play a crucial role in enabling intentional animation. This concept doesn't require metaphysical postulation and is still relevant in contemporary philosophy. Husserl's account of hyletic data doesn't rely on cases of illusion or misrepresentation for discovery. These data, like sensory content and color moments, are directly impressed upon consciousness, adding depth to phenomenological descriptions. Husserl also distinguishes another non-intended but

essential content type called "noesis." Noesis encompasses the subjective aspects of experience, including act-qualities (judgmental, evaluative, imaginative modes) and doxic modalities (belief in existence). This distinction has been emphasized by recent philosophers like Martin and Stoljar, aligning with Husserl's phenomenological insights for over a century.

In terms of phenomenal consciousness, hyletic data themselves don't have the purpose of intentionally representing anything. Instead, they become meaningful when paired with intentional contents, allowing us to perceive objects or situations through our senses like seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, or feeling. These data are responsible for the immediate and sensory aspect of perceptual experiences, distinguishing them from mere thoughts. The difference between these hyletic data and representational content is evident not only in the distinct nature of thoughts and perceptions with the same intentional objects, where the latter are sensory, but also in how the same hyletic data can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, the same sensory sensations on my arm could be experienced as either a tourniquet or something else depending on the context (Williford 502). Undoubtedly, we can claim that intentionality and the data it generates play a significant role in how our consciousness functions within the context of directedness, ultimately affecting our perception as we interact with the vibrant and dynamic world around us. Our capacity to interact with and make sense of the world is supported by this directedness, which is a fundamental quality of consciousness. Our conscious experiences and the associated data interact dynamically within this intentional framework. These data cover the perceptions, ideas, and emotions that make up our subjective awareness. They serve as the foundation for our mental and perceptual processes. The information is constantly interacting with our consciousness as we move through the living world. This interaction gives shape to how we perceive the world. We perceive the world as active participants in the construction of meaning rather than merely as passive receivers of sensory information. Our consciousness not only takes in sensory information but also interprets and contextualizes it under the direction of intentionality. It gives the data it receives meaning, enabling us to distinguish between objects, spot patterns, and generate coherent thoughts. Our rich and complex perceptual experiences are created by the intricate interaction between intentionality and data.

Therefore, our consciousness is essentially an active participant in the world rather than a passive observer, constantly trying to interpret and make sense of the information that is being fed to it. We build our perception of the living world, influencing our understanding and experience of reality, through this ongoing conversation between intentionality and data, where the normativity of a subject plays an important role.

Conclusion

I've discussed about Husserlian phenomenology and how intentionality shapes our perception by playing a significant role in our consciousness. Phenomenology is the approach by which we can relate our rationality to the living world, as Husserl always tried to argue. I have argued that intentional contents have normative effects on our perception, and an investigation of intentionality demonstrates that our consciousness is not merely a passive receiver of sensory information but rather an active contributor to the meaning-making process. We interact with the world intentionally by focusing our mental states on particular things, circumstances, or events. This intentional orientation allows us to perceive and understand the world in a manner that is deeply intertwined with our desires, expectations, and beliefs.

On top of that, Husserl's division of intentional content, intentional object, and hyletic data offers insightful information about the complexity of perceptual experiences. While the sensory underpinnings of perception are formed by hyletic data, intentional content represents our mental descriptions of objects. Our conscious experiences are more varied and rich as a result of how these factors interact. Husserl's phenomenology emphasizes how our consciousness plays a direct role in how we perceive the world. Through the intentionality of its actions, it creates meaning, interprets sensory information, and interacts with the outside world.

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