The Phenomenological Notion of Sense as Acquaintance with Background

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I am very pleased to be able to hold a presentation in this conference. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who offered me this opportunity.

Today, I would like to talk about the phenomenological notion of sense. This notion has been extensively discussed by Husserl scholars, especially in relation to Frege. However, its relationship to Heidegger's question of the "meaning of the Being" has not been investigated. Therefore I am going to focus on this aspect of the Husserlian notion of sense.

It is widely accepted that both Frege and Husserl distinguished between sense and reference. However, in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*, there is a notion of sense, of which we cannot find any exact equivalent in Frege. Husserl calls this notion "fulfilling sense" in *LI* and "noematic sense" in *Ideas I*. The close relationship between fulfilling sense and noema is confirmed through the footnote in §88 of *Ideas I*.

However, it is not easy to understand what he means by these notions. The following passage in §25 of the 6th Investigation can give us a hint how they are to be interpreted. [Citation begins.] "One might therefore be tempted– I myself hesitated long on this point – to define meaning as this very 'matter', which would, however, have the inconvenience that the moment of *assertion* in, e.g., a predicative statement, would fall outside of that statement's meaning." [Citation ends.] By "matter", Husserl means intentional matter or intension which determines the reference to a certain object, i. e. the Fregean concept of "sense". Also Frege takes assertion into account and distinguishes the mere grasp of thought from the recognition of its truth value and assertion. Nevertheless, his interest is restricted to the recognition of truth value which must be independent of the first person perspective of a judging subject. As long as the recognition of a truth value is concerned, the meaning of tense, for example, can be ignored, because the truth value doesn't change with time.[1]

Compared with Frege, Husserl deals with assertion together with other illocutionary forces like expectation, remembrance etc. which he calls act-quality in *LI* and noetic character in *Ideas I*. This is because, in his study of the intentionality, Husserl is oriented to the *performance* in perception. If I move, objects will show from different perspectives. Together with the change of the perspectives, the illocutionary force of my propositional attitude will also change. Although Husserl articulates the concept "kinesthesis" first in the lecture "Thing and Space" in 1907, this concept is already implied in his notion of "fulfilling" in *LI*.

I have, for instance, an expectation that the back side of a cube is a square. If I move and find out that the side is really a square, then my expectation is fulfilled. In this case, I

[1] G. Frege, The Thought: A Logical Inquiry, in Mind, vol. 65, 1956, pp. 289-311. P. 310: "If we use the mere form of the indicative sentence, avoiding the word 'true', two things must be distinguished, the expression of the thought and the assertion. The time-indication that may be contained in the sentence belongs only to the expression of the thought, while the truth, whose recognition lies in the form of the indicative sentence, is timeless. Yet the same words, on account of the variability of language with time, take on another sense, express another thought; this change, however, concerns only the linguistic aspect of the matter."

can also utter: The *back* side *must be* a square; *this* side *is indeed* a square. It is important not to formalize these expressions as P with illocutionary forces, because Husserl's insight resides in the very fact that the illocutionary force of propositional attitudes towards perceptual objects can be understood in the direct acquaintance with their perspective appearance which he calls adumbration (Abschattung). The change of the illocutionary force from an expectation to an assertion is apprehended in combination with the change of the perspectives. Besides, the change of the perspectives is recognized not through intentional matter like side or square, but the change of sense of *indexicals, modal verbs and tense of copula*, that is, the fulfilling sense of categorial expressions. Although the fulfilling sense or the noematic sense is related to an object, this is not the relation through the signification act, but the intuitive relation by the intuitive act.

In order to analyze the Husserlian notion of sense further, the concept of subjectivity must be clarified. The subjectivity was conceived by Frege as opposite of the objectivity of linguistic sense. After the behaviorist's critique, the subjectivity seems to be exorcized from the field of linguistic sense. However, this critique takes only the Cartesian notion of subjectivity into account, and Frege left the *linguistic subjectivity* of indexical expressions unsolved as incommunicable. The sense of indexical expressions is surely not objective in the same sense as true mathematical propositions or true descriptions of physical structures. This kind of truth is in principle *perspective-free*, or in Husserl's words, "Wahrheit an sich", whereas the truth of indexical expressions is subjective or *dependent on* a certain perspective. But it is still inter-subjectively accessible as expressions from the third person perspective of an utterer. Therefore, we need a new notion of subjectivity which can be harmonized not with the perspective-free objectivity, but with the inter-*subjectivity* of linguistic sense.

For this purpose, the notion of perspective must be now examined. Here I support the interpretation of noema by Aron Gurwitsch as one of possible aspects of the perceptual object.[2] This interpretation is mistakenly associated with Berkeleyan phenomenalism by some Husserl scholars.[3] Instead, the noema is the basis of the non-Cartesian subjectivity, which I would like to call *life-world subjectivity*. This is distinguished from the Cartesian subjectivity, because it includes the *spatiality* within its scope. After the Cartesian definition of subjectivity as a sphere of incorrigibility, the spatiality has been excluded from the scope of subjectivity, because the knowledge of spatial objects is always exposed to a possible doubt. Thus, inside the Cartesian tradition, the space is reduced to the perspective-free structure of geometrical space, and the Cartesian subject loses sight of the perspective space-structures, such as right, left, up, down, near, far, although it incessantly makes use of them in everyday actions. And this flaw of the Cartesian subjectivity is still not eliminated from the contemporary discussion about qualia or mental events, insofar as the ontological status of perspective directions is left unquestioned.

Berkeley famously criticized Lockean primary qualities, because their appearance is never without secondary qualities and therefore dependent on the first person perspective. But he wrongly identified this dependence with the existence *within the mind*.[4] However, it is clear that the perspective appearance of spatial objects such as front, back, right or

[2] A. Gurwitsch, Husserl's Theory of the Intentionality of Consciousness, in Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science, ed. by H. L. Dreyfus, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1982, p. 63.
[3] B. Smith and D. W. Smith, Introduction, in Cambridge Companion to Husserl, ed. by B. Smith and D. W. Smith, Cambridge, 1995, p. 23.
[4] G. Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, ed. by J. Dancy, Oxford, 1998, Part 1 §10-11.

left, are not something mental, although they are not a physical structure of objects and their existence is dependent on a standpoint of a perceiver. Husserl writes in *Ideas I*: "The adumbrating is a mental process (Erlebnis). But a mental process is possible only as a mental process, and not as something spatial. However the adumbrated is of essential necessity possible only as something spatial, […] and not possible as mental process" (Ideas I, p. 88). And "what is "presented", "adumbrated" […] belongs in the noema" (ibid. p. 238). [Citation ends.] The noema is therefore an utterly "non-selfsufficient" object. [Citation begins.] "Its esse consists exclusively of its "percipi" – except that this proposition does not have Berkeleyian sense because here the percipi does not include the esse as a real component (reelles Bestandstück)" (ibid. p. 241).[5] [Citation ends.] In other words, the being of the spatial adumbration of perceived objects are dependent on the point of view of a perceiver, but this spatial being must be distinguished from the non-spatial being of the perception as mental process.

This is a decisive step that leads to a revolution in the field of subjectivity, which we can observe in *Ideas II*. If the front side of a cube *motivates* me to assume that its back side must be a square, it is neither the physical structure of the cube nor its causal relation to the physical structure of my body, but the perspective appearance of the cube that motivates me. "Because the *front* side is a square", this is the *reason* why I make the assumption about the *back* side. In correlation to the mode of appearance of her surrounding world, the body of a person must be viewed not in respect of its physical structure, but as a center of orientation in her life-world. Husserl writes: "It is evident what foundational sense there is to the relation between man as personal subject and the objects of his surrounding world versus the natural relation between the naturally understood man (as psychophysical reality) and other realities. "Stimuli" are said to be emitted especially by the physical Objects of nature, and the sensitive nerves are said to be stimulated by physical excitations. […] But if we place ourselves on the terrain of the intentional relation between subject and Object, the relation between person and surrounding world, then the concept of stimulus acquires a fundamentally new sense. Instead of the causal relation between things and men as natural realities, there is substituted *the relation of motivation* between persons and things, and these things are not […] the things of exact natural science with the determinations which gives them only objective truth value (die sie als allein objectiv wahre gelten läßt) […] but are the experienced, […] things as such, intentional objects of personal consciousness" (Ideas II, p. 198f.). [Citation ends.]

Here, Husserl clearly distinguishes the "space of reasons" from natural facts like brain process, but his "space of motivations" cannot be a "frictionless spinning in a void", because it is embedded in the spatio-temporal structure of a life-world. It is namely the conceptual structure of adumbrated objects as themselves which prescribes the scope of possible expectations about perceptual objects. Depending on the *force* of motivations or the reason of expectations, an expected aspect of a perceptual object appears in different modes, which Husserl calls *noematic character*. The back side of a cube appears, for instance, *as* a square in almost necessary mode of being, which is understood as the sense of "must be", whereas its color appears only in possible mode of being, which is understood as the sense of "can be". If the expectations are fulfilled, these beings of the cube appear in the mode of actuality, which is understood as the sense of "is indeed". Thus, as Husserl describes in an article "Sense and Noema", "the changing noematic mode of appearance of the whole object as sense" (Husserliana vol. XI, p. 333) [Citation ends.] is the *background*

[5] Here, I don't follow the English translation of the last clause by F. Kersten.

or *horizon*, in implicit acquaintance with which the illocutionary force of propositional attitudes towards perceptual objects, i. e. the correlation of noetic and noematic characters can be understood. Husserl could not restrict his notion of sense to proposition or to its perspective-free truth value, because illocutionary forces of our intentional life are to be interpreted only against the background of the perspective dependent spatio-temporal structure of life-world.

One might object that, despite its spatiality, the life-world subjectivity is still solipsistic. Fulfilling sense as direct acquaintance with perspective appearance of objects seems to be limited to a first person perspective. However, if we hear indexical expressions of others, we can understand their sense, although, strictly speaking, nobody else can have the exactly same access to the perspective appearance of the life-world of an utterer. If I hear someone saying: "the back side of this cube must be a square", I don't have to observe directly the cube and person to understand the sense of "back". The spatial relationship between the person and cube is *implied* in the expression, together with other directions, and also with the temporal structure of the retained past perception, the present perception and the future oriented expectation. Put differently, indexical expressions of others can be appropriately interpreted only against the spatio-temporal background of an utterer. If we understand indexical expressions of others, we are, so to say, put in their place through *empathy*, as if we were in their position. The empathy is not a magical faculty, but an ability we have to presuppose to make sense of our factual usage of indexical expressions. We are *indirectly* acquainted with the background of indexical expressions of others in *analogy* with the spatio-temporal structure of our own life-world.

Husserl calls the indirect acquaintance with the background of other persons as "*appresence*" (Appräsenz) in distinction to the *primal presence* (Urpräsenz) as direct acquaintance with one's own life-world. He writes: "My appearance belongs to me, his to him. Only in the manner of appresence can I have, co-given with his Body, his appearances and his "here", to which they are related" (Ideas II, p. 177). "If I posit, […] a thing as Objectively actual, then I am thereby also positing, for every posited subject, existing unities of appearance, i. e., unities of validity which are indices for rules of lived experiences of perception […] that are intentionally related to these "appearances". All these "phenomenal" things are what they are only as noematic correlates of the perceptual lived experiences of the man in question" (ibid. p. 178). [Citation ends] In another place of *Ideas II*, Husserl calls the "rules of lived experiences" the ""grammar" of "expressions of life of soul" (ibid. p. 175). Indexical expressions are namely the *grammar of intentional life* which implies, as its background, the perspective appearance of surrounding objects, that is, the noematic correlates of an intentional life. Thus, the phenomenological notion of sense as acquaintance with background is, as the grammar of intentional life, *intersubjectively accessible*.

It is this phenomenological notion of sense that Heidegger bears in mind, when he defines in *BT* the sense as the "in-respect-of-which (Woraufhin) of the primary project" (SZ, p.324). If a carpenter utters: "the hammer is too heavy", the hammer is interpreted *in respect of* the spaio-temporal structure of a life-world presupposed by a practical deliberation. As we can observe in the lecture in the summer semester 1925, he still uses the Husserlian concept of "appresentation" to define his notion of sense (GA20 p. 292, 330). Heidegger calls the mode of being like "being too heavy" of a hammer the "character of meaningfulness" (Bedeutsamkeitscharakter, GA18, p. 300, SZ, p. 87). If we understand the utterance and its performative aspects, our interpretation of them is enabled through

the pre-ontological project as pre-reflective acquaintance with the meaningful character of the world, which Heidegger calls “acquaintance” or “familiarity with the world” (Weltvertrautheit, SZ, p. 86). This is precisely the hermeneutic development of the Husserlian noematic character with the aid of Diltheyan concept of meaningfulness and also of the Aristotelian practical philosophy, as it can be observed in his early Freiburg and Marburg lectures.