

Husserl's Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl was born in Prossnitz, Moravia, in what is now the Czech Republic in April, 1859. He studied mathematics at the Universities of Leipzig, and Berlin, before receiving his PhD in Mathematics from the University of Vienna in 1883. Husserl had many other interests including astronomy, physics, psychology and philosophy; he attended philosophical lectures by Willhelm Wundt and Friedrich Paulsen, among others, during his time studying mathematics. After completing his PhD in Mathematics, Husserl wished to further his study in philosophy and began studying under psychologist Franz Brentano, who he was greatly influenced by. Brentano is mainly known for introducing the notion of intentionality to philosophy. Shortly after studying under Brentano, Husserl began to produce his own work.¹

Husserl, who was highly influenced by the philosophy of Rene Descartes, sought to find an absolutely secure foundation for which all knowledge could rest upon. Husserl believed that all of the empirical natural sciences were missing something, they seemed to take for granted how things are experienced in the first person perspective. He says "Daily and practical existence is naïve; it is the immersion in an already-given world and consists of experiencing, thinking, valuing, acting" Husserl believed that any true philosopher must begin by withdrawing into

¹ *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl* ISBN: 0-385-08480-3

themselves, and then from within attempt to destroy and rebuild all previous learning. This is very similar to what Descartes did with his systematic method of doubting all his beliefs. And so Husserl said of Descartes, "Phenomenology must honor him as its genuine patriarch".²

Husserl refers to the one of the main problems in philosophy, proving the existence of the outside world. Throughout the ages there have been skeptics who have argued that we can never know if the objects of our consciousness have a separate existence apart from us, independent of our experience of them. Husserl does not deny that this is a problem, but he does maintain that the objects of our consciousness do indeed exist, regardless of their status in the "real" world. Even if the whole world is an hallucination, the things my ego is experiencing are real. "It is the ego which, while it suspends all beliefs about the reality of the world the grounds that these are not indubitable, discovers itself as the only apodictically certain being."

Husserl believed that in order to build a solid foundation for knowledge you must first disregard all prior learning and then begin to rebuild it with only "evidence that is immediate and apodictic.". This means you begin with direct first person experience. "If I place myself above that entire life and I abstain from any commitment about reality, specifically one that accepts the world as existing, and if

² Husserl *The Paris Lectures*

<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/12355793/the-paris-lectures-edmund-husserlpdf>

I view that life specifically as consciousness of the world, then I reveal myself as pure ego with its pure stream of cogitations”, Husserl said that the objects of our consciousness are the only thing our ego has direct access to, and we can investigate them as such, without making any assumptions about their independent existence. Thus Husserl launched the school of philosophy known as phenomenology.³

The phenomenology created by Husserl has made him one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, despite his relatively modest reputation. Phenomenology is devoted to the systematic analysis of consciousness and its objects, or whatever is given to direct experience from the first-person point of view. Our direct experience encompasses not only material objects external to us, but all sort of abstract things like mathematics and music, and also our own thoughts, pains, joys, memories, emotion, etc.

Husserl observed that the mind is always directed towards something, For instance when I look at a tree, and perceive it from the side. I can recall what the tree looks like. I can have beliefs about what type it is. I can have desires about whether or not to trim it. The mind can have objects of consciousness which it focuses on. Husserl believed that the mind was the only thing in the universe that was directed toward something that is outside of it, other than it. Husserl called

³ Edmund Husserl. *IDEAS PERTAINING TO A PURE PHENOMENOLOGY AND TO A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILSOPHY*
<http://www.dhspriory.org/kenny/PhilTexts/Husserl/Ideas1.pdf>

this directedness intentionality, using the terminology of his mentor Brentano, and it is the central structure of an experience.⁴

In order to ensure that any given object of consciousness is recorded exactly as it is experienced, Husserl performed what he termed the phenomenological *epoche* (the German word for bracketing), which involves putting certain beliefs out of action or consideration. This means that for every object of consciousness, one must disregard *everything* but the experience, and not rely upon *any* preexisting assumptions concerning the object. This sort of reduction will lead to universal or transcendental experience. "The phenomenological *epoche* has uncovered for us, through the apodictic *I am* a new kind and endless sphere of being. This is the sphere of a new kind of experience: transcendental experience. And herewith also arises the possibility of both transcendental epistemology and transcendental science." Bracketing, means dismissing all ones presumptions, to experience something without any pre held conceptions of what that experience should entail.

Husserl required the *epoche* because he noticed that synthesis is a unique and fundamental characteristic of consciousness. For example, I think of a house as being *one* object, which is made up of many different parts. The unity of the parts is a synthesis of the mind, it is not given in immediate experience., I may not even see all the different parts. I can stand in one room and recollect the house I have just walked through as a whole by combining all the different scenes in my mind and

⁴ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

reconstructing a “real” house; the house is my ego's intention. “The ego is not merely an empty pole, but the permanent and enduring subject of persisting convictions and habits through whose alterations *the unity of the personal ego and its personal character is first constituted*. From this we must dissociate the ego in its full concretion, because the ego is concrete only in the flowing multiplicity of its intentional existence and with the objects that are meant and constituted for it therein.”

In other words, we experience things according to how we expect to experience them. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “These (actual or potential) future experiences can be said to be (more or less) anticipated by the experiencing subject at the respective time, and they constitute what Husserl calls the “intentional horizon” of the indexical experience in the light of whose intentional content they are anticipated.”⁵ Husserl uses the example of a hexahedron, though one may only perceive it from one side, what you experience in reality is more. I fully expect that if I were to get up and walk around to examine the object from all sides, it would conform to my previous experiences of a hexahedron. Only the use of the phenomenological *epoché* enables one to strip away all previous expectations and actions of synthesis by the mind.

Husserl was not anti-science, although he did believe that all of the natural sciences were dependent on philosophy. He very much wished to make

⁵ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/#LifWor>

phenomenology a scientific and structural system, where the work of many individuals could be combined as in the other sciences. As he put it he wished for “a science about the ego which becomes the ultimate foundation of philosophy in the Cartesian sense of a universal science. “ He believed that a genuine theory of knowledge makes sense only if it is transcendental and phenomenological.

“It (phenomenology) may further be defined as the systematic development of *the universal logos of all conceivable being*. In other words, a systematically and fully developed transcendental phenomenology is *ipso facto the true and genuine universal ontology*”