

EDMUND HUSSERL ON PHENOMENOLOGY

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The history of philosophy from Socrates to Sartre shows there are no new truths to be discovered, but there are old ones to be rediscovered. Although the central subject matter of philosophy does not change, the critical and analytical approaches change very often. Permanent relationships are described in an impermanent idiom according to the age and climate of thought and the individual philosopher's personal style of thinking.

No philosopher understands his subject until he has rethought the thoughts of previous philosophers and interpreted them in his own contemporary terms and times. This philosophical feat of rethinking previous thoughts has been embarked upon by the great philosophers: Plato, Aristotle, Kant etc. This paper is a further attempt at such rethinking and interpretation.

This paper is a modest essay on Phenomenology. Phenomenology itself, is a major source of contemporary existentialism. The linkage between existentialism and phenomenology is often obscure. This is because Husserl, who popularized phenomenology, is very technical in his language. While phenomenology is rationalistic, existentialism is about the immediate human concerns of daily existence. Husserl who formulated transcendental phenomenology is the pre-occupation of this paper. We want to, in addition to a critical evaluation, see its impact on the society.

Early Influence

Edmund Husserl, to a great extent, made impact on the Existentialist movement. A German philosopher, he lived from 1859 - 1938 and later became a central figure in the phenomenological movement. He started his career in

Mathematics in which he bagged a Ph.D. in 1881. After a brief stay with Karl Theodor Weierstrass, also a mathematician, he travelled to Vienna to attend a lecture presented by the philosopher Franz Brentano (from 1884 to 1886) and therefore, he decided to devote the remaining part of his intellectual pursuit to philosophy. He lectured at Halle (1887 - 1901); Gottingen (1901 - 1916) and Freiburg (1916 - 1929) where he spent most part of his later life. His Jewish ancestry constituted a major part of his life experiences as it attracted to him both negative and positive socio-political results.

Husserl was seriously committed to the vocation of philosophy. His devotion to the field was redolent with the fervour of a person destined to a peculiar call. To him, philosophy was a science. Though, on some occasions, he had to rethink this position. However, he maintained all through his career that, only indubitable and objective truth deserves to be called a science. The kind of truth he talked about and sought after, was the sort that has nothing to do with any particular object, but which has a universal application to human knowledge.

He demonstrated commitment to this career of his in diverse ways. This can be seen in the fact that he published about 8 books, numerous articles and 45,000 manuscript pages in shorthand. He sought for a reliable and unwavering source of knowledge which he branded the "Archimedean Point". Probably, due to his avowed intention to reach for a solid foundation of knowledge, he had to abandon most of his earlier view, a factor which made him see himself as an unending beginner, without necessarily making him lose sight of the fact of his ingenuity. Therefore, all of his writings, published and unpublished, should be better seen as works-in-progress. "There is no Husserlian 'system', there are no incontestable of the phenomenological truths; there is no unambiguous and incontrovertible description of the phenomenological methods".¹

For a philosopher to view philosophy as science, there is the need for complete charity and the establishment of a solid source of truth. Besides, there is the need for thoroughness and meticulousness. In fact, nothing should be taken for granted in this quest. This is necessary, for, in philosophy, there is no pre-supposition, nothing is taken to be truth unless it is proven. It is no wonder then that Husserl's initial philosophic inquiries were prompted by the search for "clarity

and certainty". He felt it inappropriate to be doing Mathematics without understanding the basic underlying concepts. With Brentano's encouragement, he started the study of Philosophy of Mathematics and in 1881, he was able to publish his *Philosophie der Arithmetik*. Here, he explored the psychological analysis of certain basic logical and mathematical notions. For instance, the idea of number was to be clarified in the course of talking about the activity of counting. In reviewing this book however, a mathematician Gottlob Frege, contended that logical and mathematical concepts differ from the psychological acts in which they may occur and as such, the discussion of the latter does not necessarily explain the former. He alleged therefore that Husserl confused psychology with logic.

Transcendental Phenomenology

In the fifth Essay of the *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl enumerated the various ingredients of intentional acts. He posed a question. "One wonders the kind of description this is; how can phenomenological description be distinguished from ordinary psychological ones?". To answer this question, he introduced what he called "transcendental phenomenological reduction" in a series of lectures he entitled *Die idee der Phanomenologie*. As a methodological device necessary before one starts doing phenomenology, this reduction is the transition from an ordinary, straightforward attitude towards the world and the objects in it a reflective attitude.² Nonetheless, the problem that remained unsolved even to Husserl was to work out the exact nature of this device.

According to Husserl, on performing this reduction, we discover what he called the "Transcendental ego or pure consciousness for which everything that exists is an object".³ Therefore, whatsoever that is found in the world is only an object for pure consciousness. The duty of unearthing this pure consciousness, is the phenomenologists'. Phenomenology is now characterized as the exploration and description of a realm of being previously unsuspected, which is the absolute foundation of the experienced worlds, a realm of being moreover, which is not accessible to empirical observation but only to phenomenological description and to something Husserl called "eidectic intention".⁴

Precisely because the transcendental ego is not in doubt, its discovery

stands for distinction between phenomenology and the empirical sciences which makes provision for the "Archimedean Point" at which we shall ... our studies. This point was not widely received especially among the members of the phenomenological movement. Most of them saw it as a regrettable lapse into metaphysics, a complete diversion from descriptive phenomenology. However, Husserl, for a long time, held extreme views on transcendental ego. He contended that this ego continues to exist even if the totality of the whole world was to be destroyed. This ego, according to him, distinct from self, is an individual entity "distinct from the self which is the object of my empirical self-observation or the observation of the psychologist".⁵ This implies that an individual has two selves, the first is the one we are familiar with - the empirical self; the other, the "transcendental self", is unknown to us and which has to remain in existence even at the destruction of the empirical self together with the demise of the world.

Cognizant of the fact that his description of the transcendental ego was not convincing enough, Husserl attempted to give a more satisfactory one. In the *Formale und Transcendentale Logic* (1929), he held fervently that the transcendental ego exists 'absolutely' and that the existence of other things is relative to it. In his consequent lectures in 1935 which were published under the title; *Die Krisis der europaischen Wissenschaften und die Transcendentale Phanomenologie* (Belgrade, 1936), he saw the transcendental ego as being correlative to the world. It is at this point that Husserl began to rethink his doctrine of an absolute ego. "The world is no longer said to be what it is for any transcendental individual but for an intersubjective community of individuals".⁶

There was also a noticeable change in Phenomenology. It was no longer the description of a different realm of being but instead the reflection on, and description of the ways which our communal experience comes to be. What are the criteria for the coherence of different sorts of experiences and for their adequacy.⁷ This implies that Husserlian phenomenological method is not different from those of the sciences, the fact notwithstanding that it (Husserlian Phenomenology) deals with a subject matter that is also distinct from those of the physical sciences.

Another remarkable change was also perceived in phenomenology. Initially,

it was to have provided the foundation for reflecting about scientific knowledge. But, Husserl had to make a distinction between the world as known to science and the one on which we live the *Lebenswelt*, and concluded that the scientific knowledge can only be comprehended after a proper grasping of the *Lebenswelt*. Hence, Phenomenology is mainly interested in the study of the world we live in and our experience of it.

The doctrine of intentionality forms a cardinal theme of Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl did not seek to discover anything about the natural world, his concern was mainly to ascertain the essences of phenomena as they appear to consciousness. The question as to whether or not these phenomena correspond to the natural and real world he reserved for the explanatory disciplines of philosophy and science. As to the question of the real human self, he left for psychology.

However, Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976), was interested in the old philosophical question of the nature of being-viewing the essential structure of human beings as an extension of the concept of intentionality. "Just as consciousness is defined as consciousness of, human being is characterized by Heidegger as, being in the world".⁸ Equally, as consciousness is not an isolated entity which relates to objects, man is not a separate being that fights his world. Instead, he is necessarily in-the-world.

Fact And Essence

Natural knowledge starts from experience and stays within experience. "Every science has its own object -- domain as field of research and to all that it knows, i.e., in this connection, to all its correct assertion, they correspond as original sources of the reasoned justification that support them, certain intuition in which object of the region appear as self given and in part at least as given in a primordial ... sense".⁹

"To have something real, primordially given, and to 'become aware' of it and perceive it in simple intuition are one and the same thing".¹⁰ We realize primordial experience of physical things in outer perception, but this is no longer the case in memory or anticipatory expectation. The primordial experience we have, is that of ourselves and our states of consciousness in self-perception, but not

those of others. But we know the living experience of others only through the perception of their bodily behaviour. "This beholding in the case of empathy is indeed intuitional dator, yet, no longer a primordially dator act".¹¹ The world is made up all the knowable objects through experience.

Essential Insight And Individual Intuition

Initially, essence is that which, in the intimate self-being of an individual, reveals to us what it is. In itself, essence is the sum total of existing ties, relations and internal law determining the main features and trends in development of a material system.¹² By essential insight, therefore, is meant the consciousness of the individual in respect of how a material system or state of affairs reveals itself.

Empirical or individual intuition can be transformed into essential insight—a possibility which is itself not to be understood as empirical but as essential possibility. "The object of such insight is the corresponding pure essence or eidos, whether it be the highest category or one of its specializations, right down to the fully concrete."¹³ Thus, Husserl looks only to things and facts themselves as they are given in actual experience and intuition without any presuppositions. This insight which reveals to us the nature of things as they are in their original forms can sometimes be adequate and easy, to arrive at, as it is the case with the nature of sound. But, sometimes it is imperfect and not enough for greater or lesser clearness and distinctness.¹⁴ This is evident in the development peculiar to certain categories of essential being such that essences belonging to them can be revealed only 'one-sidedly' while, if given in succession, more sides of it can be revealed so correlatively that individual concrete particularities corresponding to these can be experienced and represented only in inadequate, 'one sided' empirical intuition.

Whatever kind the individual intuition may be, it can get into essential intuition, and the latter, whether correspondingly adequate or not, has the character of a dator act. In other words, "the essence (Eidos) is an object of a new type. Just as the datum of an individual or empirical intuition is an individual object, so, also is the datum of essential intuition a pure essence."¹⁵ Essential insight is as much an intuition as the eidetic object is an object. Intuition and object are not a casual whim, but are compulsorily demanded by the very nature of things.

Empirical intuition or what may be called sense-experience is the consciousness of an individual object. Similarly, essential intuition is the consciousness of something, of an object, a thing --where its glance is directed, something freely given within it, but which can then be given in other acts, faintly thought; made the subject of true and false predication, as it applies to every object in the necessarily extended sense proper to formal logic. A possible object has its own ways of coming under a glance that presents, intuitively, meets it eventually, in its bodily selfhood and lays hold of it. Therefore, essential insight is intuition. If it is insight in a deeper sense of the term, it is a primordial daton intuition, capable of grasping the essence in its bodily selfhood.

No essential intuition is practicable when one is not directing his attention at an individual counterpart and shaping an illustration of it, just as no individual intuition is possible without the free possibility of an act of ideation and in it, focusing upon the corresponding essence which exemplifies itself in something individually visible. This does not detract from the fact that the two kinds of intuition differ in principle. Thus, to the essential differences of the intuition, correspond the essential relation between existence ... and essence; between fact and eidos.¹⁶

Knowledge of Essences Independent of All Knowledge of Facts

"The Eidos, the pure essence, can be exemplified intuitively in the data of experience, data of perception, memory ... but just as readily also, in the mere data of fancy. Hence, with the aim of grasping an essence itself in its primordial form, we can set out from corresponding empirical intuition, but we can also set out just as well from non-empirical intuitions; intuitions that do not apprehend sensory existence; intuitions rather, of a merely imaginative order".¹⁷

The positing of the essence, with the intuitive apprehension that follows it immediately does not imply any positing of individual existence in any way. Pure essential truths do not make the slightest assertion concerning facts, and as such it is difficult to infer from them alone even the most negligible truth concerning the fact of the world. "Just as to think a fact or to express -- it needs the grounding of experience, so does thought concerning pure essence -- the unmixed thought, not that which connects essences and facts together - needs its grounding and support

- an insight into the essences of things.¹⁸

Generality and Necessity

Eidetic Judging, eidetic judgement or eidetic proposition obviously belong to the same system. Attached to them is an appendage of these ideas -- the plain eidetic fact. Essential necessity is the name given to every eidetic division and individuation of an eidetically general fact. Essential generality and essential necessity correlates. "The consciousness of a necessity, or more specifically a consciousness of a judgement in which we become aware of a certain matter as the specification of an eidetic generality is called apodeictic, the judgement itself, the proposition, an apodeictic ... consequence of the general proposition to which it is related."¹⁹

Husserl's Analysis of the Now-Phase

For Husserl, "every present moment of experience contains a horizon of the immediately experienced past and a horizon of anticipated future. The actual present is thus a perduring form englobing retention of the 'past now' and anticipation of an after, which is about to become a now".²⁰

In the phenomenology of internal time consciousness, Husserl analyzed memory founded on the capacity of the lived present to retain within its horizon, elements of the immediate past. He made a distinction between primary and secondary remembrance. Secondary remembrance or the recollection of relatively remote events depends, for its realizability, upon a more primary sense of memory, the retention of the just past within the horizon of the present which Husserl branded comet's tail joined to every actual perception. Hence, he contends that we have an original perceptual awareness of pastness.

A now-phase represents the boundary of continuous retentions. "Only the unity of a consciousness which encompassess the immediate past within the limits of the present can account for our understanding of pastness as such".²¹

The World of the Natural Standpoint : I and My World About Me

Our first perception of nature is that of natural human beings endowed with faculties to imagine, judge, feel and will from the natural standpoint. To clarify

this standpoint, an examination of the following hypothesis is necessary. "I have awareness of a world, spread out in space endlessly, and in time becoming and become, without end. My awareness of it means that I am capable of discovering it immediately, intuitively and also experience it. Through sight, touch, hearing etc., sensory perception such as corporeal things somehow spatially distributed are for me, simply there, in verbal or figurative sense present, whether or not. I pay them special attention by busying myself with them, considering thinking, feeling, willing."²² Both animal and perhaps men, are there for me to experience and be able to comprehend their intention, wish and will. These are realities of life (animals and men) whether I give them my attention or not, it is not necessary that they must be present and available for my perception before they are proved to be realities. Real objects are there, definite, more or less familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without their being necessarily perceived or even intuitively present.

"What is actually perceived, and what is more or less clearly co-present and determinate (to some extent at least) is partly pervaded, partly girt about with dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality".²³ It is possible I perceive it with rap from the illuminating focus of attention with varying success. "As it is with the world in its ordered being as a spatial present ... so likewise is it with the world in respect to its ordered being in the succession of time".²⁴ In a free movement in the moment of experience which focuses what is present into my intuitional grasp, it is possible I follow up these connections of the reality which immediately surrounds me. I can change my position, both in space and time, looking in different directions, and make provisions for myself, new and more or less clear and meaningful perception and representation, and images that are more or less clear, in which I make intuitable to myself existential possibilities or supposedly, in the steadfast order of space and time.

In this pattern, I discover when I am awake and conscious at all times without being able to effect any change; set in relation to a world, through its unending changes, remains one and ever the same. "Therefore, this world is not for me as a mere world of facts and affairs, but with the same immediacy, as a world of values, a world of goods, a practical world. Without further effort on my part, I find the things before me furnished, not only with the qualities that befit their

positive nature, but with value-characters such as beautiful or ugly, agreeable or disagreeable, pleasant or unpleasant".²⁵ Things that are immediately available are there to serve some purpose -- such as tables that contain books, glass that is meant for drinking water, piano that is meant for entertainment, etc. The values and the subsequent practicabilities of these objects have rights for their existence and present whether I am in contact with them or not. The same thing happens to men and beasts that live around me. It is either they are my friends or enemies, servants or superiors, strangers or relatives etc.

The 'Cogito', My Natural World-About-Me And The Ideal Worlds-About-Me

"It is then this world, the world in which I find myself and which is also my world-about-me, that the complex forms of my manifold and shifting spontaneities of consciousness stand related, observing in the interest of research, the bringing of meaning into conceptual form, through description; comparing and distinguishing, collecting and counting, presupposing and inferring the theorizing activity of consciousness, in short, in its different forms and stages".²⁶ It is also with this world-about-me that are found the diverse acts and stages of sentiment and will, approval and disapproval, joy and sorrow, desire and aversion, hope and fear, decision and action. All of these, with the sheer acts of the ego, in which I become acquainted with the world as immediately given me, through spontaneous tendencies to turn towards it and to grasp it, are included under the Cartesian expression - Cogito. "In the natural urge of life, I live continually in this fundamental form of all 'wakeful' living, whether in addition I do or do not assert the Cogito, and whether I am or am not "reflectively" concerned with the ego and the cogitaire".²⁷ Granted I am so concerned, it follows that a new Cogito has become living active, which for its part is not reflected upon, and as such non-objective for me.

My present to myself is continuous as one who perceives, represents, thinks, feels, desires, and for the most part herein I find myself related in present experience to the fact of the world which is constantly about me. But it is not every time that I am related, not every Cogito which I live has, for its Cogitatum things, men, objects or another. "The arithmetical world is there for me only when and so

long as I occupy the arithmetical standpoint. But the natural world in the ordinary sense of the world, is constantly there for me so long as I live naturally and look in its direction. I am then at the natural 'standpoint', which is just another way of stating the same thing".²⁸ The natural world still remains present, I am at the natural standpoint after, as well as before and unperturbed by the adoption of new standpoints. Given that my Cogito is active only in the world proper to the new standpoints, the natural world remains considered. "It is now the background for my consciousness as act, but it is not the encircling sphere within which an arithmetical world finds its true and proper place."²⁹ The two worlds are present together, but unconnected from their relation to the ego, in virtue of which I can freely focus my glance or my acts to the one or the other.

The "Other" Ego-Subject And The Intersubjective Natural World-About-Me

Those things that hold for me individually also happen similarly for all other men whom I discover in my world-about-me. My experience of them as men makes me to understand and take them as ego-subjects, units like myself, and related to their natural surroundings. This happens to the extent that I understand the world about-them and the world about-me, objectively as one and the same world, which difference lies only on each person's consciousness. Each of us has his place and enjoys different appearances on things. Also, our fields of perception and memory are different, which is to say that the clarity with which each of us perceives things differs. "Despite all this, we come to understanding with our neighbours, and set up in common an objective spatio-temporal fact-world about in that that is there for us all, and to which we ourselves nonetheless belong."³⁰

Evaluation

From the foregoing, it is clear that Edmund Husserl contributed reasonably in shaping existentialism. His background in mathematics greatly influenced his writings thereby making him view philosophy as a science. This perhaps equally explains the clarity and distinctiveness of his ideas. His concern for truth made him abhor pre-conceived notions in his philosophical inquiries. It is here incidentally that his phenomenology is rooted.

Husserl's main contribution to existentialism is his establishment of the phenomenological orientation which, to a great extent, influenced Heidegger, who can be described as a pioneer of the doctrine of existential phenomenology. And, by this is meant the Dasein analytic of man as being in the world. Besides, Husserl's intersubjective natural world is in consonant with the existentialists' view on the existence of others. Though Husserl did not treat most of the popular themes of existentialism, his work, mainly on phenomenology had immense influence on the existentialists, particularly Heidegger.

Phenomenology is a philosophy of action. Its interest is man and society. It is a philosophy that preaches tolerance and accommodation of alternative viewpoints. It encourages objective criteria of evaluating people's views and actions. As a scientific enquiry it recommends pre-suppositionsless positions, which is a direct attack on bias and subjective assessment of situations.

As a man-centred enterprise, phenomenology lays emphasis on man's central position in the Universe, where he strives assiduously to apply the laws of nature to his ultimate advantage. As a pure science the reality is that phenomenology practices are verifiable. In societal and inter-personal relationship it encourages openness and flexibility.

In the world that is beset by religious intolerance and ideological difference, phenomenology is a veritable tool for the resolution of conflicts that could emerge therefrom. As a science that abhors rigidity its philosophy is open to accommodate different shades of opinion. It is a panacea to out numerous societal crisis.

NOTES

1. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vols. 3 and 4. Paul Edwards, ed. (Collier Macmillan Publishers, London, 1967, p. 97).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
9. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas, General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Trans by W. R. Boyle Gibson, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967, p. 51.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
12. FROLOV I. (ed.) *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1984.
13. Edmund Husserl, *op.cit.* p. 130.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
20. James and Husserl, *The Foundations of Meaning* published by Martins Nijhoffitthe, Hague, 1974, p. 63.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
22. *op. cit.*, p. 100.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 105.