

Husserl on Human Subjects as Sense-Givers and Sense-Apprehenders in a World of Significance

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Phenomenology begins from the recognition that human awareness is intentional, directed beyond itself at “objects” and “states of affairs” that it both intends as meaningful and encounters as already meaningful. Intentionality has too often been misconstrued as the manner in which external objects are represented in the mind (or, in the cognitive sciences, in the “brain”) or as the problem of the kind of *relation* that can hold between minds and things that do not even exist, are imaginary or even impossible. I contend that much of this discussion concerning the intentional relation misses the point of Husserl’s breakthrough analyses. Instead of beginning with a concept of mental representation taking place “inside the head”, it is more constructive to think of “sense”, “meaning”, or “significance” (*Sinn, Bedeutung*) as emerging from human intersubjective interaction or “comportment” (*Verhalten*) constituting a world of significance within which objects and subjects find their sense. I contend that Husserlian phenomenology really proposes that human beings are meaning-apprehenders and meaning bestowers in a world that is encountered as already laden with significances that humans both uncover and, in a certain sense, invent.

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Intentionality as the Principal Theme of Phenomenology

Husserlian phenomenology begins from the recognition that human consciousness (*Bewusstsein*), behavior (*behavior* – Husserl sometimes employs the English word, see Husserl 1954, p. 251) or comportment (*Verhalten*) is intentional, directed beyond itself towards *objects* or *objectivities* (*Gegenständlichkeiten*), understood in the broadest sense (to include not just individual objects, states, properties, and relations but also objects clustered in *states of affairs*), which it intends as *meaningful*, *senseful* or *significant*. Husserl, in the Second Volume of his *Logical Investigations* (1901) and in his programmatic *Ideas I* (1913), characterizes intentionality typically and most generally as simply: “consciousness of something” (*Bewusstsein von Etwas*). In *Ideas*, § 84, he says that intentionality is “the principal theme [*Hauptthema*] of phenomenology”, that which characterizes consciousness “in the precise sense” or “in the full sense of the word [*im prägnanten Sinne*]” (Husserl 1977, § 84, p. 187; Eng. trans. p. 161). Right to the end of his career, e.g. *Crisis of European Sciences*, § 68, he continues to invoke the “universal problematic of intentionality”, and of the “problem entitled intentionality [*der Problemtitel der Intentionalität*]” (Husserl 1954, § 20) as the key to his endeavours. Intentionality, moreover, is presented by Husserl as a *problematic*, as a mystery, and not itself any kind of *explanation* or *theory* or *solution* to an epistemological problem. He explores it as a *phenomenon* that typifies human being-in-the-world. As Husserl says, intentionality is the title for a cluster of problems related to human meaningfulness and the *essence* of consciousness as such.¹

¹ The 1907 *Idea of Phenomenology* does not refer to intentionality except in the outline titles of the lectures (which were added later by Ludwig Landgrebe). According to these titles, Lecture Four begins with “the broadening of the sphere of research through phenomenology” (Husserl 1950a, p.

According to Husserl, furthermore, what he calls the “positive” sciences (that includes mathematics, mathematical physics, and the natural and social sciences) generally remain blind to the intentionality operative within them. It is the task of philosophy to make manifest this hidden intentionality. Thus, in his Introduction to *Formal and Transcendental Logic* he writes:

The *unphilosophic character of this positivity* consists precisely in this: The sciences, because they do not understand their own productions [*Leistungen*] as those of a productive intentionality [*bleibenden, leistenden Intentionalität*] (this intentionality remaining unthematic for them), are unable to clarify the genuine being-sense [*Seinssein*] of either their provinces or the concepts that comprehend their provinces; thus they are unable to say (in the true and ultimate sense) what sense belongs to the existent [*welchen Sinn das Seiende hat*] of which they speak or what sense-horizons [*Sinneshorizonte*] that existent presupposes – horizons of which they do not speak, but which are nevertheless co-determinant of its sense (Husserl 1974, pp-17-18; Eng. trans. p. 13).

Indeed, Husserl presents his *Formal and Transcendental Logic* as an “explication of the intentionality determining the sense of logic most originally [*durch Entfaltung der ursprünglichsten für die Logik sinnbestimmenden Intentionalität den wesentlichen Charakter der historischen Logik zu verstehen*]” (Husserl 1974, p. 49; Eng. trans. p. 46), and in that sense it is a re-working of the problems initially addressed in *Logical Investigations*, which is about the reaches of intentionality and the overcoming of various forms of naturalization of mental life generally (as he explicitly articulates in his “Philosophy as Rigorous Science”, 1910/1911).

55). Similarly the chapter titles of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* include § 60: “The fundamental lawfulness of intentionality and the universal function of evidence [*Die Grundgesetzlichkeit der Intentionalität und die universal Funktion der Evidenz*]” (Husserl 1974, p. 168; Eng. trans. modified, p. 159) and Appendix II is entitled “From the General Theory of Intentionality [*Aus der allgemeinen Theorie der Intentionalität*]” (Husserl 1974, p. 315; Eng. trans. p. 315).

In his published works, and even in lecture courses such as *Erste Philosophie* (1923/1924), Husserl always portrays Descartes as the original discoverer of intentionality “which makes up the essence of egological life”, and often uses the Cartesian construction of *ego-cogitatio-cogitatum* (“I-thinking-the thought”) to express the form of states that are characterized by “having something consciously [*etwas bewussthaben*]” (e.g. Husserl 1954, § 20). Thus he can write in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, § 50:

Every cogito has its cogitatum – for the phenomenology of intentionality that is a fundamental essential situation [*Wesenslage*]. Cogito can signify “I perceive”, “I remember”, or “I expect” – modes of consciousness that indeed belong in the doxic sphere, though not in the sphere of predicatively determining thinking. But it can also signify: I exercise “valuing” emotional activities [*Gemütsätigkeiten*] in liking or disliking, in hoping or fearing, or volitional activities [*Willenätigkeiten*], or the like. Carried on straightforwardly, every such cogito is always directed to the Objects of experience [*Erfahrungsobjekte*], to the concrete values and disvalues, of the ends and means, or the like. But each permits a reflection (with a change of attitude or focus) – a reflection directed to its *cogitatum qua cogitatum*, its “intentional objectivity as intentional” [*intentionale Gegenständlichkeit als solche*] (Husserl 1974, p. 140; Eng. trans. p. 135).

This passage emphasizes the range of intentional activity – not just perception and cognition, but all forms of valuing, stance-taking, and emoting, all our forms of “doing and suffering” (*Tun und Leiden*) in the world.

Everything senseful is the outcome of intentional constitution. In his mature embrace of transcendental idealism, e.g. in the *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), furthermore, Husserl characterizes “transcendental subjectivity” as “the universe of possible sense [...] [for which] an outside is precisely nonsense” (Husserl 1950, § 41, p. 81). Every object, every possibility, every actuality, every

thought and action, in short, all “being and meaning” (*Sinn und Sein*), all “ontic sense” (*Seinsinn*), is an “achievement”, “accomplishment”, or “outcome” (Husserl’s favourite word here is: *Leistung*) of intentional, i.e. sense-constituting, subjectivity. For Husserl, from the phenomenological perspective, intentionality and sense-constitution more or less summarize the whole programme of philosophical investigation. The full depth of intentionality became clearer to Husserl as he continued his investigations reaching down to the deepest level of time-constitution, to the highest level of human participation in cultural life, the life of objective spirit. Philosophy, for Husserl, *is* intentional description *tout court*.

Intentionality, Evidence and Sense-Giving

Husserl often identifies this investigation of intentionality with the clarification of evidence and the making certain of what was previously only apprehended in a loose way. Husserl’s conception of evidence is very complex (see Heffernan 1998), but, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* he identifies evidence with “the intentional achievement of self-giveness [*die intentionale Leistung der Selbstgebung*]” (see Husserl 1974, § 59, p. 166; Eng. trans. p. 157), for which the most basic mode is perception; the “primitive mode of the giving of something-itself is perception [*Der Urmodus der Selbstgebung ist die Wahrnehmung*]” (Husserl 1974 p. 166; Eng. trans. p. 158). Intentional self-giveness has the character of founding the experiences of truth and correctness. These “self-givings”, according to Husserl, are “creative, primal institutings of rightness, of truth as correctness [*schöpferische Urstiftungendes Rechtes, der Wahrheit als Richtigkeit*]” (Husserl 1974, § 59, p. 167; Eng. trans. p. 159); they are originally instituting of “being and sense” (*ursprünglich Sinn und Sein stiftende sind*). In this

sense, Husserl always sees intentionality and evidence as essentially correlated. He writes:

The concept of any intentionality whatever – any life-process of consciousness-of something or other – and the concept of evidence, the intentionality that is the giving of something-itself are essentially correlative [*Intentionalität überhaupt – Erlebnis eines Bewußt habensvonirgendetwas – und Evidenz; Intentionalität der Selbstgebung sind wesensmäßig zusammengehörige Begriffe*] (Husserl 1974, § 60, 168; Eng. trans. p. 160).

Intentionality really means sense-making, making sense in an “originary” way; that is founding some kind of intuitive grasp of matters that then acts as a kind of anchor for further thinking about the topic. Heidegger is usually associated, even more than Husserl, with this notion of “originary foundation” (*Urstiftung*) since Heidegger makes it a particular part of the experience of art (e.g. the matter in which a Greek temple sets up and sets forth its world from out of itself). But these originary foundations are constantly being experienced by us, and are the basis for our achieving a sense of belonging to a senseful world.

Husserl perhaps too often speaks of *Sinngebung*, “sense-giving”, or “sense-bestowal”, where the import might be that the subject casts a net of meaning over a previously meaningless object. Indeed Sartre often speaks in this manner of intentionality and it is one of the characteristics of social constructionism as found in the social sciences that all meanings are constructed more or less wilfully by subjects, e.g. the choice of one’s gender.

It is, however, more loyal to Husserl’s intention to speak of “sense-apprehension” or “sense-explication” (*Auslegung*), or even “interpretation” (*Interpretation*), since, in many cases, including the primal case of perception (which for Husserl is always basic to our human being-in-the-world,

something that troubled the more “pragmatic” Heidegger), the constituted, sense-contentful object simply *appears or manifests itself* in a meaningful manner to a seemingly passive perceiving subject. The perceived object is *always already* constructed, constituted, packaged and pre-digested for human consumption, as it were, and in most cases the subject’s position is simply one of acceptance. It is not so much a matter of casting a net of meaning over a meaningless entity but as apprehending and perceiving the already established meaning. The natural attitude, for Husserl, is a very *thick* attitude; it presents us with the ready-made world.

Not just objects but *the world as a whole* also has this “pregiven” (*vorgegeben*) character, as Husserl will realize, taking up the intuition of the experienced world that he found in Richard Avenarius. Avenarius (1843-1896) developed the concept of the “pre-found world” which Husserl adopts (see Avenarius 2005),² along with the concept of the world of naïve experience he found in the writings of Ernst Mach (1838-1916) (see, for instance, Mach 1886). In the end Husserl takes over another concept – that of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) – to fully express the living network of significant contexts and horizons, including temporal horizons, within which we live and experience (see Sowa 2010, pp. 49-66; Luft 2011; Moran 2012 and 2015, pp. 107-132). *Leben ist erleben*, as Husserl says. To live is to live through experiences.

Phenomenological constitution means that human beings load their experience with sense or meaning, although they are almost never explicitly conscious of so doing, especially when conducting life “in the natural attitude”. Constitution is largely an activity that takes place in the background, apart from

² Avenarius speaks of the world as “the pre-found” (*das Vorgefundene*). For Husserl’s discussion of Avenarius, see Husserl 1973a; Eng. trans. pp. 22-28 and 107-111.

those instances where conscious decision-making takes place at the level of judgment.

To constitute means broadly to load or invest with meaning but it is, as I have been stressing, more a matter of being in tune with a pre-established significance. As Merleau-Ponty famously articulates, I hear the noise in the street *immediately and pre-reflectively* (depending on my background, on the current context, horizon of expectations, concept of normality, etc.) as a car back-firing or a pistol shot. The stop sign *alerts me* that I have to stop (it addresses me in some manner). The solid ground (as solid) meets my footfall reassuringly as I walk. The environment is a network of affordances and resistances. Something is only an obstacle, if I seek to climb over it (as Sartre points out). The distance between the then newly constructed twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York called out to the tight-rope walker Philippe Petit to walk between them in 1974.³ A new space was installed, instantiated, and eventually made human, at that very moment when the rope was strung between the towers and the tight-rope walker commenced his daring war. When the towers were destroyed in 2001 the empty space left behind is a significant arena, a memorial space, not just a meaningless gap. It became constituted as Ground Zero and arguments took place to claim it significantly (as in the proposal to build a mosque there). There is a constant raveling and unraveling of meaning going on more or less outside of the individual wills of participant or spectator subjects.

³ See the 2008 documentary film, *Man on Wire*.

Intentionality as Embedding in a Meaningful Shared World

Furthermore, and this will be the theme of the remainder of this paper, intentionality should never be understood (albeit Husserl has only himself to blame for this misconstrual) as a solipsistic, individualist form of meaning-loading, carried out by isolated Cartesian egos that are not in communion with one another, but is an interactive, collective, social, historically embedded experience, an experience of interconnecting subjects operating within the monadological horizon of the common and historical life-world (which Husserl characterizes as “the world of tradition”, “the historical world”). In this vein, the late Husserl speaks of the *Ineinandersein* of human intentional existence and of the connectivity of consciousness (*Bewusstseinszusammenhang*) (Husserl 1974, § 60; see Moran 2016, pp. 107-126). In fact, Husserl states this as the fundamental law of consciousness that each act of consciousness is interwoven an infinite number of other possible acts (within a single consciousness – but also, although this is not stated in the passage quoted below – opening to other consciousnesses):

Absolutely any consciousness of anything whatever belongs a priori to an openly endless multiplicity [*endlose Mannigfaltigkeit*] of possible modes of consciousness, which can always be connected synthetically in the unity-form of conjoint acceptance (*con-posito*) to make one consciousness, as a consciousness of “the Same” (Husserl 1974, § 60, p. 168; Eng. trans. p. 160).

It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes an open-ended group of subjects to establish the common world of experience (*die Erfahrungswelt*).

Husserl's mature account of life-world intentionality seems a long way from his early discussions of intentionality in the Fifth Logical Investigation, where his focus is the critique of Brentano, despite the fact that Husserl claims, in the *Crisis*, that the insight into the a priori of correlation came to him already in 1898! The mature Husserl is indeed a "correlationist" (to borrow Quentin Meillassoux's term; see Meillassoux 2008) about all aspects of being-in-the-world. Indeed, Husserl claimed his real philosophical breakthrough came in 1898 when he realized that there was a "universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness" (Husserl 1954, § 48, p. 169 n. 1; Eng. trans. p. 166 n.). Anything that is – whatever its meaning and to whatever region it belongs – is, Husserl asserts, "an index of a subjective system of correlations" (Husserl, 1954, § 48, p. 168; Eng. trans. p. 165). Every object and every meaning must be understood not solely as it is "in itself" but in necessary relation to the subjective acts that disclose it (these subjective acts, however, have to be understood in a transcendental, non-naturalistic manner rather than as the acts of empirical individual humans).

Husserl's Critique of Brentano on Intentionality

As is almost too well known, to the point that its significance has become obscured, in his earlier work (e.g. Fifth Logical Investigation), and indeed right through his career, Husserl constantly credits Brentano with the breakthrough discovery of intentionality. In his 1929 *Amsterdam Lectures* he speaks of Brentano's "epoch-making contribution to have introduced intentionality as the basic descriptive characteristic of the mental" (Husserl 1968, p. 000). Subsequently, in his 1936 *Crisis of the European Sciences*, § 68, he writes:

This is the place to recall the extraordinary debt we owe to Brentano for the fact that he began his attempt to reform psychology with an investigation of the peculiar characteristics of the psychic (in contrast to the physical) and showed intentionality to be one of these characteristics; the science of “psychic phenomena” then has to do everywhere with conscious experiences (Husserl 1954, § 68, p. 236; Eng. trans. pp. 233-234).

Although, as Husserl always insists, intentionality is the lynch-pin of phenomenology, almost everything about it is problematic – the nature of the so called “act” of intending (*intentio, Meinung*), its temporal “phases”, the nature of the so called intentional “relation” (*Verhältnis, Beziehung*), its “content” (*Inhalt, Gehalt*), its object (*Objekt, Gegenstand, Gegenständlichkeit*), and so on, even leaving aside the larger questions about the role of the ego as inhabiting and living through the act (described in *Ideas I* as illuminating the act as a whole), the nature of the attention permeating the act, its possible self-reflective character, how acts are individuated, and so on and on. As Peter M. Simons has put it, however, the modern theory of intentionality in Brentano was “conceived and born in sin” (see Simons 2001, p. 12). It was initially articulated in Cartesian immanentist terms and never managed fully to shake off that mantle, even in Husserl’s mature formulations.

The language that Husserl uses to discuss intentionality (content, object, relation, directedness, immanence) is inherited primarily from Brentano, and, unfortunately, this Cartesian language has continued in the tradition of Brentano’s students, including Twardowski, Meinong, and Husserl, down to latter day Brentanians such as Roderick M. Chisholm and thereafter to Searle, Dennett, Tim Crane, and others (see Moran 2013, pp. 317-358). The emphasis and the import of the language lean too narrowly on an individual mind trying

to target an individual intentional object in a relatively isolated and atomistic act of intending (Husserl himself acknowledged later that he had ignored the seamless unity of the “flow of consciousness”, *Bewusstseinsstrom*).

Husserl’s terminology, initially, owes directly to Franz Brentano, who, in famous passage in the *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint* (1874) speaks both of “directedness towards an object” (*die Richtung auf ein Objekt*), and “relation to a content” (*die Beziehung auf einen Inhalt*). The oft quoted passage manages to cram in all the ambiguities and loose-ends that will challenge succeeding interpreters. Brentano writes:

Every psychical phenomenon is characterized by that which the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or, just as well, mental) inexistence of an object, and which we would call, though with not wholly unambiguous expressions, the relation to a content, the direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as a real thing), or the immanent objectivity. Every psychical phenomenon contains something as an object within itself, although not every one does so in the same way. In the presentation, something is presented, in the judgment, something is affirmed or denied, in love, loved, in hate, hated, in desire, desired, and so on (Brentano 1973, p. 000).

Brentano never clearly distinguished between his different formulations, as his student Kasimierz Twardowski (and later Meinong) pointed out (see Twardowski 1982). Brentano, at least in these pre-1911 formulations (he updated his *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint* several times), did not clearly distinguish between the immanent psychological content of an experiential episode and its transcendent intentional object. Furthermore, as many commentators (e.g. Smith 1994)⁴ have since pointed out, Brentano seemed to

⁴ On Brentano’s Cartesian internalism about intentional objects, see Smith 1994, pp. 37-64.

retain (despite his Aristotelian sympathies) a certain Cartesian representationalism in his earlier formulations. As Barry Smith writes:

Brentano's intentionality thesis at the time of the *Psychology* may now more properly be interpreted as follows: the mind or soul is windowless; our acts of thought and sensation are directed in every case to what exists immanently within it, i.e. to these acts themselves, or to immanent data of sense, or to immanent entities of other sorts (for example to concepts, the descendants of Aristotle's forms) (Smith 1994, p. 41).

He does seem to posit a range of intermediary objects between the mind and external things. Thus the early Brentano often speaks of the intentional object as something "not-real" (*Nicht-Reales*), or "insubstantial" (*unwesenhaft*), he sometimes, as in his *Descriptive Psychology* lectures, refers to "an internal object-like thing [*ein innerlich Gegenständliches*]", something "in-dwelling [*imwohnendes*]" (Brentano 1982, p. 24), "mentally immanent [*geistiges inhaben*]" (Brentano 1982, p. 155), which "need not correspond to anything outside" (Brentano 1982, p. 24).

Brentano's basic descriptive psychological laws maintained that every mental act either is a presentation or depends on a presentation and, further, that *every* presentation related to an object. What then about presentation that appeared to have no objects, "objectless presentations [*gegenstandlose Vorstellungen*]" (see Rollinger 2004 and 2008)? At least the early Brentano thought that one was related intentionally to an internal object, an object in mind, although later he repudiated this view probably from around 1905 but most definitely in his later reist phase.

Bernard Bolzano (1781-1848)⁵ had discussed “objectless presentations” in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Book I, § 67. He thus bequeathed the problem of the status of thoughts that involved impossible or non-actual entities (round squares, golden mountains, and so on) to Brentano’s pupils, especially Twardowski and Meinong. Do all thoughts refer to objects, even thoughts of impossible objects? Bolzano wrote:

It is true that most ideas have some, or even infinitely many, referents. Still, there are also ideas that have no referent at all, and thus do not have an extension. The clearest case seems to be that of the concept designated by the word “nothing”. It seems absurd to me to say that this concept has an object too, i.e. a something that it represents [...]. The same holds of the ideas “a round square”, “green virtue”, etc. (Bolzano 1972, pp. 88-89).

In 1890, for instance, two of earliest Brentano’s students, Alois Höfler and Alexius Meinong,⁶ pointed out that a distinction had to be made between the so called intra-mental (internal) content, on the one hand, and the actual existent thing on the other. In 1894 Twardowski similarly distinguished between the immanent content (or mental picture) and the extra-mental object: “What is presented *in* a presentation is its content; what is presented through a presentation is its object” (Twardowski 1977, pp. 7, 16). The *content* (*Inhalt*), according to Twardowski, is purely a vehicle to the real object, it becomes something similar to the “mode of presentation” in Frege or what Searle calls “aspectual shape”. I can think about Napoleon (intended object) as “the victor at Jena” or as “the vanquished at Waterloo”, to use Husserl’s own example. The

⁵ Bernard Bolzano’s main book, *Wissenschaftslehre* (see Bolzano 1972) was published in 1837.

⁶ Alois Höfler, Alexius Meinong, *Logik* (Höfler, Meinong 1890, p. 7), cited in Twardowski 1977, p. 2.

whole issue of “content” is discussed critically by Husserl, who at the very least wants to distinguish between “reell” content and “ideal” content but goes on in the Fifth Logical Investigation to make a range of careful discriminations to the end that there is very little left of the Brentanian conception that inspired him. Husserl reviewed Twardowski’s book and also wrote an unpublished article on “intentional objects” (1894-1896) (Husserl 1979). In the latter text, Husserl rejects completely the view that the object attended to in an act of objectless presentation is the inner mental image. In the “Intentional Objects” (drafted 1894 to 1896) essay, Husserl claims that “truths, propositions and concepts are also objects” and can be said to exist in the full sense, although not in the sense of “real” or spatio-temporal existence (Husserl 1979, p. 326). He distinguished the *psychological* components of a mental process (part of the proper object of the empirical science of psychology) from the unchanging, timeless, identical, ideal meanings and their intended objects, which are the focus of logic and ontology, respectively. Later, partly influenced by Natorp, Husserl moved to the view that intentionality can grasp idealities understood as having “being-in-themselves” (*An-sich-sein*). Idealities have existence just as much as spatio-temporal individuals.

Husserl’s quite complicated discussion in his Appendix to the Sixth Logical Investigation, radically interrogates Brentano’s basic contrast between outer and inner perception (which Husserlian phenomenology in part accepts but also reconstitutes in a new way; see Moran 2000).

Over his lifetime, Husserl would increasingly distance himself from Brentano. In a letter to Marvin Farber – in 1937 – shortly before his death, he wrote:

Even though I began in my youth as an enthusiastic admirer of Brentano, I must admit that I deluded myself, for too long, and in a way hard to understand now, into believing that I was a co-worker on his philosophy, especially, his psychology. But in truth, my way of thinking was a totally different one from that of Brentano, already in my first work, namely the *Habilitation* work of 1887, in part worked out in some detail in *Philosophy of Arithmetic* of 1891. In a formal sense, Brentano asks for and provides a psychology whose whole topic is the “psychic phenomena” which he on occasion defines also as “consciousness of something”. Though his psychology is nothing less than a science of intentionality, the proper problems of intentionality never dawned on him. He even failed to see that no given experience of consciousness can be described without a description appertaining to an “intentional object as such” (for example, that this perception of the desk can only be described, when I describe this desk as *what* and *just as* it is perceived). Brentano had no inkling of intentional implication, of intentional modifications, of problems of constitution, etc. (Husserl’s letter to Marvin Farber, 18 June 1937, translated in Cho 1990, pp. 36-43).

He says something similar in the *Crisis* of 1936:

Unfortunately, in the most essential matters he [Brentano] remained bound to the prejudices of the naturalistic tradition [*in den Vorurteilen der naturalistischen Tradition*]; these prejudices have not yet been overcome if the data of the soul [*die seelischen Daten*], rather than being understood as sensible (whether of outer or inner “sense”), are [simply] understood as data having the remarkable character of intentionality; in other words, if dualism, psychophysical causality, is still accepted as valid (Husserl 1954, § 68, p. 236; Eng. trans. p. 234).

This suggests that Husserl thinks of intentionality not as a narrow relation between an extant mental episode and some kind of object (real, ideal, unreal, fictive etc.) but rather as a way of thinking about constitution, synthesis, horizon and so on.

The whole Brentanian legacy was upended once and for all, when Husserl introduced his new language of noesis and noema in *Ideas* and after. By *The Idea of Phenomenology* lectures of 1907 he rejecting the view that phenomenological insight depends on the inspection of objects given in inner intuition (Husserl 1973, p. 63). In his mature work, from 1913 onward, furthermore, Husserl distinguishes between the natural attitude in we live “straightforwardly” (*Dahinleben*) directed towards the world and the world of transcendental meditator or spectator which takes a step back and contemplates the world detached from all *Seinsglaube*. It is now only in reflection that the universal characteristic of intentionality becomes visible. Thus, in the *Amsterdam Lectures* of April 1928, Husserl writes:

Whatever becomes accessible to us through reflection has a noteworthy universal character: that of being consciousness of something, of having something as an object of consciousness, or correlatively, to be aware of it – we are speaking here of intentionality. This is the essential character of mental life in the full sense of the word, and is thus simply inseparable from it (Husserl 1968, p. 307).

Intentionality as Transcendence in Husserl and Heidegger

Following on from Husserl, Heidegger wants to *radicalise* the philosophical interrogation of intentionality by raising more fundamental questions, neglected in traditional philosophy, of “the question of being” and, specifically, “the question of the being of the intentional” (*die Frage nach dem Sein des Intentionalen*), as he puts it in his 1925 lectures (Heidegger 1979, § 13, p. 129). The intentional relation, according to Heidegger, has too often been misunderstood in Cartesian terms as the subject trying to reach the object, must instead be founded on the “being-with” or “being-by [*Sein-bei*]” (Heidegger 1978, § 9, p. 168; Eng. trans. p.

134) of *Dasein*, i.e., intentionality is a form of “ontic” transcendence which can only be understood if *Dasein*’s more basic “ontological” transcendence is understood (Heidegger 1978, § 9, p. 170; Eng. trans. p. 135). As Heidegger puts it in his 1927 *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*: “Intentionality is the *ratio cognoscendi* of transcendence. Transcendence is the *ratio essendi* of intentionality in its diverse modes” (Heidegger 1989, § 9, p. 91; Eng. trans. p. 65). The radical rethinking of intentionality will lead Heidegger to a fundamental interrogation of *Dasein*’s “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1989, § 15, p. 234; Eng. trans. p. 164), where *Dasein* is to be understood as nothing other than the very possibility of beings gaining entry to world (*Welteingang*) (Heidegger 1978, § 11, p. 249; Eng. trans. p. 193). Heidegger, then, wants to use intentionality as the way to understanding *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world (see Moran 2015a).

There is a gradual move, then, in phenomenology, from seeing intentionality as that which demarcates the domain of the psychical, or is discovered within the province of inner perception, to the view that intentionality is a fundamental expression of humans as being in the world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). Husserl and Heidegger both think of human beings in their conscious compartments as generating or creating a certain “phenomenality” (*Phänomenalität* – Husserl’s term in his *Amsterdam Lectures*) or “lighting up” or “clearing” (*die Lichtung*) that allows a hitherto silent, unknown and hidden being to manifest itself. Being has a self-disclosive power and, as Robert Sokolowski puts, it “human beings are the datives of disclosure”, they are the “to whom” of disclosure (Sokolowski 2000, p. 4). As Husserl writes in his *Amsterdam Lectures* of 1928:

In a way, and perhaps stretching the point a little, one can say of every mental process that in it something is appearing to the particular I insofar as the I is somehow conscious of it. Accordingly, phenomenality [*die Phänomenalität*], as a characteristic that

specifically belongs to appearing and to the thing that appears, would, if understood in this broadened sense of the term, be the fundamental characteristic of the mental (Husserl 1968, p. 307).

It seems Husserl moves to a kind of holism in grasping the domain of sense as coinciding with the domain of “the world” and sees it as interrelated nexus of meanings or senses that are essentially correlated to intentional sense-makers.

Interestingly, in their positive characterization of intentionality, aiming to avoid Brentanian immanence, Husserl and Heidegger both try to re-describe phenomenology in terms of transcendence and, especially in his *Idea of Phenomenology* (1907) lectures he speaks of “transcendence in immanence”. For Husserl, the main achievement of Brentano was that he identified the essential “pointing-beyond-itself” (*über-sich-hinausweisen*) of the mental act although almost everything else he said about it was wrong.

Above all, Husserl wants to avoid misleading talk of “immanent” objectivity. He insists that all objects of thought – including the objects of fantasy and memory – are *mind-transcendent*, i.e. they have unity beyond what is currently apprehended in any act.

Even when I am *imagining* something non-existent, e.g., if I am thinking of the mythical god Jupiter, the God Jupiter is not *inside* my thought in any sense, it is not a “real” element or real part of the experience (Husserl 1984, § 11, pp. 384 ss.). Rather, even fictional objects are *transcendent* to or “above” our mental experiences. Furthermore, not just does the intentional object transcend the intentional act, but the intentional act is also characterized as always *transcending itself* towards the object. Husserl’s language of “transcendence” is multifaceted – and I think it is correct to say that here “transcendence” never means “existent as an actuality outside of the intentional experience” but at most – as in

perception – is apprehended with the experiential sense of existing outside of and independent from the current mode of apprehending it.

The Rejection of Representationalist Accounts of Intentionality in Favor of Modes of Givenness

One key feature of the Husserlian – and indeed the phenomenological – approach is that it rejects the representationalist position outright (see, for instance, Dreyfus 2000, 2002 and 2004).⁷ This was already clear from Husserl’s Second Logical Investigation. At that time, Husserl’s target was chiefly the representationalism and sensualist imagism of Locke but it likely that he also had his own teacher Brentano in mind. What Husserl is opposing is the claim that one can only have individual contents before the mind and that one cannot think general thoughts. The danger is that once one introduces a representationalist account, one has to connect an inner representation with an outer object. The problem – as Berkeley already saw – is that reality becomes bifurcated. To what is our consciousness directed? Is it directly to the “ideas” or “thoughts” in our own mind or are we oriented directly to things and events in the “transcendent” external world? As Heidegger would show, the very manner in which the question comes to be posed precludes its resolution. In one sense, from the *Logical Investigations* through *Ideas I* and into the late philosophy, Husserl entirely rejects all talk of objects as “immanent” in the intentional act. He is very clear that our intention towards material, spatial objects is an orientation towards a thing that essentially transcends the act of intending it. There is no way that intentionality relates to its own internal content.

⁷ While Dreyfus is right to reject representationalism, he is wrong to include Husserl as a representationalist, whereas in fact Husserl is closer to Merleau-Ponty’s position.

Husserl writes:

One result of the reflections that we have just completed is the transcendence of the thing over against perception of it, and, as a further consequence, its transcendence over against any consciousness that relates to it at all. This is the case not merely in the sense that the thing is not to be found factually as a really obtaining component of consciousness [*als reelles Bestandstück des Bewußtseins*]. Rather the entire state of things is an eidetically discernible one: as a matter of absolutely unconditional universality or necessity, a thing cannot be given in any possible perception, in any possible consciousness at all as immanent to it in a real [*reell*] manner. A fundamentally essential difference thus surfaces between being as experience and being as thing. The regional essence of experience (specifically, the particular region of the cogitatio) has the intrinsic property of being perceivable in immanent perception, whereas the essence of a spatial thing does not have this property (Husserl 1977, § 42, p. 77; Eng. trans. pp. 73-74).

Similarly, and coming from a different phenomenological perspective, Merleau-Ponty could write in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) that the reductionist approach to naturalizing intentionality is absurd: “How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing that can never be made comprehensible” (Merleau-Ponty, p. 403; Eng. trans. p. 351).

Traditional European (e.g. Meinong) and modern analytic discussions of intentionality often try to draw a sharp distinction between intentional objects that do not exist and those that do. The concept of existence here is usually taken to mean the object having a place in the spatio-temporal order or possessing causal powers (see, for instance, Voltolini 2013). Husserl rejects this supposition:

Inherent to this contrast between immanence and transcendence is [...] an intrinsic difference in the kind of givenness [*Unterschied der Gegebenheitsart*]. Immanent and transcendent perception are not only distinguished generally by the fact that the intentional object, the object standing there with the character of being itself bodily present, is in the first case immanent to the perceiving, in the sense of really obtaining in it, and in the second case is not. They are distinguished even more through a manner of givenness that, in its essential differentiation, passes over *mutatis mutandis* into all the modifications of perception by re-presenting it, into the parallel intuitions of memory and of phantasy (Husserl 1977, § 42, p. 77; Eng. trans. p. 74).

The necessary givenness of physical objects in profiles (*Abschattungen*), for instance, is determinative for Husserl. A certain ambiguity, however, remains with Husserl in *Ideas I*. He does not completely reject the language of immanence and transcendence. He acknowledges there is one sense in which the object is really present in the act thinking it but in another sense the object has the sense of being independent, self-standing and transcendent to all thought about it. But he tries instead to replace the language of immanent and transcendent existence with the language of different modes of givenness (such that perceptions, memories, fantasies are distinguished by different kinds of differences of the objects – different kinds of transcendence, as it were). Employing the *epoché*, he decided the best way to think of intentional objects is to consider their senseful makeup independently of the question of their mode of existence. They have object conditions (can be successfully referred to in repeated acts) – which means they have identity conditions – and also they have a “sense”. Mode of givenness replaces mode of existence.

The correct way to think of a Husserlian intentional object as apprehended phenomenologically is as a kind of infinitely complex entity that has already

built in the possible modes of approach to it (a series of lawfully related noemata) or, alternatively, to consider its modes of givenness. The modes of approach to the object can be visualized as “windows” to the object or avenues of approach to it. The object’s various aspectual shapes are set up in a pre-determined way, similar, as Husserl repeatedly says to a monad “with windows”, an analogy Husserl will also use to speak of transcendental egos and their *Ineinandersein*. Husserl gets into some trouble as every object ends up having an infinite number of profiles and so is an open-ended “Idea” (he repeatedly says this in the *Ideas*). This is clear in the *Amsterdam Lectures* where Husserl describes the noema of a house in a house-perception as opening onto an infinite horizon of other possible profiles of the house. Husserl raises the question of how we can be conscious of this horizon of undisclosed possible perspectives which belong to the house:

The question immediately arises as to how come it is evident that this pointing-ahead belongs to the phenomenon-in-consciousness? How come this horizon-consciousness refers us in fact to further actually unexperienced traits of the same <phenomenon>? Certainly this is already an interpretation which goes beyond the moment of experiencing, which we have called the *horizon-consciousness*, which is, indeed, as is easily determined, completely non-intuitive and thus in and of itself empty (Husserl 1968, p. 318).

In fact, Husserl in *Ideas I*, discovers a new kind of intentionality – horizon-intentionality, something he later acknowledges (in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*) was missing in the *Logical Investigations*. Thus he writes in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: “In the *Logical Investigations*, I lacked the doctrine of horizon-intentionality, whose all determining role was set out for the first

time in *Ideas*” (Husserl 1974, p. 207).⁸ In fact, it is this notion of horizon-consciousness that Husserl is far more interested in than his conception of the noema, especially in works after *Ideas I*.

Husserl’s *Ideas I* offers a radical rethink of the Fifth Logical Investigation and in particular its analysis of intentionality in terms of the new language of the correlation between noesis and noema (see Moran 2015b). Noesis or *cogitatio* is a new term that Husserl uses to avoid confusion with psychological states. Noema, furthermore, is not exactly the same as the intentional object as such. We are slicing the *Erlebnis* in a new way. In *Ideas*, § 96, in his revolutionary chapter on noesis and noema, Husserl says that he wants to work out “in general the difference between noesis (i.e., the concretely complete intentional experience, designated with the emphasis on its noetic components) and noema because apprehending and mastering this difference are of the greatest import for phenomenology” (Husserl 1977, § 96, p. 222; Eng. trans. p. 192). I do not share the view of John J. Drummond (1992) and others that the concept of the noema is a major advance over the account of intentionality in the *Logical Investigations*. Husserl thinks his new terminology brings rigour to the discussion of the intentional relation and the intentional object. It is difficult to characterise precisely what the noema is supposed to be. It is a correlative of the noetic act. It is not the same as an ideal sense but it supports an ideal sense.

In his *Amsterdam Lectures* Husserl remarks that empirical psychology has no way to handle the noema. He writes: “Through the phenomenological reduction intentional objectivities as such were first laid open. They were laid open as an

⁸ “In den *Logischen Untersuchungen* fehlte mir noch die Lehre von der Horizontintentionalität, deren allbestimmende Rolle erst die Ideen herausgestellt haben”.

essential component of all intentional processes and as an infinitely fruitful theme for phenomenological description” (Husserl 1968, p. 314).

Husserl now sees intentional explications as an uncovering of the various forms of synthesis that characterize the noetic and noematic character of the act. He writes: “Intentional explication has the unique peculiarity belonging to its essential nature, that is as an interpretive exegesis [*Auslegung*] of noesis and noema. Interpreting <is taken of course> in a broader sense and not in the sense of merely analyzing an intuited concrete thing into its component traits” (Husserl 1968, p. 319).

In these later texts (1928 to 1937) Husserl seems less interested in clarifying the meaning of the noema than in identifying all the different forms of synthesis that are taking place in the flow of consciousness. Modes of givenness, horizons, and forms of syntheses dominate the late Husserl’s phenomenological analysis. In fact, Husserl’s mature phenomenology is interested in syntheses, passivity, horizons, the nature of intentional implication, far more than in specifying the nature of the noema. After *Ideas I*, he never comes back in such detail to the discussion of the noema. Thus in his *Phenomenological Psychology* lectures of 1925, for instance, the focus is on the interconnectedness (*Zusammenhang*) of the stream of experience.

The Interconnectedness of Life

According to Husserl, Wilhelm Dilthey had criticized the prevailing explanatory psychology and had ingeniously recognized the importance of the interconnected “nexus of life” (*Lebenszusammenhang* – a term Husserl also uses frequently in his mature works), but he had failed to provide a full phenomenology of flowing, intersubjective life with its intentional syntheses,

implications, sedimentations, habitualities and horizons. In his later works, Husserl uses a much more expansive notion of intentionality according to which consciousness is not just intentionally directed at things in the world, but also co-constitutes unending and unlimited horizons of intentional implication and, indeed, the entire worldly context, including not just actualities but the range of potentialities and possibilities in which such intentional objects are apprehended and made meaningful. Life has to be understood as *intentional*, “accomplishing” life with its potentially infinite horizons of intentional implication, uniting together into the collective experience known as *spirit*. As Husserl writes in the *Crisis*: “But each soul also stands in community [*Vergemeinschaftung*] with others which are intentionally interrelated, that is, in a purely intentional, internally and essentially closed nexus [*Zusammenhang*], that of intersubjectivity” (Husserl 1954, § 69, p. 241; Eng. trans. p. 238). There is a network of interacting egos adding up to a “we-subjectivity” and “we-community [*Wir-Gemeinschaft*]” (Husserl 1954, p. 416), a “community of monads [*Monadengemeinschaft*]” (Husserl 1950, p. 158).

Husserl’s mature phenomenology, then, comes at intentionality from a different and much richer point of view than that of the isolated individual episode of consciousness (*Erlebnis*) that he had originally investigated in the *Logical Investigations*. It now explores intentionality from the point of view of intersubjectivity, the social interweaving (*Verflechtung, ein Wechselseitig-für-einander-sein*) (Husserl 1950, p. 157) of subjects, what Husserl generally calls *Ineinandersein* or *Füreinandersein*. As Husserl already writes in *Ideas II*, the intersubjective character of humans and their “being for” one another presupposes a common surrounding world, and the common surrounding world presupposes our intersubjective character: “We could not be persons for

others if there were not over against us a common surrounding world. The one is constituted together with the other” (Husserl 1952, p. 377; Eng. trans. p. 387).

The fact that a common shared world is a presumption of our experience, contextualises it, gives it a horizon, has a double-edged character. On the one hand, there is a kind of collective social intentionality (well described by Alfred Schutz [see Schutz 1974] and subsequently rediscovered by John R. Searle [see Searle 1995 and Hacking 1999]) through which we cooperate together to establish shared cultural institutions – the nature of money for example (Searle’s example). But there is also the fact that each of us brings our own particular perspective to bear on that world. Husserl writes:

Each of the subjects who are intersubjectively related in mutual understanding in regard to the same world and, within that, in regard to the same things, has his own perceptions of them, i.e., his own perceptual appearances, and in them he finds a unity in the appearances, which itself is only an appearance in a higher sense, with predicates of appearance that may not, without any further ado, count as predicates of the appearing “true” thing (Husserl 1952, § 18, p. 82; Eng. trans. p. 87).

Husserl speaks of the “intersubjective harmony of validity [*die intersubjective Einstimmigkeit der Geltung*]” (Husserl 1954, pp. 166, 163). Indeed, as he will insist, the very idea of *objectivity* as such, of a common objective world – including and perhaps most especially scientific objectivity – is not a given brute fact of experience but a very unique and particular achievement of subjects cooperating together. Naïve experience on its own does not *even raise the issue* of objectivity. It simply lives in its experiences with an originary primal belief (*Urglaube*), an “acceptance character”. At the experiential and perceptual level, the sense of the objectivity of a physical object, for instance – its having a kind of “being in itself” independent from us – is precisely based on the idea that there are other

possible views of the object, ways others have of perceiving the object, which I can envisage and understand even if I do not currently experience the object in this way. In the modern mathematical sciences, this “objectivity” is established by results that can be replicated by others performing similar experiments, by peer review, and so on, all activities that involve reference to others and forms of communal agreement and co-confirmability.

There are very many ways in which people are united together. There is a pre-linguistic and pre-objective intercorporeality such as is shared by the child in the womb of its mother. Then there is the fully fledged cultural life where we interact with cultural products which have (like the accomplishments of science) the character of ideality. As Husserl writes in his 1935 “The Vienna Lecture”:

Persons bound together [*Miteinander*] in direct mutual understanding cannot help experiencing what has been produced by their fellows in similar acts of production as being identically the same [*als identisch das Selbe*] as what they themselves produce. In a word, what is acquired through scientific activity is not something real but something ideal [*was wissenschaftliches Tun erwirbt, ist nicht Reales sondern Ideales*] (Husserl 1954, p. 323; Eng. trans. p. 278).

Husserl has many interesting things to say about the constitution of culture. Understanding cultural products requires oneself being an intentional meaning-maker. One cannot participate in it unless one has bought into the process, as it were:

If I had never even brought to realization object-goals, nor ever even tried something and accomplished it, then I never could understand a work or an implement,

etc., not any cultural object (c. 1920, “Problem der Apperception”, Husserl 1973a, pp. 358-359, my trans.).⁹

There is an intimate connection between intersubjective constitution and one’s self-constitution in connection with one’s own embodiment (also experienced initially, genetically, in relation to the body of the mother). For Husserl, the body and the external world are both actively and passively constituted. Not only is the body constituted but as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both saw clearly, in constituting my own body, I at the same time constitute the bodies of others. One should not think of the pairing operation or the transfer of sense as the constitution of another alter ego by my ego in such a way that one ends up simply mirroring oneself in the other. The constitution of the other body as an other subject that is in principle inaccessible to me is one of the great puzzles of what Husserl calls *Einfühlung* which is a special subdivision of our more general *Fremderfahrung*.

We have to understand that intentionality is also involved in the constitution of language and, more generally, of culture – as well as what gets constituted as “nature” and as the realm of the physical. Self-constitution (bodily and psychic self-constitution) is intertwined with other-constitution and with the constitution of the shared objective world. Husserl writes in a late text:

That [...] means that each monad is not only gradually constituting itself (beginning from the streaming living present), but, moreover, constitutes all the other monads, actually and potentially [...] such that they potentially, if not even actually, encompass within their horizon all possible being there is. Each monad is not only for itself but for all other monads. Just as Being-for-itself is not an empty (and, in fact, senseless)

⁹ “Hätte ich nicht selbst Zweckobjekte verwirklicht, nicht selbst schon etwas versucht und zustande gebracht, so könnte ich kein Werk und kein Werkzeug etc., kein Kulturobjekt verstehen”.

portraying / picturing of one's own being, Being-for-One-Another is not simply a "mirroring", a mere "representation" [*Füreinander-sein nicht eine blosse "Spiegelung", "Repräsentation"*] ("Die konstitutive Aufbau der Welt und die konstituierende Intersubjektivität", 16 July 1931, Husserl 1973b, pp. 193-194).

Husserl realized how problematic all this was – his Cartesian starting point is useful only to break through "in one blow" to the transcendental field of first-personal constituting consciousness. But, on its own, we can never get to a full understanding of intentionality. Husserl understood the limits of the Cartesian way and hence insisted on moving to other ways, including the way through the life-world, in order to establish a properly intersubjective phenomenology.

Even in his very first lecture course in Freiburg given during the War Emergency Semester of 1919, Heidegger emphasizes the embeddedness (although he did not use the word *Einbettung* which we owe to Husserl's student the phenomenologist Gerda Walther [1923]) of experience within a world, and that the primary experience is of the world rather than of the individual objects within it. In our experience of a chair or table, we grasp first the nest of network of significations, the environment out of which things appear to us: "what is first is what is meaningful [*das Bedeutsame ist das Primäre*]" (Heidegger 1987, p. 73). It is in this context that Heidegger here uses the expression "it worlds [*es weltet*]" (Heidegger 1987, p. 73), the first of many such formulations. The world is the context of significations. While Husserl had already acknowledged the concept of "world" in his phenomenology, and had emphasized the draw of the world in the natural attitude,¹⁰ Heidegger specifically emphasizes the *hermeneutic*

¹⁰ For a survey of Husserl's uses of the concept of world, see Bernet 1994, pp. 93-118 ("Le monde").

dimensions of historical being-in-the-world. Of course, there is already some scope for a hermeneutical moment in Husserlian phenomenology with the *Auffassungssinn*, the interpretative grasp of the sensuous. But Heidegger re-describes the whole intentional situation as hermeneutical from the ground up, portraying *Dasein's* mode of being as interpretative and disclosive through and through.

Conclusion: Intentionality in an Intersubjective Context

Husserl's mature phenomenological approach to intentionality understands it not as a mysterious relation or quasi-relation between an isolated mental "act" (itself a somewhat abstract notion given that mental life is experienced as a continuous, multi-layered stream) and an equally mysterious quasi-existent or non-existent object. Rather, in the mature Husserl, intentionality is more adequately portrayed as the manner in which embodied human agents (and some animals) orient themselves and act in a meaningful world (understood not as a set of physical objects but as a set of affordances, possibilities, horizons, and futurity) as disclosers and creators of meaning. Phenomenology aims to capture the essential structures of the particular manner in which the world (and objects in the world) appear to embodied conscious agents who are comporting themselves within it in prescribed ways (although some have an open-ended character). This world-disclosure or "phenomenality" is not an objective fact in the world but rather a specific and necessary accomplishment of an interwoven web (*Zusammenhang*) of subjectivities that in this sense *transcend* the world and are presupposed by the sciences that study the world (what Husserl would have called "mundane" sciences).

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