**Phenomenology and Foucault; Prof. Boedeker;**

**Handout on Husserl #1: *History of the Concept of Time*, pp. 27-47**

Edmund Husserl: the founder of the philosophical movement known as *phenomenology*: the description of structures of human experience. He started out a mathematician, and in 1882 wrote a Ph.D. dissertation in mathematics.

I. Husserl’s view of intentionality:

A. 1884-1886: Husserl studied with Brentano, from whom he learned the centrality of intentionality to consciousness. Brentano’s (and Husserl’s) notion of the *(transcendent) intentional object* was foreign to neo-Kantians. Neo-Kantians saw only the mind, the sensations it contains, and the forms it applies to these sensations. The notion that mental acts could also be about such things as physical objects was not a part of neo-Kantianism. So was the notion that physical objects could be – albeit indirectly – given to the mind.

B. Although Husserl always differed from the neo-Kantians by maintaining Brentano’s notion of the intentional object, he did learn much from the neo-Kantians.

1. Inspired by Brentano, wrote his habilitation, *On the Concept of Number: Psychological Analyses* (1887), where he applied intentionality to our thought about numbers. His approach, though, was still mired in Psychologism, since he tried to reduce numbers to mental operations. Husserl’s correspondence with the mathematician and logician Gottlob Frege in 1891, and Frege’s highly critical review of Husserl’s book in 1894, prompted Husserl to reject his Psychologism. Husserl came to think of numbers as non-mental and non-physical objects that subsist and about which there are truths, whether or not anyone happens to think of them. For example, even if no one had every completed the sum 11,392+7,029, it would still true that 11,392+7,029=18,421.

2. Through his correspondence with Frege, Husserl then adopted the search for the ideal, *a priori* forms of experience pursued by neo-Kantian transcendental philosophy.

a. Crucially, Husserl also adopted this neo-Kantian interpretation of *what* someone *thinks* in an experience, as opposed to what is reelly immanent within that experience. This allowed him to make a significant move beyond Brentano. Recall that Brentano’s view of intentionality just looked at relation between mental experience (*intentio*) and intentional object. But of course not all experiences – such as my hopes about Santa Claus – have a real intentional object. Husserl attempts to solve this problem by positing an intermediate entity between mental act and intentional object. This is called the

*intentional content*,

*intentional object as intended*,

*intended as such*,

*(intentional) object in the how (= the way and manner) of its being-intended*,

*intentum* (= *what is intended*),

***noema*** (i.e., *what is perceived*),

*(noematic)* ***sense***, or

*perceived as such*.

For Husserl, every mental act, or *noesis*, has a *noema* (= *sense*), although not necessarily a real intentional object. Husserl’s picture of intentionality thus looks like this:

**(immanent)** >-------- *has as its* --------> **noema** >-------- *about* --------> **(transcendent)**

**mental act** *intentional* (= sense) *(correct* **intentional object**

**(= noesis)**  *content* *or false of)* **in itself**

(including

sensations)

The noema (= sense)

(i) is a *description* of the intentional object; and thus the way in which the intentional object is given, or presented, to the mind. Thus the same intentional object can be intended using different noemata. (For example, you can think of the same guy as either Superman or Clark Kent; or you can think of the planet Venus as either the morning star or the evening star.)

(ii) is a non-mental and non-physical *universal* that is valid (if correct of the intentional object) or invalid (if incorrect of the intentional object). (If no real intentional object corresponds to the noema, then the noematic sense is invalid.)

(iii) is not reelly immanent to the mental act (as are sensations), but can be directly experienced by the mind. (Husserl, like the neo-Kantians, thus *rejects* Descartes’ II E.)

(iv) can serve as the sense of the mental acts of different people.

(v) is a rule that stipulates a set of experiential conditions that, if directly experienced, would count as *verifying*, or *confirming*, (the correctness of) that noema. In other words, the noema is a rule specifying a set of *verification-conditions*. **When a noema is completely verified (or confirmed), its intentional object is “evident”, i.e., “intuitively”, or “adequately”, given to the mind. The mind’s intention of the intentional object is thus completely fulfilled.**

(vi) of a mental act of perceiving of real, physical objects is a rule stipulating the (very complex) ordered sets of *sensations* that would count as the complete perception of the physical object – i.e., the object as it would be seen from all possible perspectives. Husserl thus agrees with Descartes’ theory of perception (II A). Husserl also agrees with Descartes’ II C: sensations can be known with certainty, but the real nature of physical objects cannot.

b. Husserl thus accepts Brentano’s notion of the intentional object (missing in neo-Kantianism), but also insists on the neo-Kantian notion of the *intended as such* (missing in Brentano).

c. Husserl *rejected* two presuppositions common to *both* Marburg and Southwest neo-Kantianism, maintaining instead:

(i) Knowledge is *not just* the application of (conceptual) form to sensations. Although sensations are necessary for perception to take place for physical objects, physical objects – and not sensations – are generally the *objects* known. Sensations are merely the means to the end of the knowledge of the object. Husserl agrees with the Marburg school that a perfect, mathematical science is the ideal goal of consciousness. Unlike the Marburg school, however, this science strives to know *physical objects*, not sensations.

(ii) There *can* be consciousness even where there is *no* (conceptual) form.

Rejecting these views allows Husserl to hold:

(iii) Sensations have no (conceptual) form. By themselves, they are just meaningless “data” coming from the sense-organs. (On this point, Husserl sides with the Marburg school and some of Descartes’ II B against the Southwest school.) Sensations first get meaning when the mind “grasps” them as verifying (or falsifying) a noema that does (or does not) stipulate them.

(iv) Sensations *are* given to consciousness. (On this point, Husserl sides with the Southwest school against the Marburg school.) This allows sensations to play their crucial role in the verification (or falsification) of noemata.

d. He also adopted the neo-Kantian interpretation of *a priori* forms as non-mental and non-physical ideal universals – or “essences” – that “subsist”, rather than “exist”.[[1]](#footnote-1) But his background in mathematics and Brentano made him relatively independent from the particular Marburg and Southwest schools of neo-Kantianism.

e. Husserl denied that all valid senses, such as those of logic or mathematics, are themselves values (thus siding with the Marburg school against the Southwest school). Thus Husserl, in Heidegger’s words, rejects the Southwest neo-Kantian notion that “only the *should* [i.e., the value] that is recognized in judging can be the object [of knowledge]” (1919: 189). Heidegger points out the mistake in the Southwest school’s reasoning:

P1: We *value* true judgments and propositions as things we *should* make.

P2: True judgments and propositions are valid (= true) of something.

C: True judgments and propositions are themselves values.

This conclusion doesn’t follow from the premises!

f. Husserl held that not all *a priori* structures were logical (thus siding with the Southwest school against the Marburg school). This view allowed him to distinguish between 2 kinds of transcendental, *a priori* investigations:

i. Formal ontology (*general metaphysics*), where “ontology” is the study of what it is for something to be. Formal ontology – the study of what it is for something to be, just insofar as it is – is based on formal logic. Formal logic studies 2 things: first, the basic forms of noematic senses,[[2]](#footnote-2) also known as *categories*; and second, the *a priori* analytic logical laws based just on these basic forms of noematic senses. The analytic laws of formal logic apply to all noematic senses. Recall that whenever an intentional object appears to us, it does so “through”, or in terms of, a noematic sense. Thus for Husserl the categories studied by formal logic are at the same time the basic ways in which intentional objects can *appear* to us.[[3]](#footnote-3)

ii. Regional/material ontology (*special metaphysics*) studies 2 things: first, the various basic *regions* of things; and second, the *a priori* synthetic laws that apply just to the things in these regions. For Husserl, the most basic being *mind* and *body*, i.e., *consciousness* and *physical matter*.[[4]](#footnote-4) Thus Husserl, like Descartes, is a metaphysical dualist (cf. Descartes II D).

g. For Husserl, both formal and material ontology deal with universals, not particular physical or mental things. For Husserl, a universal is something that you can make completely present (and not just, say, in memory) to yourself again and again. Nevertheless, the universals they deal with are importantly different.

- The universals studied by *material* ontology are particular *properties* or *relations* (for example, *being a physical object*, *being a living thing*, *being an animal*, *being a dog*) that apply to particular objects (e.g., Fido). These properties or relations are reached by a process that Husserl calls *generalization*.

- The universals studied by *formal* ontology are neither properties nor relations, but rather *forms*. Forms are *ways* in which properties or relations are related to each other, or to particular objects. Thus the ultimate forms studied by formal ontology are actually present right in the simplest perceptions or other intentional relations. Such *forms* are reached by a process that Husserl calls *formalization*.

C. Husserl and Dilthey:

1. Unlike either Marburg or Southwest neo-Kantianism, Husserl’s investigations are not restricted to the philosophy of science – either natural or human – but are much broader – including such pre-scientific phenomena as ordinary perception of physical objects, interpersonal relations, and action. At the end of Dilthey’s life (between 1903 and 1911), both Husserl and Dilthey learned from each other about such pre-scientific phenomena. Dilthey say a much-improved form of his “descriptive psychology” in Husserl’s phenomenology. Husserl roughly adopted Dilthey’s approach to the study of the minds of other people.

2. Nevertheless, Husserl’s *ultimate goal* was always that of Descartes and the neo-Kantians: to give an absolutely certain foundation to *all* science (*both* natural and human). Husserl conceived phenomenology as this foundational science of consciousness. In this respect, Husserl’s focus on the theory of knowledge (= epistemology) was quite different from Dilthey’s. Heidegger would argue that Husserl had not learned enough from Dilthey in this respect, in 2 respects. Husserl always thought of phenomenology as

a. the study of the *ways of givenness* of intentional objects. Givenness, however, is a *theoretical* mode of intentionality, as opposed, say, to a practical or lived one (1919: 88f). In order to avoid this prejudice, Heidegger uses the term “ways of being encountered” instead.

b. a *science*. This objectifies life, treating it as theorized, instead of as lived (1919/20: 78-80).

II. Intentionality’s tendency toward verification, fulfillment, and evidence:

A. Perception and adumbration:

1. In general, a mental act, or intention of an object, is fulfilled when the mind experiences all of the verification-conditions stipulated by the act’s (noematic) sense.

2. In the case of a perceptual act, the verification-conditions are comprised of attending to (*gegenwärtigen*) all of the *aspects*, or *adumbrations*, of the perceived thing – i.e., the thing as perceived from all possible perspectives.

(Note the distinction:

- one *perceives*, or *intends*, a whole *real, physical object*;

- one *attends to* a single *aspect*, or *adumbration*, of a real object.)

3. At any given time, the mind can perceive the real object only from one perspective. Thus at any given time, one can attend toonly one aspect of the object (say, the front side of the real object as seen from the front).

4. But if the mind weren’t in some way directed toward the other aspects of the object, then one would perceive only 2-dimensional facades, not a 3-dimensional physical object.

5. Thus in perceiving, a physical object, the mind doesn’t just

a. *attend to* (*gegenwärtigt*) the aspect presently given,

but also

b. *retains* (*behält*) aspects attended to in the past,

and

c. *protends* (*gewärtigt*) aspects that it anticipates attending to in the future (e.g., the underside of a chair).

1. This is true despite the fact that in 1916 Husserl replaced Rickert (Heidegger’s teacher) at Freiburg, where Heidegger had just qualified to teach, but could not because he was serving in the army during WWI. (Heidegger served as Husserl’s assistant at Freiburg from 1919 to 1923, and eventually replaced Husserl at Freiburg upon his retirement in 1928.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Husserl calls the basic forms of noematic senses “judgments”, but this obscures the issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Among other things, formal ontology points out that there are objects and facts, and that there can be general laws connecting objects and facts with each other. For Husserl, arithmetic belongs to formal ontology, since everything that is can be counted. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For example, minds have no extension in space; whereas bodies do. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)