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

**Handout on Husserl #4: *History of the Concept of Time*, pp. 72-94**

IV. Husserl on phenomenology and ontology:

A. Phenomenology: the analytic description of intentionality in its a *priori*:

1. Intentionality: Like all kinds of research, phenomenology has a domain, region, or field of matters that it studies. Phenomenology’s topic is not physical objects, living things, or even mental objects (such as sensations) as such. Instead, phenomenology studies our intentions of such objects, i.e., how the objects of everyday and scientific experience are *given*, or *presented* to the mind. In Heidegger’s terms, it studies the *ways in which* objects show themselves, i.e., how objects show up *as* something. Thus phenomenology describes (a) the intended as such (what Husserl also calls the *noematic sense*), and (b) how intentions tend to seek fulfillment. These are the original *phenomena* of *phenomenology*.

2. Description: Phenomenology does not try to construct theories that *explain* the intentional objects observed. The method of phenomenology is thus not experimental or deductive. Instead, phenomenology only seeks to *clarify* what’s observed *just as it’s observed*. Accordingly, the phenomenological method is *descriptive*. This is the meaning of Husserl’s phenomenological call to arms: “To the matters themselves!”[[1]](#footnote-1)

3. Analysis: A description is *analytic* if it doesn’t just stop at describing something, but also seeks to “dig deeper” – to uncover the conditions of its possibility.

a. For example, a phenomenological description of perceiving a chair doesn’t just describe the chair as I perceive it, but also describes how it is possible for me to perceive something as a chair. This involves a description of how I put together (1) my *attending to* the aspects of the chair that I’m currently seeing; with (2) my *retaining* the aspects of the chair that I’ve already seen, and (3) my *protending* the aspects of the chair that I anticipate seeing; so that I perceive a 3-dimensional object existing through time, and not just a series of 2-dimensional façades. Husserl calls the mind’s complex activity of putting together what it attends to, retains, and protends the “synthesis” of time-consciousness. (Note that “synthesis” here does not mean creating, but rather just *putting together* into a whole.)

b. Husserl calls the complex synthesis that makes our intentions of objects possible the constitution of the intended as such (here, the chair) in consciousness. For Husserl, analysis of intentional acts always leads to some such synthetic constitution by consciousness of the intended as such. **Please note that although the mind *constitutes* the intended as such by putting together many mental acts into a single act, it does not create these objects themselves.**

4. Phenomenology begins by analytically describing *particular* intentional phenomena, such as perceiving my cat Frank or my neighbor’s house. But its goal is to go beyond just descriptions and speak about what *must necessarily* belong to allintentional phenomena (of a given kind, such as perception) as such. That is, phenomenology’s goal is to describe the *a priori* nature, structures, and tendencies of intentional phenomena. “*A priori*” means “from before”: namely, “prior to” our actual encounters of entities. An *a priori* feature of an encounter of an entity is what we must (always) already understand if we are to be able to encounter that entity. Husserl (and occasionally Heidegger) follow Kant in calling such an investigation *transcendental* *philosophy*. Heidegger thinks of this as making the being2 of an entity into a phenomenon. This is difficult work, since the being2 of entities is usually not explicit. We usually focus on entities themselves and what they are, not on how they’re given to us. Husserl (and occasionally Heidegger) follow Kant in calling such an investigation *transcendental philosophy*.

B. Husserl on phenomenology and ontology:

1. One important *a priori* feature of intentionality are the *categories* (i.e., ways of being of the intended as such) – which Husserl (but not Heidegger) saw as restricted to *that-being* and the categories of *what-being* (i.e., the logical structures of judgments). *Formalization* is the process of beginning with a particular intention, and “extracting” the categories involved in its intended as such.

a. A phenomenological formalization (= description and classification) of the categories (what Husserl calls *formal apophantics*[[2]](#footnote-2))

can thus serve as the basis for

b. *formal ontology* [[3]](#footnote-3): the study of what it is for something to be, just insofar as it is.

Whereas formal apophantics just studies the categories of the intended as such, formal ontology studies (intentional) objects themselves, just insofar as they are.[[4]](#footnote-4)

2. Some *a priori* features of intentionality can be reached by the process of *generalization* (as opposed to formalization). Unlike formalization, generalization doesn’t begin with a *whole* particular judgment. Instead, it just begins with a particular aspect – i.e., the *concept* of a property (such as *cat*) or a relation (such as *to the left of*) – contained within the intended as such. Generalization then subsumes this particular concept or relation under more and more abstract (= general) concepts or relations. For example:

Begin with my cat Frank. The concept of *cat* can get generalized into “All cats are mammals” can get generalized to “All mammals are animals,” which can get generalized to “All animals are living things”, which can get generalized to “all living things are physical things”, and finally “all physical things are particular things.”

Or take the fact that Frank is on the sofa. “*x* is on *y*” expresses a 2-dimensional spatial relation”, “*2-dimensional spatial relation* is a spatial relation”, “*spatial relation* is a relation”.

a. A phenomenological generalization of meanings within the intended as such, including the different ways in which we intend objects as having these meanings,

can thus serve as the basis for

b. regional *ontology*: the study of what it is for something to be, insofar as it belongs in a specific region of objects (e.g., the region of mental objects, the region of physical objects, the region of universal objects, etc.)

C. Husserl on regional ontology and time: The most basic regions of objects are distinguished phenomenologically, according to the particular ways in which time figures in our intentions of them. For example:

1. Mental objects (such as sensations) are given in the act of consciousness in which they’re reelly contained, and can be adequately intuited only in the present moment when they actually occur: the *originary impression*. After this, we can only try to remember them.

2. Physical objects are given by means of sensations, when these sensations are grasped as satisfying the verification-conditions of a noematic sense. Like sensations, physical objects are constantly changing through time. But unlike sensations, physical objects can never be adequately intuited. They always have a back side, inside, etc. that we haven’t yet seen, or that might have changed since we last saw it.

3. A universal object, unlike either mental or physical objects, can at *any* time be adequately given as *the same*. They are the objects that we can always “come back to”, whenever we want. They are given as constantly present, or, perhaps better, constantly present*able*.

1. Indeed, one of Husserl’s criticism of Descartes is that he saw philosophy as a *deductive* science, like geometry and mathematical physics. Thus instead of merely describing the phenomena that he saw in the field of consciousness that he discovered, Descartes took his certainty that his mind exists as a premise of a number of arguments with conclusions about things that he can’t directly experience (that God exists, that every idea that he clearly and distinctly perceives must be true, that physical objects do exist, etc.). “Had Descartes stopped with the 2nd *Meditation*, he would have come to phenomenology” (quoted by Heidegger 1923/24: 268). (Actually, Descartes, like Husserl, preferred analysis to deduction in philosophy, but that’s not important for our purposes.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For Husserl, *apophansis* = judging the intended as such as true1. *Formal apophantics* proceeds in 2 stages. First, the pure categories (logical forms of judgments) are isolated. Second, it is determined which combinations of categories are consistent (and thus logically possible, such as “*p* and *q*”); inconsistent (and thus contradictory, or logically impossible, such as “*p* and not-*p*”); or analytic (and thus necessarily true; such as “either *p* or not-*p*”). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For Husserl, formal ontology = formal analytics = formal mathematics (in a broad sense). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For Husserl, formal apophantics + formal ontology = formal logic (= universal mathematics). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)