

Husserl's Method of Philosophical Inquiry : A Critical Analysis

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Abstract : *History of Philosophy is the history of inquiry. Without inquiry philosophical study cannot possible. The method of philosophy is just the method of inquiry. Sometimes philosophy uses the scientific method and vice-versa. Sometimes philosophy functions to apply old views to new situations. Sometimes in philosophy, we reimagine the old and familiar from a new perspective. So if there is any method to philosophy, it is just the method of inquiry in general. Philosophers adopt a broad range of methods for understanding the world. The present paper attempts to examine the Husserl's phenomenological method briefly and some problems have been highlighted.*

Keywords : *Bracketing, epoche, noema, reduction, transcendental phenomenology.*

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Introduction

History of Philosophy is the history of inquiry. Without inquiry philosophical study cannot possible. The method of philosophy is just the method of inquiry. Sometimes philosophy uses the scientific method and vice-versa. Sometimes philosophy functions to apply old views to new situations. Sometimes in philosophy, we reimagine the old and familiar from a new perspective. So if there is any method to philosophy, it is just the method of inquiry in general. Philosophers adopt a broad range of methods for understanding the world. The present paper attempts to examine the Husserl's phenomenological method briefly and some problems have been highlighted.

Main Text

Edmund Husserl was the true founder of modern phenomenology. He set himself the task of describing in general terms the method and subject matter of a new science of pure phenomenology. He also executed numerous detailed and penetrating phenomenological investigations. Phenomenology is an investigation of phenomena. Husserl defined the science of phenomenology as the description of subjective processes or phenomena. He conceived pure phenomenology as a necessary preparatory science much as Aristotle considered logic as a propaedeutic science.¹

When we speak of the phenomenological mode of analysis, the concept of 'analysis' it not used in the sense commonly accepted in recent philosophy. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with 'description'. One may characterize the phenomenological procedure as description by analysis – where both (description and analysis) are taken in non-empirical context. Phenomenology had a twofold objective – one is phenomenological psychology or descriptive phenomenology, second is 'pure' or transcendental phenomenology.²

The phenomenological method is neither deductive, nor empirical or inductive. It lies in exhibiting and clarification what is given. It does not explain through laws and does not deduce out of any principles. It does not proceed from axiomatic principles through deductive steps. On the other-hand it seeks to view in its immediacy what stands before consciousness – that is its objects. So phenomenological analysis is the objective rather than subjective notion or activity. It is the object of activity such as the perceived in perception, the remembered in remembering, the imagined in imagining, the loved in loving, the valued in valuing

and so on.

Phenomenological analysis is meant the manifold of one's stream of consciousness. It can be grasped reflectively. It has also an immensely complicated structure of its own. This complicated character of the structure of consciousness particularly relates to the diverse modes of referentiality. Phenomenological analysis presents itself as an ideal objective unity. Such unity again would be constituted in terms of the meant reference of the subject, actual or potential, through a multiplicity of appearances in objectivity.

An essential feature of the phenomenological method is its technique of 'bracketing' or 'elimination' of the factual dimension of our experience. It is the core of the phenomenological method itself—what is known as phenomenological or transcendental 'reduction'. The attitude of deliberate doubt – like Cartesian fashion – is sought to be taken up in phenomenology to access its proper objects – as essence. Accordingly a suspension of belief in the natural order would be undertaken. The phenomenologist is not concerned with particular facts as such but with the ideal essences which shine through the particulars. Husserl frequently uses the expression *epoche* (suspension of judgment) to refer to the purification of experience of its factuality. The characteristic of phenomenological attitude involves an initial suspension of judgment regarding the existence of the presentations of consciousness. The phenomenological bracketing or elimination of existence is a methodological attitude. It must be preserved throughout to insure investigation of the essential constitution of experience. Mathematics affords a typical example of the sustained employment of the phenomenological technique. Pure mathematics systematically 'brackets' the factual and existential aspects of our experience of space and quantity. It also focuses attention exclusively on ideal relations. According to Husserl, like mathematics, phenomenology is 'the science of pure possibilities (which) must everywhere precede the science of real facts.'³

Phenomenological reduction or *epoche* has two different versions ⁴– the "universal *epoche*" and "local *epoche*". The former seems to require all his existence assumptions regarding the external world into brackets at once, at any point. On the other hand, the later merely requires him to bracket particular existence assumptions, depending on the respective "transcendental guide".

Only the universal *epoche* seems to conflict with our externalist view. It is noted that if no-extra mental existence assumptions whatsoever are admitted at

any point, then phenomenologically there cannot be object dependent intentional content. By contrast, there may be some such contents generally having to be dependent on a particular extra mental object. In this particular case perceptual experience is the best for the local epoche. The respective item is described exactly as it is experienced. Now in the case of perceptual experience, one cannot, both fall victim to and at the same time discovers a particular perceptual error. It is always possible that one is subject to an illusion or even a hallucination. So one's perceptual experience is not veridical. If one is hallucinating, there is really no object of perception. However phenomenologically the experience one undergoes is exactly the same as if one successfully perceived an external object.

Therefore, the phenomenological description of a perceptual experience should be independent of whether for the experience under investigation there is an object it represents or not. Either way, there will at least be a perceptual content. It is this content that Husserl calls the perceptual noema. Phenomenological description is concerned with those aspects of the noema that remain the same irrespective of whether the experience is veridical or not. Thus phenomenologist must 'bracket' his belief in the existence of the perceptual object.

But this lands him in a methodological dilemma. If, the phenomenologist leaves the "natural attitude" and brackets his corresponding existence-belief, at the same time, he cannot perform the perceptual experience he wishes to investigate (the first horn of the dilemma). On the other hand, if phenomenologist makes use of that belief, then he is bound to violate the constraints put upon him by the local epoche. He fails to assume the phenomenological attitude (this is the second horn).

We can say that there are at least three possible ways out of this dilemma: (1) the phenomenologist could choose the first horn of the dilemma and analyses an earlier perceptual experience. (2) He could again decide in favour of the first horn. He also analyses a perceptual experience that he merely intuitively imagines himself to have⁵. (3) He could instead choose the second horn, keep employing his existence belief but make a kind of "pragmatic ascent". He describes the perceptual experience in such a way that the description does not presuppose the existence of a perceptual object.

According to Husserl, the complete noema of a perceptual experience contains an additional element. This is its "thetic" or 'positing' character – its quality. Moreover, the manner in which the perceptual object presents itself includes the sensual matter or 'hyle' underlying the respective perceptual experience. He regards

sense impressions as non-conceptual in nature. It is only the intentional content of a perceptual experience that “forms” its underlying hyle so as to yield a conceptual representation of the perceptual object.

The deep-structure of intentional consciousness is ‘phenomenological reduction’.⁶ It uses the method of epoche in order to make coherent sense of the transcendence of objective reality. The most global form of epoche is employed when this reality in total is bracketed. But the temporal flow of one’s “present” experience cannot be bracketed at this stage. These recurrent temporal features of the horizon structure of consciousness cannot be meaningfully doubted. Hence there is no epistemically problematic gap between experience and object in this case. It provides an adequate starting point for the phenomenological reduction. After all, intentional consciousness has now been shown to be coherently structured at its phenomenologically deepest level.

Critical Analysis

So in our above discussion, we see that phenomenological reduction is the core of phenomenological method. Edmund Husserl uses the concept of reduction in at least two senses: (1) the –so-called “eidetic reduction” leading from particulars to universal essences (eide). (2) the more specific and controversial sense of reduction which Husserl called the “phenomenological” or “transcendental reduction”. Naturally a question arises whether the reduction in this latter sense is really indispensable for phenomenology or whether a phenomenology is possible and perhaps even actual without this radical procedure.

Herbert Spiegelberg thinks that ⁷ there will be no question about his (Husserl) own answer concerning the indispensability of the reduction, at least as far as pure phenomenology was concerned. But Pfander took no interest in Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. In his book “Logik” of 1921, he discussed the meaning of phenomenology at all. There is no mention of the reduction. He seems that phenomenological reduction is no important part of phenomenology and hence expendable. He even omits the word “reduction” and uses merely Husserl’s Greek term “epoche”, by which he means a suspension of belief or judgment. He also does not subscribe to Husserl’s additional operation of leading back to the origins of the world in the consciousness of the phenomenological subject. In other words, Pfander accepts the epoche, but rejects the transcendental reduction.⁸

Philosopher Philip Pettit’s seems ⁹ that the necessity of the reductions based

on his view that intentionality means creative constitution. Such a creative achievement can be discovered only on the basis of a reduction. But this interpretation of intentionality is certainly not common ground for the entire phenomenological movement. Eugen Fink ¹⁰ says that intentionality means 'productive – creative'. But neither for Brentano, the discover of intentionality as consciousness –of, nor for the Husserl of the logical investigations, nor for any other phenomenologist, including Sartre, is the constitutive, let alone the creative, function of intentionality its basic characteristic. No reduction is necessary to reveal it, not even an epoche. Besides, constitutive and even creative acts are very definitely accessible to a non-reduction phenomenological investigation. So we conclude that a phenomenological analysis of intentionality without reduction is not only possible but actual. So he concludes that a phenomenological analysis of intentionality without reduction is not only possible but actual.

Moreover, phenomenology offers a useful and potent methodology for philosophical investigations. The phenomenological approach professes to be as much non-empirical as non-metaphysical. Its avowed freedom from presuppositions –on the natural as much as on the metaphysical level-would not permit its method to become exclusively either empirical or metaphysical. So far as phenomenology offers to bring out the ideal preconditions of knowledge and experience, its method cannot wholly be defined within the empirical frame of reference. It has to start with experience, and to go behind the given in experience to its ideal implicates.

Similarly, a question may legitimately be raised against the possibility of obtaining non-factual non-real essences, disconnected from reality. Is it possible that we get at pure essences, altogether excluded from every connection with the real world, and proceed systematically connection with the real world and proceed systematically in the reality-neutral region of purified experience? This point in objection might indeed go against the plausibility of phenomenological reduction itself –of the very act of “bracketing”.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, we can say that some problem, some critique, some quarry may be arises against Husserl's phenomenological reduction. Yet, it is no doubt to say that Husserl's phenomenological reduction is the important gate way for the study of phenomenology.

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