

## PHENOMENOLOGY AS AN ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY APPROACH TO EPISTEMOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT:** This article aims at showing that phenomenology is an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology. With the methods of bracketing and going back to the things themselves, phenomenology deals with the question of meaning or essence, that is, a question that goes beyond the empirico-rationalistic approach. In this way, this article aims at showing that with the method (phenomenological reduction) and the foundation (concepts of intentionality and consciousness) of Husserl's philosophy, phenomenology is a new approach, which is considered as an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Our main question is: "How can phenomenology become an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology?" Etymologically speaking, the term "epistemology" means a study or theory of knowledge. In fact, epistemology deals with the question of "How can we know?" With this epistemological approach, knowledge comes from both sense-experience (empiricism) and reason (rationalism).

By focusing only on the natural attitude and the positive sciences, epistemology is not concerned with the question of the "meaning or essence" of things. This is why phenomenology becomes an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology. This is why the phenomenological approach to knowledge focuses on the meaning or essence of the things that appear to our consciousness. Our new question is: "How can we know phenomenologically?"

In this article, we shall respectively speak of: the phenomenological approach to knowledge; Husserl's method of the phenomenological reduction; and the phenomenological foundation concerning the concepts of intentionality and consciousness.

### II. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE

#### 2.1. How can we know phenomenologically?

The question shows that phenomenology has relevant implications on epistemology. While epistemology deals with an object outside *there*, phenomenology deals with an object *within* the human mind. Also, epistemologists study the empirical experiences (*outer sense*), whereas phenomenologists study only the conscious experiences (*inner sense*) because the subject and object are united in a kind of transcendental world.

How can we know phenomenologically? With the phenomenological approach to knowledge, we should first adopt the reflective attitude (the introspective attitude, conscious attitude, intentional attitude or transcendental attitude) towards conscious experiences by bracketing or putting aside all our prior presuppositions and prejudices. Second, we should fundamentally go back to the things themselves in order to know their meaning or essence.

In fact, the key thesis of phenomenology is that consciousness is intentional, that is, directed towards "objects." With the phenomenological approach to knowledge, we only deal with mental phenomena, which are different from the physical ones. According to Franz Brentano, the mental phenomena are those phenomena given to the mind. They are the phenomena of conscious experiences, that is, the experiences within our consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Since the object of investigation is phenomenologically within the mind, we need to move from the natural attitude (attitude of experience) to the transcendental attitude (phenomenological seeing or viewing).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, Edward (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Volume 4: *From Genealogy to Iqbal* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 816b-817b.

<sup>2</sup> Bernet, Rudolf, *Edmund Husserl. Collected Works. Volume 12: The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Ingo Farin and James G. Hart (Springer: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 40.

With the natural attitude, we assume unquestioningly that the world exists outside *there*. Nonetheless with the transcendental attitude, we are aware of the objects within our mind. This is why phenomenology aims at articulating what shows itself to our mind.<sup>3</sup> It also aims at interpreting the phenomena, which give themselves to us.

As an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology, phenomenology studies things as we experience them.<sup>4</sup> In his *Ideas*,<sup>5</sup> Husserl describes phenomenology as the science of phenomena. Like Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edmund Husserl defines phenomenology as the interpretation of our conscious or living experiences. For him, phenomenology deals with the connotation or essence of the phenomena that appear to our consciousness.

With the phenomenological approach to knowledge, the objects of investigation are no longer outside *there*; but they are within the subject. As human beings, “we must inevitably see the universe from a center lying within ourselves and speak about it in terms of a human language shaped by the exigencies of human intercourse. Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity.”<sup>6</sup>

These objects of investigation are perceived by the subject. Phenomenologically speaking, an object is known because it exists or reveals itself in the mind of the subject. According to Edmund Husserl, to know is to exist or to be-with-things. Nevertheless, through this being-with-things in knowledge, a world opens up, a world reveals itself, a world-for-man begins to be. Thus, in the words of Paul Claudel, *connaître* (to know) is a kind of *co-naître*, a being-born-together.<sup>7</sup> The main question is: “Who influenced Husserl’s phenomenology?”

## 2. 2. Descartes’ influence on Husserl’s Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl expresses the Cartesian influence in his phenomenology. In fact, Husserl borrowed many ideas from Descartes by criticizing some of them in his writings (*Cartesian Meditations, Idea of Phenomenology, Paris Lectures, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*).<sup>8</sup> In the introductory remarks of his *Cartesian Meditations*, Edmund Husserl states that René Descartes gave phenomenology new impulses through his *Meditations*.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Husserl assigns the same goal to his *Cartesian Meditations* as it was the case with Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*. As Husserl says: “The aim of the *Meditations* is a complete reforming of philosophy into a science grounded on an absolute foundation. It implies, for Descartes, that *Methodic doubt* is a corresponding reformation of all the sciences...”<sup>10</sup>

Concerning the Cartesian influence on the new-fangled philosophical method, Husserl argues: “phenomenology must honor Descartes as its genuine patriarch.”<sup>11</sup> There are, of course, other influences upon Edmund Husserl’s thought, notably the empiricism of John Locke, the skepticism of David Hume, the Copernican revolution of Immanuel Kant, and the pragmatism of William James. In every case, Husserl went beyond these philosophers whose insights shaped his own ideas. Nevertheless, Descartes’s influence was decisive for it let Husserl become the founder of the philosophical method, called: “phenomenological reduction.”

However, whereas Descartes sought through methodic doubt, Husserl formulated the *epoché* reduction. In order to get clear and distinct ideas, Descartes wanted to reconstruct philosophy on a solid foundation. By doubting everything and by questioning all human knowledge, Descartes wanted to build up certain knowledge. As we can see, the *epoché* reduction follows the same patterns as the Cartesian methodic doubt. The only

<sup>3</sup> Wallace, A. William, *The Elements of Philosophy. A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians* (New York: St. Pauls’, 1977), p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> Hammond, Michael, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat. *Understanding phenomenology* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Volume 1: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Luijpen, William, *Existential Phenomenology* (Louvain: Duquesne University Press, 1963), pp. 96-97.

<sup>8</sup> Omeregbe, Joseph I. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study* (University of Lagos: Joja Education Research and Publishers Limited, 1998), p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Stumpf, Samuel Enoch, *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1998), p. 472.

difference is that the Cartesian epistemological approach focuses on *reason*, while the Husserlian phenomenological approach emphasizes the concept of *consciousness*.

Like Descartes before him, Husserl wished to put philosophy on a firm basis.<sup>12</sup> Since the Husserlian *epoché* reduction bears a resemblance to the *Cartesian methodic doubt*, we perceive in Descartes' philosophy a certain measure of anticipation of a novel philosophical discipline called "phenomenology." Descartes began by doubting everything, including all phenomena, while Husserl "brackets" all phenomena or conscious experiences.

Husserl abstains from entertaining any belief about experience. Thus, he "brackets" the whole stream of experienced life including objects, other people, and cultural situations<sup>13</sup> (the prejudices and presuppositions). The "bracketing" implies suspending all beliefs characteristic to the "natural attitude," the attitude of common sense and science. Husserl's "bracketing" is the exclusion of the influence which constitutes an obstacle to our knowledge.

With regard to both the Cartesian methodic doubt and the Husserlian *epoché* reduction, the source of all knowledge is the ego: the subject. On the other hand, while for Descartes the ego becomes a "thinking being" (*Res cogitans*), Husserl realizes the ego as "living being" (*matrix of experience*). In other words, Husserl puts primary emphasis upon experience instead of logic. Husserl focuses on the "living experience", whereas Descartes deals with the "thinking one."

Also, whenever Descartes emphasized the two terms in his famous *ego cogito*, Husserl believed that a more accurate description of experience is expressed in the three terms *ego cogito cogitatum*. This is why Descartes emphasized the "I think," Husserl makes the point that to say "I think *something*" is the typical human experience. But what is really the Husserlian method called "phenomenological reduction"?

### III. HUSSERL'S METHOD: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

Phenomenology is not a unified method of philosophy. Its main proponents (Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) interpret it differently. Although it is possible to present a broad characterization of what they share, Edmund Husserl focuses on the transcendental method, while Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty focus on the existential method<sup>14</sup>. In this way, I will mainly present the Husserl's "phenomenological reduction."

#### 3.1. Two types of the "phenomenological reduction"

Husserl's method has two kinds of the phenomenological reduction: the *epoché* reduction applied to the subject and the *eidetic* reduction applied to the object. The Husserlian *epoché* reduction is a bracketing process (the putting aside); it is a process of doubting everything. Like Descartes who doubts everything (the former knowledge; the senses, dreams, evil genius and even the mathematical truths), Husserl brackets or puts aside all the prejudices and influences that can constitute obstacles to the knowledge of the objects of our consciousness.

By using the *epoché* reduction, Husserl aims at building his new philosophy on a solid foundation. Like Descartes, Husserl starts by suspending all knowledge about everything. He aims at bracketing all his prejudices and presuppositions. The way our senses can deceive us, he also acknowledges that the natural attitude is naïve and unreliable. In order to suspend all his beliefs, Husserl asserts: "Our first outlook upon life is that of natural human beings, imagining, judging, feeling and willing from the natural standpoint."<sup>15</sup>

Husserl aims at moving from the natural attitude to the transcendental attitude (the philosophical attitude of mind).<sup>16</sup> According to Husserl, the natural attitude takes reality for granted by thinking that something is always given to us. The natural attitude stands for what Husserl calls the "fact-world," whereby we take reality as something which is always there, existing outside our mind and even transcending our consciousness.

The natural attitude is transcendent, whereas the philosophical attitude of mind is transcendental. Since the natural attitude is the one of the common sense, it is naïve and unreliable. With the transcendental attitude, Husserl brackets or doubts all the former assumptions. This is why he argues: "The attempt to doubt everything

<sup>12</sup>Copleston, Frederick, *A History of Philosophy*, Volume 7. *Fichte to Nietzsche* (New York: A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), p. 434.

<sup>13</sup>Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, p. 474.

<sup>14</sup> Craig, Edward (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Volume 7: *From Nihilism to Quantum* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 343a-344a.

<sup>15</sup>Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup>Husserl, Edmund, *The Idea of Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 13.

has its place in the realm of our perfect freedom. We can attempt to doubt anything and of current usage may also be expressed in the words: I suppose (I make the assumption) that it is so and so."<sup>17</sup>

According to Husserl, the transcendental attitude is a phenomenological reduction from which new knowledge can spring. The transcendental attitude disconnects us from all prejudices and presuppositions that pertain to the natural standpoint. Concerning the disconnection process, Edmund Husserl says: "I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect, I take none of them, no one of them serves me for a foundation."<sup>18</sup>

For Husserl, the transcendental attitude helps us to know the meaning or essence of the phenomena. It is a "philosophical attitude of mind"<sup>19</sup> required for judging, valuing and signifying the world of experience. With this transcendental attitude, the outer experience is fundamentally transformed into an inner one. In other words, "the natural experience is transcendentalized by the transcendental Ego in the universe of possible sense."<sup>20</sup>

The transcendental *Ego* is centered on the self-reflection. It becomes aware of its own phenomenological self-contained essence that is posited as the Ego who invests the essence of the phenomena. As Husserl says: "The posited Ego means that the world is no longer given to me in advance and outside there, but the positing world is within the transcendental Ego."<sup>21</sup> Since the posited Ego transcendentalizes the positing world, the conscious experience transcendentalizes the natural experience. In the process of transcendentalizing the positing world (the transcendent world), the *epoché* reduction constitutes an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology. What about the *eidetic* reduction?

The *eidetic* reduction consists in focusing on the essence of things or on the essential structures of what appears to us. At this level, Husserl ascribes to the subject ("mind and body") a *constitutive role* of giving the sense or meaning of things. According to Husserl, the *eidetic* reduction leads us to a subjective knowledge of the phenomena. For him, the structures of the world can only be those experienced by the subject. This is why Husserl says: "I must lose the world by *epoché*, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination."<sup>22</sup>

With the *eidetic* reduction, Husserl wants to go back to the things themselves. Husserl says that "We must not make assertions about that which we do not ourselves see."<sup>23</sup> For this reason, Kant's distinction between the *phenomenal* reality and the *noumenal* reality is unacceptable to Husserl. Edmund Husserl rigorously limits the scope of his phenomenology to the realm of "conscious experience," which is called "transcendental world."

According to Husserl, the transcendental world is the world of the transcendental *Ego* or the world of consciousness. In order to know this transcendental world, Edmund Husserl speaks of two kinds of the phenomenological reduction. The *epoché* reduction deals with "putting things aside" in order to avoid any prejudices and presuppositions, while the *eidetic* reduction deals with the sense or meaning of what appears to us.

By bracketing the realm of experience (i.e. using the *epoché* reduction), Husserl is led back (*re-ducere*) to the center of transcendental world. Going back to the things themselves connotes observing, analyzing, abstracting, and describing them. Husserl does not speak of a mere observation (sense-perception), but he speaks of a mental observation which consists in taking distance from the phenomena in order to provide their meaning.

Within this mental observation, we should suspend our judgment concerning the phenomena; we should also disregard our beliefs that concern them; and we should finally focus on what these phenomena reveal to us. This mental observation helps us to penetrate into things in order to know the meaning that lies behind them. This is why phenomenology becomes the study of the essence of our conscious experiences.

Concerning the mental observation, Husserl describes the knower by saying: "I have discovered that I alone am the pure ego, with pure existence... Through this ego alone, the being of the world make sense to me and has possible validity."<sup>24</sup> However, by focusing on the second kind of the phenomenological reduction, Husserl says "all consciousness is always a consciousness of something beyond it, something presented to it but

<sup>17</sup>Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>18</sup>Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, p. 111.

<sup>19</sup>Kambale, Mathe Jean de Dieu, *Edmund Husserl's Concept of "Life-World" as the Ground and Horizon for Transcendental Intersubjectivity* (Nairobi: Thesis at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, 2017), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup>Husserl, Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Translated by Dorion Cairns (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>21</sup>Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, p. 118.

<sup>22</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *The Paris Lectures*, Translation and Introductory Essay by Peter Koestenbaum (The Hague: MartinusNijhoff Publishers, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, p. 475.



not contained in it.”<sup>25</sup>After describing the knower, how does Edmund Husserl describe his phenomenological reduction?

### 3.2 Description of the “phenomenological reduction”

After applying the *epoché* reduction on the subject and the *eidetic* reduction on the object, the phenomena can be either *real* or *apparent*, either *explicit* or *implicit*<sup>26</sup>; these phenomena can either *represent* or *misrepresent* the reality; they can either *reveal* or *hide* the reality, depending on how we experience things. In other words, our experience of the phenomena leads us to a dichotomy between an *inner* world and an *outer* world. But how does Husserl describe this “phenomenological reduction”?

The phenomenological reduction is a philosophical method by means of which one returns to the “first origins and beginnings” of things instead of relying on the superficial aspects of the material objects. With this philosophical method, one should place himself or herself in the sphere of “original and clear beginnings.”<sup>27</sup>The phenomenological reduction is a procedure by which one perceives things themselves as they are without any presuppositions or prejudices.<sup>28</sup> It is a procedure by which one perceives the original phenomena exactly as they present themselves to us. It is also a procedure by which one arrives at the “most basic field of work” or the “primordial field.”<sup>29</sup>The phenomenological reduction is a change of attitude by which one learns to see things in a more radical way. In other words, one needs to penetrate into things in order to see the meaning behind the material objects.<sup>30</sup>

The phenomenological reduction is an adoption of an objective and neutral position toward the former knowledge. The procedure requires that one must free himself of the philosophical solutions that have been proposed for the various philosophical questions. One should free himself or herself of hypotheses handed down from ancient to modern times.<sup>31</sup> One should only rely on his or her neutral positions about things because “phenomenology represents a field of neutral research.”<sup>32</sup>The phenomenological reduction is a process that leads one from the “phenomena” (the physical, intuitive and mental phenomena) to their “essences.”<sup>33</sup> It is a process through which one raises his or her knowledge from conscious experiences to their meaning.

The phenomenological reduction is somehow a *Cartesian methodic doubt* because it also deals with the “bracketing/suspension of all prejudices and presuppositions so as to reach the meaning or essence of things. It is an attempt to a universal denial<sup>34</sup> (the process of bracketing, suspending or letting aside). It is a process of attaining knowledge with certainty. The phenomenological reduction is a procedure by which someone moves/shifts from the “natural standpoint to the transcendental one” in order to get the meaning of things. It helps someone to move from the empirical judgment to the transcendental one, and from natural attitude to the transcendental one so as to deal with the essence of things. It also helps someone to go back to what is essential and meaningful in the material things.<sup>35</sup>

## IV. FOUNDATION OF PHENOMENOLOGY: THE CONCEPTS OF INTENTIONALITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Intentionality is the mind’s capacity to direct itself on things. Franz Brentano characterizes intentionality in terms of the mind’s direction upon an object. For him, *intentionality* is what distinguishes the mental, intuitive and physical phenomena.<sup>36</sup> By intentionality, Brentano focuses on an object given to our mind.

<sup>25</sup> Wallace, *The Elements of Philosophy. A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians*, p. 299.

<sup>26</sup>Hammond, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat, *Understanding phenomenology*, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, Translated, with an Introduction, by David Carr (Evanston/Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 146.

<sup>28</sup>Kockelmans J. Joseph, *Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>Husserl, Edmund, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and the Crisis of European Man* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>32</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations. Volume 1: Prolegomena to Pure Logic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. XXIII.

<sup>33</sup>Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations. Volume 1: Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup>Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup>Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology*, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, p. XX.

In this way, intentionality is the directedness of the mind upon something; it is the aboutness and relatedness of the mental states; it is what Husserl calls the “attentiveness of the mind.”<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.1. The “Concept of Intentionality”

From Brentano, his teacher, Husserl reflects deeply on the intentional theory of mind. According to him, intentionality characterizes mental acts, such as: judgments, beliefs, meanings, valuations, desires, loves, hatreds, and so on. In his *Idea of Phenomenology*, Edmund Husserl says that the intentional act is always “an act about” or “an act of.” This is the case when we say: “I think about or of; I desire this or that.”<sup>38</sup> The phenomenological meaning of intentionality does not deal with the so-called “bad or good” intention, but rather with the fact that consciousness is always linked with an object; it is always directed to an object.

Nonetheless, in his *Paris Lectures*, Husserl states that intentionality is a discovery about the nature of consciousness. To the question “What is consciousness?” he answers “intentionality.” In other words, intentionality signifies the fact that consciousness is intentional or directional<sup>39</sup>. Consciousness is a stream between two poles: subject and object. And the intentional character of consciousness is carefully developed in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*.

Husserl, following Brentano’s argument, holds that intentionality is the essence of consciousness. In comparing the two terms, Edmund Husserl means that the object of consciousness—a tree, a pain in my stomach or a complex number is “something meant, constructed, projected, constituted, in short, *intended by me*.”<sup>40</sup>

Husserl prefers the name of intentionality to designate an active participation of the ego in the structuring of our experience. Intentionality is the structure of consciousness *per se*. Intentionality has to be referred to as “knowledge by acquaintance,” “knowledge about,” “pure data,” “interpreted phenomena,” and “constituted or constructed reality.”<sup>41</sup>

In his Introduction to Phenomenology, Dermot Moran says: “intentionality is the doctrine that every mental act is related to some object.”<sup>42</sup> With this statement, the idea of intentionality creates a kind of reconciliation between empiricism and rationalism, on the one hand. This idea of intentionality unifies realism and idealism, on the other hand. With intentionality, phenomenology becomes a philosophy of encounter or conscious experience.

Undeniably, some philosophers have used the term “intentionality” with the same meaning like that of consciousness. Even Edmund Husserl describes consciousness as an intentional object. Also, Husserl describes phenomenology as the study of conscious experiences (the intentional experiences). At this level, intentionality has the same meaning as consciousness, which is the foundation of Husserl’s phenomenology.

#### 4.2. The “Concept of Consciousness”

The Husserlian concept of “intentionality” is fundamentally related to that of consciousness.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Descartes who focuses on “the existence of the subject alone” (*Cogito ergo sum*), Husserl focuses on “the existence of the subject in relation with something in the world.” At this level, Husserl considers consciousness as the foundation of his phenomenological approach to knowledge.

In his *Paris Lectures*, Husserl describes consciousness as a matrix for events; it is the pre-condition for a meaningful being; it is a subject-object encounter. In this perspective, a subject is what it is because an object is presented to it. In other words, to be a subject means to confront an object, just as to be an object means to be perceived by a subject. Therefore, consciousness deals with the essential interrelationship and interdependency of subject and object.<sup>44</sup>

Consciousness is never closed; on the contrary, it is openness because it is always a mode of existing and of placing someone outside himself or herself. Since it is an intentional or a directional experience, consciousness is a being-together-with-the object<sup>45</sup>. This is why Edmund Husserl considers consciousness as a process of being-open-to and being-directed-to because consciousness is fundamentally a process of intercourse with reality.

<sup>37</sup> Searle, J. R., *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, pp. XIII-XIV.

<sup>39</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, p. XXVII.

<sup>40</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, p. XXVIII.

<sup>41</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, p. XXX.

<sup>42</sup> Moran, Dermot, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> Omeregbe, *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>44</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, p. XXXIII.

<sup>45</sup> Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology*, pp. 92-93.

According to Husserl, consciousness is a “sensitive experience.” As an intentional experience, “Consciousness is the phenomenological subsistence of the ego and the inner perception.”<sup>46</sup> During this experience, I find things and they are given to me in the permanent exchange between the perceiver and the perceived object. Within the encounter of subject and object, there are two correlated mysteries: the mystery of man’s openness to reality and the mystery of reality’s being-for-man.<sup>47</sup> For Husserl, an object is meaningful only if it is perceived by the subject. Also, a subject is meaningful only if he or she has a conscious experience.

In this way, to be conscious is to have a conscious experience. To be conscious means to be aware by letting the world be given to us<sup>48</sup>. To be conscious means to allow things reveal or manifest to us; it means to be attentive to something affecting us within the scope of our surroundings. To be conscious means to allow things to exist; it means to allow things to be thought of, that is, to be constituted or constructed by the transcendental Ego’s intentional acts.<sup>49</sup>

To be conscious means to live in a kind of existential phenomenology whereby man and the world are not isolated. In other words, to be conscious means to constitute a unity of reciprocal implications between the *subject* (who perceives the phenomenon) and the *object* that reveals itself to the perceiver). This is why Husserl’s phenomenology offers a solution for the impasse to which philosophy has been led by all kinds of subjectivism and objectivism.<sup>50</sup>

Phenomenologically speaking, Husserl considers consciousness as the activity of the mind. It is the awareness of our experience, which presupposes a subject and an object. The *subject of experience* is a subject that undergoes a conscious experience, whereas the *object of experience* is an object that reveals itself to the transcendental *Ego*. Focusing on his phenomenological understanding, Edmund Husserl speaks of the following features of consciousness: consciousness is a mental activity that takes place inside us. The objects of consciousness are usually within us.

These objects of consciousness include *thinking, believing, knowing, imagining, listening, deliberating, deciding, choosing, loving, liking, hating, desiring*, etc. These are all conscious acts and they take place in the mind. Another distinguishing feature of consciousness is its *indubitability* because it cannot be doubted. It is impossible for a given subject to doubt that he is conscious because the very act of doubting is itself a manifestation of consciousness. That was why Descartes, after doubting everything else, found himself unable to doubt the fact he was thinking since doubting is itself an act of thinking which is in turn an act of consciousness. A third feature of consciousness is its *inaccessibility* to anybody else except the subject of the consciousness in question.

For Husserl, one person’s consciousness is inaccessible to another person because it takes place in his subjectivity. There in his subjectivity a person is in a world of his own, a world that is inaccessible to others. That is why we all have secrets because whatever is in mind, for example, remains a secret unless and until I decide to tell it to somebody. In fact, someone else cannot understand what is going on in my consciousness, except myself.

A fourth feature of consciousness is the fact that it is not *spatial* because it is not physical, not quantified, not measurable, and not localizable. This is of course implied by what we said earlier that it is a mental activity. However, although it does not take place in space, it nevertheless takes place in time. For example when I am thinking about something I am doing so at a particular time but not in any space. According to Husserl, our bodies occupy space, however not our minds because they are not physical entities. A fifth feature of consciousness is its *continuous nature*. The conscious activity is a continuous activity because human mind is always at work. For Edmund Husserl, one’s mind is always at work, passing from one thing to another.

In this perspective, Husserl says that man is, by his very nature, always thinking because his mind is always working. While sleeping, man’s mind is at work by the process of dreaming. Even in the state of coma, man’s mind is at work because at this stage there is only a kind of disconnection between the mind and the body. A sixth feature of consciousness is that it is outside-oriented. This is what Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl insisted on by saying that consciousness is always *consciousness of something outside itself*. Within conscious experiences, there is always a link between the subject and its object. In phenomenology, Husserl considers that the subject (the conscious person) is always in relation to something (the object that reveals itself to the knower). The last feature of consciousness is the fact that it is *reflective*. Consciousness, in other words, is

<sup>46</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations*. Volume 2: *On the Theory of Wholes and Parts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 352.

<sup>47</sup> Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations*. Volume 2: *On the Theory of Wholes and Parts*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>48</sup> McKenna R. William, *Husserl’s “Introductions to Phenomenology”: Interpretation and Critique* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology*, pp. 176-177.

by its very nature conscious of itself as consciousness. If I am thinking of something, for example I am conscious of the fact that I am thinking of it.

That is why the pain experienced by man, for example, is more painful than a similar pain experienced by an animal, because man does not only feel pain but is also conscious of the fact that he is feeling the pain because he reflects on it, whereas an animal does not. For Husserl, an animal feels pain of course, but it does not reflect on it, so its pain is consequently less than that of man who is experiencing a similar pain and reflects on it, and this makes the pain worse. In addition, Edmund Husserl says an animal that is feeling pain cannot ask itself “why is this happening to me?” because it cannot reflect on the fact that it is feeling pain. Unlike man, the animal does not have reflective consciousness.

## V. IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The paper displays that “phenomenology is an alternative as well as complementary approach to epistemology.” In this article, we endeavored to demonstrate that epistemologists know through sense-perception and reason, while phenomenologists know by bracketing and going back to the things themselves. Focusing on the meaning or essence of the phenomena, this paper focused on two main points: the phenomenological approach to knowledge and the phenomenological reduction.

With the phenomenological approach to knowledge, we only deal with conscious experiences, which are different from the physical ones. Concerning these conscious experiences, Husserl states that to know is to be-with-things. In this way, phenomenology becomes an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology for the reason that phenomenologists deal only with the objects which are within the human mind, that is, the experiences of consciousness.

Concerning his philosophical method, Husserl’s phenomenological reduction is all about the *epoché* reduction (bracketing or putting aside all our prior presuppositions and prejudices) and the *edetic* reduction (going back to the things themselves in order to know their meaning or essence). At this level, Husserl describes the phenomenological reduction as: a philosophical method that brings us to the “origins and beginnings” of things; a procedure by which one perceives things themselves as they appear to his/her consciousness; a change of attitude by which one learns to see things in a more radical way; an adoption of the objective and neutral position toward the former knowledge; a process that leads one from the realm of facts to that of their meanings or essences; a Cartesian methodic doubt because it deals with the “bracketing” or “suspension” of all prejudices and presuppositions about reality and a procedure by which someone moves from the natural attitude to the transcendental one.

Concerning his philosophical foundation, Husserl’s basic concepts are all about “intentionality and consciousness” for the reason that he focuses on our conscious and intentional experiences. Indeed, he says that intentionality is the directedness of the mind upon something, while consciousness is an awareness or sensitive experience. Since Husserl’s concept of “intentionality” is somehow related to that of consciousness, we can describe this consciousness as: a mental activity which takes place in human mind; an indubitable activity because it happens in the thinking process; an inaccessible activity because it takes place in a single person; a non-spatial activity because it is only a spiritual activity; a continuous activity because human mind is always at work, except when someone is asleep or in a state of comma; an outside-oriented activity because it is always a consciousness of something else and a reflective activity because it only deals with conscious experiences.

Keeping in mind the *method* (phenomenological reduction) and the *foundation* (the concept of intentionality) of Husserl’s philosophy, phenomenology is an alternative and complementary approach to epistemology. By bracketing and going to the things themselves, phenomenology is an alternative approach to epistemology. And by dealing with the meaning or essence, phenomenology is fundamentally a complementary approach to the epistemology of sense-perception and reasoning.

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