



## Husserl's Evidence Problem

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the concept of evidence, with specific focus on the problem of evidence in Husserl's phenomenology. How this problem was dealt with and resolved by philosophers such as Plato, Descartes and Kant is compared and contrasted with Husserl's approach, and the implications of the solution offered by Husserl discussed. Finally, in light of the issues outlined, it is assessed whether or not Husserl can be said possibly to have been philosophically inclined towards notions such as idealism, empiricism, solipsism and scepticism.*

The central issue confronted by Husserl, and the rationale for the development of his transcendental phenomenology, was the problem of evidence. When Eugen Fink (1939/1981) therefore asserted that "evidence is the title for the *central* problem of Husserl's phenomenology" (p. 38), he was pointing not only to the unsurpassed significance of the problem of evidence in Husserl's philosophy, but to the problems posed by Husserl's approach to it. In the process, as Fink points out, what was originally "a problem of knowledge" became "a problem of being" (Fink, 1939/1981, pp. 38-54). In essence, Husserl's approach to the problem of evidence came to imply "a radical upheaval of our total Existence, that is, a far-reaching metamorphosis of our fundamental attitudes toward the well-known, pre-scientific mundane reality as well as toward pre-existing philosophies and positive scientific enterprises" (Shimomissé, 1988, ¶3, citing Fink, 1934). Problematic, too, is Husserl's claim that pure perception is radically presuppositionless and thus atheoretical, given the indications to the contrary in the development of his transcendental phenomenology. In this regard, Shimomissé (1988, ¶26) comments that it would seem that certain

anomalies in Husserl's phenomenology are possibly due to "inherited" notions, and that "Husserl was not quite free from the tradition of Contemporary European Philosophy":

Needless to say, however, there exists a 'gap' between what the philosopher intended to do and what the outcome of his philosophical inquiries were. This gap may either be a result of the philosopher's latent or explicit dependence on the historical, cultural or spiritual environment of his time, or a consequence of a certain development of some philosophical thought, which no doubt is often hard to escape from.

The above summary of the pertinent problems identified by Fink and Shimomissé points to the nature of the issues which this paper aims to address. In the process, it will attempt to explain how Husserl attempted to solve the problem arising from his concern for "comprehending the thing as it is in itself" – which I consider the basic problem of Husserl's philosophy – by examining the significance

he attributed to the concept of *evidence* and assessing the extent to which his phenomenology was perhaps inclined towards certain philosophical notions such as *idealism*, *empiricism*, *solipsism* and *scepticism*.

Throughout the history of philosophy, it has been almost impossible to discuss a philosophical system or philosopher who is not influenced by his predecessors or who has not influenced his successors. In philosophy, unlike science, it is not possible to speak of a process of development. That is why, even in our age, we cannot claim that we are ahead of Plato, the great philosopher of antiquity. A. N. Whitehead, a philosopher of our age, put it very aptly in his observation that all philosophy “consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (1929/1979, p. 39).

Phenomenology can be described as the method of grasping essences. This method, developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Edmund Husserl, was put forward as a reaction to the philosophical tendencies of the 19th century which had denied the possibility of knowing essences. In its turn, it has contributed to the emergence of Existentialism and the New Ontology. According to Husserl, phenomenology is a pure science which is a priori descriptive and critical. This field of study, which dissociates itself from any sort of theoretical approach, teaches us what “self” is and how it could be perceived (Husserl, 1913/1969, pp. 52-53).

It is commonly admitted that philosophical problems are persistent and carry more weight than the solutions offered. This is also the case with the evidence problem, which did not come into focus with Husserl for the first time but, on the contrary, was previously handled in various ways, with different solutions offered with respect to it. Descartes had based his philosophy on the concept of evidence, as did Husserl. Where Descartes and Husserl differed from the outset, however, was in their definition of the criterion of evidence.

The word “evidence” is rooted in the Latin *evidens* (an adjective meaning “evident” in the sense of “visible”, “clear” or “plain to see”), which derives, as a compound, from the preposition *e* (meaning “from”) and the verb *videre* (“to see”). The word has come, in common usage, to refer to that which can be so clearly seen (with the eyes) or perceived (by the mind) that it can serve as proof of, or testimony to, the truth. Descartes defines *evidence* as “the clarity and distinctness of perception that is of thought” (“*clara et distincta perceptio*”), and accordingly examined evidence in terms of two aspects which

were originally conceived as one. Husserl, however, restricts the meaning of *evidence* to imply the originality of either the matter itself or the perception thereof, with this emphasis on “originary” meaning reflected in his call for a return “back to the things themselves”. Unlike Descartes, Husserl furthermore holds that evidence is not singular in meaning; there are evidences, experiences. The type of evidence in the “*cogito*” of Descartes is an evidence which is pure, definite, omnipotent, possessed of singular meaning, wholly harmonious, requiring no mediator, clear, self-structuring, requiring no reviews or revisions. It is the evidence which causes other evidences to seem absurd. This kind of evidence is not, however, from Husserl’s perspective, the sole evidence; it is one of the evidences of a particular type. Evidence, for Husserl, is not a concept with an absolute or apodictic nature and which has a single meaning. Husserl’s concept of evidence is not decisive in character; it is variable, bears the nature of suspicion, depends on some other experiences (that is, it needs mediators), does not have a harmonious nature (bears unclear aspects), and emerges with unclear results. It reveals what it stands for to be ‘nothing’; it is self-evident in nature. What we, therefore, happen to experience is essential and complete in itself. While our experience, thus, is consistent and relative, its harmony is not neutral in character; the obtained self-evidence is, then, indirect and comes about thanks to the experience (Mengüsoğlu, 1945, pp. 71-72).

Whereas Husserl’s understanding of *evidence* is dependent upon the instrumentality of intuition, in Descartes the emphasis is on evidence as “seeing” something without any doubt (Uygur, 1972, p. 105). In Cartesian thought, the only criterion for the demonstration of truth is the *self*. Every truth which presents itself clearly and distinctly is in the self. It is such that even God, who is the first and only source of truth, and the repository of all truth, can be demonstrated only on the basis of the self. The self is where all clarity and distinctness is to be found. “*I think*” (*cogito*) is to me the manifestation of self as an externalization of self. At the same time, it is a reflection of God in the self. Thus, there is God at the foundation of the self; in the background of the self there is God (Timuçin, 1976, p. 168).

In Descartes’s philosophy, God’s existence is seen in terms of the *self*, whereas it is, in fact, God who gives to self and the realm of objects their being. Thus, it is clear that the self – in which, according to Descartes, lies the power of acquiring true knowledge – is based on God. Even if the birthplace of true knowledge is

the self, the truth of this knowledge should not be relied on unless this self is provided with an unlimited and fully adequate foundation.

Accordingly, in Descartes, God is the guarantor of self-evident knowledge which emerges in the self on account of its self-consistency. On the other hand, in Kant, the 18th century Enlightenment philosopher, this guarantor is the *categories* which exist a priori in all human beings. However, in Husserl, insofar as subjectivity and ontological foundation are destroyed, it must be asked what the basic criterion of *evidence* is. This problem, arising from the concern for “comprehending the thing as it is in itself”, is, I believe, the basic problem of Husserl’s philosophy – not least because, as Fink suggests, the answer to it inevitably lies in asking “What are the ‘originary modes of consciousness’ of the existent, what are the original evidences?” (1939/1981, p. 38).

While, in Descartes, the concept of *evidence* meant “seeing” something without any doubt, in Husserl it does not have a single meaning as apodictic certainty. This is due to the fact that Husserl used *evidence* in two different but closely interrelated senses. Husserl did not separate *experience* and *evidence*. That is why *evidence* emerged as a form of consciousness, an *intentionality*,<sup>1</sup> in Husserl. This intentional act resembles the structure of lives and acts of consciousness, the periphery of consciousness, and life with such a structure is determined to be the consciousness of something. Husserl explains such an intentional experience (that is, intentionality) as “being directed towards something aimed at”, “being turned to something”. Evidence thus is, in fact, a form of consciousness, an intentionality. Intentionality and evidence are, for this reason, two concepts which are, to some extent, concurrent in the philosophy of Husserl (Sözer, 1976, p. 42).

According to Husserl, it is the body which provides orientation<sup>2</sup>; man’s intentionality is possible thanks to the body. A person’s body is, therefore, essentially important in phenomenology. It is the centre for

<sup>1</sup> *Intentionality*: Orienting. Intentionality is such a frame of conscious experiences and acts of consciousness that life with such a frame is determined as the consciousness of something. Intentionality, which acquires its prime function in Husserl by *epoché*, is the main structure of consciousness which needs be rediscovered in each and every experience.

<sup>2</sup> The body mentioned here is the one which is reduced together with the general thesis of natural behaviour; it is the body as a total of transcendental meaning.

orientation. According to Husserl, who emphasizes the unity of the soul and the body by pointing out that “the body is all I possess”, and who claims that the “I” is a whole composed of the soul and the body, there are two features of the physical organism. These two features cannot be thought of apart. The body is, firstly, an organ for perception and demand. I perceive anything through my body, which is an organism that belongs to *me*. If my body were not a whole made up of individual organs, nothing would exist. My body, for this reason, is a prerequisite for the world to exist. I am, therefore, dependent on a centre of orientation, and thus on my body, in whatever I perform. This centre of orientation is originally bestowed upon me with every turn I take. I am unable to perform without my body. According to Husserl, whatever one perceives, wherever one goes, one experiences everything with respect to the relationship between oneself and one’s body. Such dimensions as “over”, “below”, “right”, “left” and so forth derive meaning only in relation to my body (Husserl, 1929/1973, pp. 72 & 82).

The aim of orientations of the body, which is an organ of perception and demand, is secondly to describe the self. The direction of the description towards the self means that the essence of the described consists of the description itself (Husserl, 1929/1973, pp. 121-122). And this point is of the utmost importance in the philosophy of Husserl.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is “self” which is important, which is desired, and this self is what emerges after the outer world and nature are parenthesized. This means that the phenomenon exists even without a consideration of the conditions of the external being which cause it to come into being. It is hoped that the object will yield itself in the form of ‘pure phenomenon’ after the external conditions of being, the outer world and nature are parenthesized. The parenthesizing of the external conditions of being is, however, not satisfactory. A second reduction is required. I exist and I am alive. It is, therefore, necessary for me to be directed to those external beings other than myself. How am I going to know myself under these conditions? The parenthesizing of such entities – political, historical, cultural, social – which determine “I” leads to the provision of the requirement. Only then could I prove myself to be another I in contrast to the outer world and nature. In this way, the “pure I”, the I which is the same I for everybody, the consciousness, emerges (Mengüşoğlu,

<sup>3</sup> This will be the starting point for the later Existentialist philosophers. They, too, will claim that “the body is whatever I perceive together with it”.

1976, p. 11). According to Husserl, we become capable of the “pure self” itself in this manner. Husserl characterizes the “pure self” as “pure consciousness” and as such as the I which is directed towards the external world and which can be parenthesized.

In experience we *become conscious of a thing*. *Evidence*, on the other hand, is an act of consciousness which gives (presents) a thing – that is, brings about an experience. Thus, *evidence* is the name for experiencing which may have various degrees or grades of adequacy. Therefore, according to Husserl, there is no one *evidence*, but many *evidences or experiences*. There also are *evidences* which are relative, which are not certain, allowing for doubt one way or the other, which in fact depend upon other experiences, which are not consistent, and which thus leave some aspects in the dark, or even appear altogether wrong in the end, as a result of which “what” is shown is exposed as “nothing” (Uyгур, 1972, p. 105).

Thus, it may be stated that Husserl, with his concept of *evidence*, has departed from the position of Descartes and accordingly from the traditional concept of evidence in European thought, and in so doing has expanded the classical understanding of evidence.

*Evidence* is the fundamental issue of Husserlian phenomenology. Indeed, Husserl’s purpose is to illuminate the things in themselves in terms of their essences within the context of evidential thinking. In other words, he wants to recognize, know and describe what is in terms of its a priori rules.

*Transcendental*<sup>4</sup> *phenomenology* proceeds exclusively by *evidences*. In Husserl’s opinion, neither the world, nor the individual objects, possesses a pure essence; the essence of the world is dependent upon consciousness. To put forward that the essence of the world depends upon consciousness is to claim that all beings are based on transcendental consciousness by means of the acts of consciousness and in accordance with their own rules and laws (Husserl, 1913/1969, p. 118).

<sup>4</sup> *Transcendental*: Replacement of the parenthesized world’s transcendent existence by consciousness, which is thought of as the whole of real and possible acts of consciousness, as another source of knowledge getting past the world’s transcendence by the immanent existence of the consciousness.

Husserl, who likens phenomenology to archaeology in a posthumously traced manuscript from 1931 (cited in Steinbock, 1995, p. 89), defines phenomenology as “universal philosophy” and names his philosophy “transcendental philosophy”, which is not the same term employed by Kant (1781/1965) in his *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*]. The common point shared by both, however, is their referring to the most recent sources. The term “transcendental” in Kant is a means of criticizing mind, that is, an adjective modifying a noun used for a sort of knowledge which deals with man’s a priori holding objects as a whole and thus not holding each object individually; in Husserl, however, the term means the whole of the true and possible acts of consciousness which replace the parenthesized transcendental being of the world as the main source of information and goes beyond the transcendent of the world by way of immanent consciousness (Uyгур, 1971, p. 53).

It is essential to “visualize essence”, in other words, to intuitively perceive “essence” and to obtain the intuition of the “essence”. Visualization of the “essence” is, however, not only an active act, rather than a passive one, but also a complex one. As it is in the case put forward by Descartes, the act could be realized not all at once, but after a long period of preparation. It is a peculiar type of perception which grasps the “essence” openly and manifestly; in Husserl’s terms, it is a reflexion, a reflexion of life. Husserl mentions the following outstanding characteristics of reflexion: “... The thing which is perceived in harmony with the act of perception in reflexion emerges as a being that exists before the view is directed towards it not as a being that principally exists and not as something that survives within the vision perceived. Reflexion reveals the ever flowing nature of consciousness, the ‘intentional way of life’” (Husserl, 1929/1973, p. 147).

Husserl, therefore, describes someone else’s I, in the sense of the essence, by means of his transcendental phenomenology, which he forms with general and compulsory eidetic-descriptive judgements, and which he thinks to be the basic science. According to him, transcendental phenomenology is one of the natural sciences which depends upon intuition, which operates manifestly by means of a method describing the essence, and which examines the vast a priori space of the transcendental I; because the sole aim is to describe only the positive without any preoccupation. What is described is the most radical and the act is performed with full authority (Husserl, 1929/1973, p. 138). According to Husserl, phenom-

ology is, therefore, a pure science which depends on intuition and which is directed towards description (İpşiroğlu, 1939, p. 164).

*Evidence* is the hidden spring of phenomenology (Uygur, 1972, p. 103). *Evidence* is not a “blank intention” – that is, consciousness which has no constitutive structure, and as such is “not-itself” but merely its hidden potential – which is directed to something in utter uncertainty; on the contrary, it is the ground which presents something at least in terms of one of its aspects. Indeed, due to its nature, the purpose of *evidence* is “to ‘fill’ blank intentions (orientations) with different initiatives” (Uygur, 1972, p. 105).

According to Husserl, *evidences* are teleological, that is, purposive achievements which, coming together, strive to present some single thing in its entirety and completeness. Certain *evidence*-types thus emerge as bases that constitute certain beings. On the whole, Husserl employed the term *evidence* to refer to a rather definite kind of experience. In this meaning, *evidence* refers to the presence of something in itself; that is, the givenness of something in itself or of thinghood itself. Only in this way do I know that I am conscious of something, of that something as it is exactly in itself in its original state. This kind of consciousness declares that I have seen that thing itself, that “I am in that thing with my consciousness” with such an orientation that it gives that thing to me, that I grasp it with perfect clarity (Uygur, 1972, p. 106). Such an *evidence* is direct, consistent, complete, and the truth itself, bringing a thing into consciousness in its originality. Husserl speaks of such *evidence* as “the best source” that sufficiently documents the correctness of all types of knowledge. When promoting the thesis, “let us return to the things in themselves”, Husserl in fact means to return to “*evidences*” (Uygur, 1972, p. 106).

Husserl’s concept of *evidence* underlies his concepts of “intentionality” and “constitution”.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the concepts of “intentionality” and “evidence” overlap in a particular sense (Sözer, 1976, p. 42). *Evidence* is defined in two separate, complementary ways throughout Husserl’s investigations. In terms of one definition, *evidence* overlaps with the concept of “intentionality”, and, in terms of the other, with the concept of “transcendental constitution”. In its former meaning, *evidence* is a foundation of reality to which

<sup>5</sup> *Constitution*: the consciousness constitutive both of the object and of its own existence.

all other conscious experiences eventually turn, and in which they find their final reality. Husserl does not consider evidence and experience to be apart in either *Ideas I* (1913/1969) or *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929/1969). He claims that something becomes evident through experience, and evidence therefore is an intentional achievement; it is the experience of something; it is an act of consciousness, an activity of consciousness. Therefore, he treats evidence as if it is something with dual meanings which are closely related.

Husserl sees the categories of “object” and “evidence” as correlates of one another, and thus points out that evidence is an intentionality which concerns the totality of conscious life. According to him, evidence is seeing the object to which intentional experience is directed and grasping it as it is in itself, that is, as given as itself. On the other hand, for something to be given in itself means for it to be justified by being grounded in its *eidōs*,<sup>6</sup> in its essence. If I can call this object a “pencil”, it is because it is given to me evidently, as it is in itself, “as itself”. Here, we observe an obvious reaction to the concept of “*numenon*” (thing in itself) in Kant, that *numenon* is unknowable because it is in another world (the world of *numena*); in other words, it is a reaction to Kant’s agnosticism. This response to Kant had also come from Hegel, who maintained that everything in the universe could be known. Thus, Husserl’s basic thesis, like that of Hegel, is that *phenomena* can be known completely in and of themselves, regardless of whether they are *real* or *unreal*, because what really exist are *phenomena*, and behind the *phenomena* there are no *numena*, that which Kant qualified as really real; the only reality is the *phenomena*. Essence is to be sought after and grasped in the *phenomenon*. Moreover, *phenomenon* is essence and essence is *phenomenon*. That is to say, *phenomenon* is the *phenomenon* of essence. It is not possible to think of and look for essence anywhere else but in the *phenomenon*. Plato had asserted that essences are not in *phenomena*, but in the *realm of essences (ideas)* which he claimed to be the only real world. Therefore, Husserl, in seeking the essence in the *phenomenon* only and in arguing that essence can be reached only through the *phenomenon*, is thereby also contesting Plato, the great philosopher of antiquity.

<sup>6</sup> *Eidōs*: What is meant by this term is not the “*ideas*” similar to Plato’s which are transcendent and designate merely one form, but the universal and necessary essences, whether only in form or in content (*wesen*).

According to Husserl, knowing the *phenomenon* with self-evidence is to grasp the essence. How is this possible? What is the criterion for a clear and distinct recognition of *phenomenon*, for becoming conscious of its self-evidence? For this, to start with, it is enough that the object be given to me “in itself”. In this way, evidence becomes realized first in the activity of sense perception. Husserl has assigned a special place to perception in all forms of experience and, in a way, has accepted perception as original experience.

As for Plato, he has maintained that the high knowledge of ideas can be attained by passing through perception, and therewith leaving the world of perceptions behind once the knowledge of the world of ideas is attained. The kind of knowledge which perception provides can only be “*doxa*” (supposition or belief), but “*doxa*” is only a negative condition of “*episteme*” (knowledge). Claiming that *knowledge is perception*, Plato implies that the sophisticated knowledge of ideas can only be reached through perception. Although he considers perception to be utterly important, he changes his mind when he tries to reach the realm of concepts and points out that the realm of intuition could be ignored. According to Plato, therefore, knowledge provided by perception is only *doxa*, which is a negative prerequisite of *episteme*. In Plato’s opinion, perception which is at the same level as senses is negative in value. Perception, however, achieves the quality of being positive when it is based on “forms” because, in Plato’s opinion, the objective criterion of knowledge is provided by forms.

On the other hand, Descartes, on account of their being deceptive, dismissed sense perceptions as knowledge from the outset and sought definite knowledge in the subject’s relation to itself and not to the object, expressing this view with the dictum “*cogito ergo sum*” [“I think, therefore I am”].

At any rate, according to Husserl, *evidence* is not a quality limited to sense perception; it is not a specific difference of sense perception. His thesis is that there is a *general evidence*, and all types of *evidences* that are related to conscious acts are species of *general evidence*. All evidences are fulfillings of meaning and, in that sense, they are all equivalent to one another (Sözer, 1976, p. 45). “Sense data, because of their contribution to objective ‘meaning’, render the material object what it is in itself” (ibid., p. 47).

On the other hand, Husserl treats the concept of ‘meaning’ differently from the widely known and

accepted. He similarly treats the concepts of ‘immanence’, ‘pure self’ and ‘absolute consciousness’. The perception of a tree in the garden, for instance, could consist purely of naming the particular object, with the word ‘tree’ carrying a ‘pure meaning’, a ‘noematic meaning’. The ‘noematic tree’ is the particular tree which my consciousness perceives and which my consciousness is directed to. And it is the object which is thus perceived standing opposite. In Husserl’s opinion, we are bound to perceive this immanent meaning which stands in nature. Thus, the ‘tree’ turns into ‘meaning’ which is at the noematic point of the intentionality of perception. Similarly, the ‘tree’ determined noetically yields the possibility of reaching its own self indefinitely: there is this similar possibility in other occasions of perceiving other objects at given times. The meaning is, however, ‘real’ and the concept of ‘tree’ is not likely to lose any of its own nature.

Evidence, which is the source of all truth and of all reality, embraces the object in its entirety, while being, at the same time, a source which both includes in itself all one-sided truths about the object, and, transcending them, posits the evidence of “*thing in itself*” as the final purpose (Sözer, 1976, p. 48). Since both truth (*phenomenon*) and essence have their origin in consciousness, it is possible to speak of the truth of “*the thing in itself*”. That is to say, the object derives its essence from *consciousness*. Essence and truth are in this sense unified.

According to Husserl, who claims to grasp the universal through the individual, being is constituted in the *transcendental consciousness*. This is the absolute essential consciousness. It is a subject by itself, and its main fabric is essentiality. According to Husserl, what gives the transcendental consciousness its integrity is intentionality.

Husserl’s phenomenology bears the title of being transcendental, since the phenomenon of the world is constituted within *pure I*, that is, the transcendental consciousness. If the being were constituted within the transcendental consciousness which formed the ontological foundation, it would, then, be impossible for the ‘self’ to be a true self; the attitude of a sophist would be assumed and man would be the measure of everything, as Protagoras points out.

In the Husserlian philosophy, it is *transcendental consciousness* that builds and secures the ontological foundation. If this were not the case, it would become impossible for essence to be real essence, a sophistic attitude would follow and, as Protagoras stated, “man

would be the measure of all things.”

Husserl's aim is to find the object in the subject. In his view, also, the sense data *per se* are meaningless. Meaning is in the transcendental consciousness. What thus arises here is the problem of objectivity. Taking transcendental consciousness as the ultimate ground results in finding the same, permanent essence (*substrate*) in all acts of consciousness. The precondition for this is intention. The subjectivity problem is overcome if, and only if, the object has a consciousness (subject) directed towards it, and the subject has an object towards which it is directed.

As is widely known, ‘subjectivism’ or ‘Kantianism’ limits knowledge to conscious states and elements; it attributes great or supreme importance to subjective elements in experience. Kant and philosophers who are thought to be Kantian hold that the mind furnishes the forms of experience and that the organs of the senses furnish impressions only. Our knowledge is therefore subjective. But Kant shows the necessity of a belief in God, freedom and immortality if we are to possess the institutions of civilization. And he further shows that, without the a priori idea of intelligent design in nature, we could not recognise any phenomenon of life in plants, or animals or other organisms. According to Kantians, the universe is the design of individual consciousness. There is not any other reality therefore than moral and spiritual reality.

Kant holds that such phenomena as warmth, light and colour are absolutely internal concepts perceived by the subject. Similarly, it is the mind which makes the cosmos and which yields the world its laws. Phenomena, then, are basically ideas. With regard to knowledge, Kant argues that the rational order of the world as known by science can never be accounted for merely by the fortuitous accumulation of sense perceptions. It is, instead, the product of the rule-based activity of ‘synthesis’.

This activity consists of conceptual unification and integration carried out by the mind through *concepts* or the ‘categories of understanding’ operating on the perceptual manifold within *space and time* – which, while also being concepts, are forms of sensibility that are a priori necessary conditions for any possible experience. Thus, the objective order of nature and the casual necessity that operates within it are dependent upon the mind. The ‘two-world’ interpretation regards Kant's position as a statement of epistemological limitation, insofar as its inference that we are never able to transcend the bounds of our own mind implies that we cannot access the ‘thing-in-

itself’. In Husserl's philosophy, however, every consciousness belongs to a particular object; the primary task, therefore, is to examine the consciousness. In other words, the subject is bound to be inclined to its object; the intention of the subject is bound to be its subject. The existence of the subject depends upon the existence of an object, and the object exists if there is a subject to be directed towards – in other words, if consciousness exists. On the other hand, with the realization of these polar acts, the object becomes objectified. The foundation of subjectivity, under these circumstances, is demolished and, thanks to the realization of this act with two poles, the object turns out to be an object. Thus, Husserl is saved from falling into the pit of subjectivism.

Therefore, as in Plato, in Husserl, too, essence is permanent. But, with *phenomenon* being the *phenomenon of essence*, it is possible in Husserl's philosophy to approach essence, and therefore *phenomenon*, in various ways, and in the end to find the very same essence. For example, a tree can be thought of as abstracted from all of its attributes while nevertheless remaining “self-identical” in terms of all of its attributes (Sözer, 1976, p. 35).

According to Husserl, the path to the *intersubjective constitution*<sup>7</sup> by “thought” of a physical object as objective reality has to go through *sense perceptions*<sup>8</sup> or appearances. First, an intersubjective objectivity must be realized within the context of sense experience only, so as to render possible the constitution of the object at the highest level of mathematical determinations (Sözer, 1976, p. 63).

In this way, Husserl also overcomes Kant's problem. Kant, however, also speaks of the thing in itself or *transcendental object* as a product of the understanding as it attempts to conceive of objects in abstraction from the conditions of sensibility. Following this line of thought, some interpreters have argued that the ‘thing-in-itself’ does not represent a separate ontological domain, but is simply a way of considering objects by means of the human understanding alone. This is known as the two-aspect view. With regard to morality, Kant argues that the source of good lies not in anything outside the human subject, either in nature or given by God, but rather in

<sup>7</sup> *Intersubjective Constitution*: Constitution or structure which is valid for all other beings that have minds, all other “selves”.

<sup>8</sup> *Sense perceptions*: Givenness of material objects through our senses.

only the good will itself. A good will is one that acts from duty in accordance with the universal moral law that the autonomous human being freely gives itself. This law obliges one to treat humanity – understood as rational agency, and represented through oneself as well as others – as an end in itself rather than merely as a means to other ends the individual might hold.

These ideas have largely framed or influenced all subsequent philosophical discussion and analyses. The specifics of Kant's account generated immediate and lasting controversy. Nevertheless, his theses – that the mind itself necessarily makes a constitutive contribution to its knowledge, that his contribution is transcendental rather than psychological, that philosophy involves self-critical activity, that morality is rooted in human freedom, and that to act autonomously is to act according to rational moral principles – have all had a lasting effect on subsequent scholarship. There are those who oppose Kant, and the first reaction is by Hegel, who claims that everything in the universe can be known. Later, Husserl asserts that “the only reality is the phenomenon; the essence should be sought within the phenomenon; only then could one reach and catch the self”. Husserl's attitude is to be considered as his reaction to Kant. Since, in Husserl's view, knowledge emerges where the acts of meaning and intuition meet, it would be possible for all the acts of meaning to be the equivalent of a piece of knowledge, which is to say that all knowledge is possible (Husserl, 1910-11/1995, p. 57).

Husserl has accorded an ontological meaning to what is given in *phenomena* from the outside and has taken them out of (individual) consciousness. The reason for this is that, according to Husserl, objectification means “to become phenomenal”, that is, *to appear*. This takes place by a *sensible scheme*<sup>9</sup> which makes visible the object constituted by consciousness. According to him, a material object cannot be given by sense data and scheme, but may come to be “visible” through them. For example, the green colour of tree leaves appears differently under different conditions of light, but I believe that the “green” I see when the sun is at its zenith is the real one. Thus, there appears to me only one green, the real green,

<sup>9</sup> *Sensible Scheme*: A product of passive synthesis, the sensible scheme is a “*res extensa*” in terms of its primary and true meaning; in other words, it is an object that occupies place in space. Objects which Husserl calls “*space phantoms*”, such as the rainbows, the sun, the moon, the stars, and so forth, are each a sensible scheme in their own right. Sensible scheme is the basic stratum.

under a variety of conditions. If so, the “visible green” is objective, that is, it belongs to the object called a tree, and has therefore become objectified (Sözer, 1976, p. 62).

In view of his position that the object is grounded, is objectified (brought into being) in transcendental consciousness, it may be said that Husserl has inevitably wavered towards *idealism*. Husserl definitely avoids relating the object to the subject and vice versa. He is, therefore, inclined to idealism – he thinks that the object is dependent on the subject and, in his opinion, the act of perception has priority. He holds that the object is the basis of the subject and he finds the foundation to his thoughts in transcendental consciousness. Thus, he is inclined to idealism. He is sure that he has to have a tendency towards idealism. His idealism is the ‘idealism of transcendental phenomenology’, which is different from previous views. He thinks that his view is an end in itself. It is the view that the presence of objects is limited to consciousness and that objects are entities of consciousness. The idealism of Husserl holds that objects take their origins from consciousness and as such are indebted to the consciousness which was present previously. The following passage would seem to verify this view: “Objects are for me only and they are for me what they are for a real consciousness”. Meaning that can be reached, every being that can be thought of, whether immanent or transcendent, is bound to be within the borders of transcendental subjectivity that constitutes beings (Husserl, 1929/1973, pp. 116-117; Uygur, 1972, p. 55).

What provides this intersubjective objectivity in the field of sense is the identification of the *sensible scheme* with the real state of the object. It is only by this identification that the material object is “visible”, and opens itself up (Sözer, 1976, p. 63). According to Husserl, Kant (1781/1965), in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, quite correctly stated that *reproductive synthesis* (like recalling like) holds a significant place among all (a priori) universal and necessary syntheses presupposed by all experience. However, according to Husserl, what Kant failed to see was the existence of a “*criterion of truth*” on which is based all sensible experience in the passive synthesis<sup>10</sup> of designs, namely that there is “*evidence*” as such (Sözer, 1976, p. 84). In the overlapping of design (that is, of my

<sup>10</sup> *Passive Synthesis*: Constitution or structure of the primary unity arising from the combination of sense data by a synthesis.



expectation of truth) and the reality itself is the emergence of truth. Thus, expectation would have to be an a priori justification. As for the way in which Husserl justifies *sensible evidence*, he too relies on *reproductive synthesis*, which he uses in the same sense as Kant, namely as the recalling of like by like. *Evidence in sensibility, or passive consciousness*,<sup>11</sup> is determined by the direct fulfilment of passive *intention*. It is *perception* that provides the fulfilment; that is to say, *perception* is a primary type of justificatory *phenomenon*. Husserl, in his *Logical Investigations* (1900), defines *evidence* as the “consistent perception of truth” (cited in Sözer, 1976, p. 87). Husserl has also inquired into the possibility of a foundation which would secure and guarantee this “consistency”, given that consistency in itself explains how a certain *intention* is to be justified, but does not guarantee that justification to be always the same (Sözer, 1976, p. 88). According to him, that an intention in the sensibility can only be justified, and that the contrary is impossible, should be determined a priori. In *sensibility*, as in the case of propositions, we can speak of a truth which is determinate, permanent and unchanging. Thus, the cleavage between knowledge and sense is destroyed and lost sight of. All *evidence* in the realm of *sensibility* is in the justification itself, and the criterion of truth is in the “*recollection*”.<sup>12</sup> While, according to Plato, recalled essences are in a different realm of their own, for Husserl these essences are in this world and are the essences of the present. The present I can only recall; I cannot know it any other way.

According to Husserl, “*recalling* is a kind of perceiving”. By recalling, I live a past event as if I am perceiving it. Recalling does not give the present time in the real sense of the term, but it gives the past in the real sense. The absolute criterion of truth is *recollection*. That recalling is a justificatory perception is a direct outcome of the essential constitution of “*retention*” (Sözer, 1976, p. 91).

In recalling, confusion and error are also possible. How can the absolute criterion of truth be *recollection*? Husserl proves that *recollection* has apodictic certainty as follows: Firstly, the form of time through which absolute consciousness flows is

<sup>11</sup> *Passive Consciousness*: The consciousness that is not spontaneous, whose existence does not derive from its own activity.

<sup>12</sup> *Recollection*, like perception, is a justificatory perception which gives the relevant object as such to the subject. That is to say, it is the presentation of the past with evidence as a reality in its own right.

an apodictic form. This gives *recollection* apodictic certainty. Secondly, not only its form, but also the content of past time, has apodictic certainty. This certainty stems from the fact that it can be recognized as a self-identical content of experience (Sözer, 1976, p. 97). To recall an event correctly, not one but an unlimited number of *recollections* are at work. In this way I can re-visit the content of past experience in terms of the continuity of these *recollections* which keep on moving forward. There is always the *ideal of recollecting* past events as they are in themselves. Husserl states that “my belief in my past, and my belief in the existence of my consciousness in the past, is an essential belief; as opposed to that, my *recollection* of any single event is of no consequence” (cited in Sözer, 1976, p. 99). The “*ideal of recalling correctly*” postulated by the continuity of *recollections* is eventually founded upon such an *invincible transcendental phenomenon*. According to Husserl, the real error here stems from forgetting that there are also other objects in human form (Sözer, 1976, p. 99).

*Recollection*, the apodictic certainty of which has been demonstrated, is consistent with the “*transcendent material object*”, by which Husserl means “the thing in itself”. Sense perception, insofar as it is changeable, cannot be the basis for what is needed; however, the content of *recollection*, on account of repeated *recollections*, offers what is self-same and familiar, “what is as it should be”, as opposed to the momentary and changeable content of perception. Thus, in the significance he attaches to *recollection*, Husserl follows Plato’s path. According to him, too, the key to the universe is not in the present time, but in an undisclosed recollection that needs be brought out into the daylight (Sözer, 1976, p. 100).

Plato in antiquity had also assigned uppermost significance to perception, with the value he assigned to perception stated in the dialogue *Theaitetos* (151e): “knowledge is perception”. According to him, *recollection* is only of what has been perceived and learned (163e). That of which we have acquired knowledge before can be recollected (164b). He maintains that, “if there is perception, then there is a being which perceives, and if there is a perceiver then there is the perceived”. That a thing is bitter or sweet is a personal perception. There can be no case of being-sweet but not being-sweet-for-someone (160b). Nothing is a thing in itself and by itself; on the contrary, everything comes to be always in relation to something else (157a). Plato, who classified perceptions as seeing, hearing, smelling, as well as

cold, hot, pleasure, pain, greed and fear, and the perceived as sounds and smells, was in fact emphasizing the fact that Protagoras's dictum – "man is the measure of all things" – indeed meant that everything is as it is perceived. Whereas, in Protagoras, there is no objective criterion of knowledge, in Plato "*forms*" provide this objective criterion. Therefore, according to Plato, who maintained that *essences* can be reached only by the intellect and not by the senses, perception at the level of sense carries only negative value. Sense perception acquires positive value only when grounded in the "*forms*".

However, Husserl's sense perception is the only act of knowledge, because he derives the essence from sense objects. Thus, although Husserl resembles Plato in respect of the importance and priority he assigns to perception, he departs from Plato in that he seeks the essence in the *phenomenon*, and asserts that *phenomena* as *phenomena of essences* are permanent and unchangeable.

Although the act of perception is one of, and may be the most important of, the acts of knowledge which take place by means of the function of our sense organs, such as seeing, smelling, hearing, touching and tasting, it is also limited, in that it changes from sense to sense. The act of perception has enormous value, in that it gives us the arrangement, rank and order of things in space, as well as the shapes, colours, smells, hardness or softness, distance or proximity of things in our environment. Knowledge, in Husserl's phenomenology, is a sort of harmony between the meaning and the intuitive act; it is, namely, the outcome of the two acts. The latter is of primary importance; the former, however, cannot bring about anything on its own, in that it is empty and blind. The task of the act of meaning is to indicate the object only. Intuitive orientation first creates an image of the object. It is, however, dependent on the act of meaning. To know something, therefore, means perceiving that particular thing. For this reason, Husserl attributes to perception, namely intuition, an important task and quality: grasping the phenomenon, the ability to catch the matter. It is sufficient for the self to be given the phenomenon in the form of 'the self' in order to achieve the task. Thus, the state of being self-evident is primarily observed in the act of sensual perception. In fact, sensual perception is, for Husserl, the only way to the act of knowing, because he extracts the self out of sensual objects. For this reason, Husserl attributes particular importance to all experience and he accepts perception to be the main test. In Husserl's

view, the knowledge of something depends upon its perception. The purer the perception is, the more definite and absolute the visual essence is. He holds perception to be the prime criterion for the way towards the unchangeable and permanent.

Despite that, however, can perception be considered the criterion of evidence<sup>13</sup> in the sensible world? Obviously not; because, if perception were to be the criterion of evidence, there would have to be no perceptual errors and everybody would have to perceive everything in the same way; and for that to be so there would have to be things (objects) which would remain the same in themselves – which is not the case. In my opinion, what Husserl, who admits that there are unchangeable and permanent selfsame-objects, means by "evidence in the realm of sensibility" is that these objects can be perceived and grasped originally by the sense organs as evidence. He does not mean the same thing as Protagoras, who did not admit of perceptual "selfsame-things" and maintained that objects always are in "a process of becoming" according to the subject who perceives them. Had that been Husserl's meaning, he would not have taken perception as the "criterion" for the path that leads to what is permanent and unchangeable, and he would not have undertaken the task of constructing an ontological foundation such as the transcendental consciousness.

Accordingly, we can say that Husserl's views are consistent within his system of thought. He has tried to refrain from making the object dependent upon the subject, and the subject upon the object; but, in assigning priority and value to the act of perception, he has inevitably grounded the object upon the subject, and, having thus upheld the subject, he has wavered towards idealism. In *Five Lectures on Phenomenology*, Husserl (1907/1997) establishes the main theses of his understanding of transcendental phenomenology. Within the context of his teachings, Husserl deals both with his view on "phenomenological simplification", which eases the return to "consciousness", and with the idea of "transcendental idealism", which is the foundation of his phenomenology. He also handles the issue of "the forming of

<sup>13</sup> The 'criterion' does not come to mean the 'source'. Consciousness becomes the criterion for revelation of reality. Husserl aims at reaching the object through the subject. In his opinion, sensual outputs lack the quality of being meaningful. Meaning takes place within the transcendental consciousness. It is the transcendental consciousness which provides all other mental beings, all other 'egos', with a valid structure.

the object in consciousness”, which is the essence of his method of thinking. The ‘pure self’, in his opinion, is the source where the true meaning for everything can be found, and it is the thing which constitutes all beings. It is something without which there is nothing else, which is immovable, and which can never be done without. And since it can never be compared and contrasted with any being in respect of being self-evident, the idea is the only entity which can be claimed to be ‘present’ with no suspicion. The ‘nature of the object’ can only be seen clearly through consciousness. “Things” (phenomena) therefore do not exist within ‘lives’; they are said to have been constructed within ‘these lives’. The object, in other words, is constructed within the individual consciousness. At the same time, in maintaining that essences emerge as perceived by the subject, Husserl has fallen for *empiricism*.

Whether or not it is possible to know what is as it really is in and of itself is an ontological problem that is still very much with us today. In antiquity, Plato considered phenomena as appearances and not as really real, maintaining that what is truly real, the essence or *idea*, can be grasped only by reason. In the 18th century, Kant, an Enlightenment philosopher, following the same path, also considered phenomena to be appearances, and accepted as really real the *numenon* (thing in itself) which he claimed we could never know because it is not in time and space.

The main concern of Edmund Husserl, who objected to the old metaphysics and particularly the views of Plato and Kant, is to grasp what is as it is in itself – that is, with evidence. In Husserl’s view, there is being as it is in itself, and it can be known because it shows itself to the perceiver. The method of knowing “being as it is” relies on the application of the phenomenological method of *reduction* or “parenthesizing” (bracketing). The pure essence, the pure consciousness itself which emerges through the phenomenological reduction, is the topic of study for phenomenology (Husserl, 1929/1973, p. 72). In Husserl’s view, therefore, the existence of the being depends upon consciousness. In other words, the existence of a being is due to the state of being conscious. Consciousness, however, is not dependent upon existence. We would not detract from the essence of consciousness even if we imagined the non-existence of the being. Once this method is applied to the object, the essence of being manifests itself with clarity and distinctness and can thereby be known.

The problem of being able to know the object as it is

in itself, which could not be resolved before Husserl, was solved in this manner by Husserl’s system. However, this solution in turn gave rise to another problem, that of what guarantees the permanence and unchangeability of essence, namely the problem of “intersubjectivity”. This problem preoccupied Husserl for a long time. He finally found the ontological ground he was looking for in transcendental consciousness. Since this consciousness is directed towards its object and is a living, temporal consciousness, it gave rise to several other problems such as the following: While I, as the subject, direct my perception towards the object and determine its essence, do I reduce it to the states of my consciousness? For, if I am a relative being, do I not determine essence relatively by the reduction I apply to determine essence, and so forth? Nonetheless, since problems of philosophy are persistent problems, these are only a few of the problems which will be repeatedly dealt with in various philosophical systems and provided with new solutions.

In conclusion, as has already been mentioned, there is not a single philosopher who has not influenced his successors or who has not been affected by his predecessors, and Husserl is no exception. Every single system of philosophy has influenced the succeeding ones and has similarly been influenced by the preceding ones. It is thus inevitable that Husserl, too, would have been influenced by earlier philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Janet in his attempt to constitute his transcendental phenomenology, which he identified as a positive science formed through the contribution of general and compulsory eidetic-descriptive judgements, and with the help of which he tried to describe someone else’s I depending on the intuition of transcendental reflexion. Husserl’s influence on succeeding philosophers such as Heidegger, Hartmann, Scheler and Sartre cannot be ignored either. The question of evidence in Husserl springs from his concerns about “the perception of the object as it is possessed”, which essentially is also a vitally important issue for Plato, Descartes and Kant. These philosophers had tried to solve the problem, but Husserl was the one who made the issue the main theme of his philosophy. Husserl’s aim, like Plato’s, was, in fact, to achieve absolute knowledge. In Husserl’s opinion, absolute knowledge can only be reached through absolute existence. If there were such a thing as absolute knowledge, then there would be absolute existence. However, Husserl, in contrast to Plato, considers perception to be the permanent and absolute criterion which leads to the absolute existence; he tries to establish an ontological

foundation like the transcendental consciousness. For Plato, who is taken to be a creator of concepts, what exist are not, in fact, ‘phenomena’ themselves, but their essence; they are ideas. Phenomena thus exist only in respect of the share they receive from ideas. In the same manner, the ‘world of the phenomena’, namely the visible world in which we live, does not exist in actual fact. What really exists is the ‘realm of ideas’. The realm of ideas could be perceived through reasoning; the essence or ideas could only be conceived through reasoning. They do not exist in the world of the phenomena, but in the realm of the essence, the realm of ideas.

In fact, Husserl, like Plato, attributes uppermost importance to the essence, “the thing which makes something that particular object”. For Husserl, too, the essence is what is permanent; but the phenomenon is the element of the essence, and, in the philosophy of Husserl, the essence (phenomenon) could be approached in various ways. In the end, the same essence is reached. Husserl attributes importance and gives priority to perception, and he is considered to resemble Plato in this respect; but he differs from Plato insofar as he not only tries to find the essence within the phenomena, and claims them to be permanent and unchanging in the form of the phenomena of the essence, but tries to reach the essence by way of description and intuition rather than by way of the phenomenal approach.

Like Plato, Husserl, too, approaches the essence by way of appearances – although, in his case, doing so includes parenthesizing the existence of the outer world. While a similar process can be attributed to Plato, Plato, as a realist, initiates from ontology. The point reached on the termination of the act, the essence, is, at the same time, the idea; it is the true being, an ontological foundation. Husserl, however, initiates from epistemology, and there is no ontological basis to the emerging essence. This foundation bears the quality of being self-satisfied, not substantial; it is pure consciousness in the form of an intentionality. As it is for Descartes, pure consciousness continues always to remain at an epistemological level, no matter that it may be extrovert in nature. In Husserl’s philosophy, in contrast to that of Plato, the essence emerging after the act of parenthesizing, the pure consciousness, is not the being itself; therefore, there is no ontological foundation.

Descartes, on the other hand, ignores the senses initially, as he thinks they may be misleading. He demands absolute knowledge, not in directing

towards the object, but in the subject’s directing towards itself, and he attains *cogito* in the end. Descartes, in fact, analyses the essence by questioning “What am I?” and thus reveals the possibility for the thought or the consciousness to be considered as an entity. ‘I’ or ‘consciousness’ in Descartes’s view, however, contrary to Husserl’s, does not turn to its object; it is a somewhat spiritual being that is against its object. In Husserl, the spiritual existence (like Kant’s *numen*) is considered to be pure essence in its supraspatial and chronological nature; every consciousness, however, is the consciousness of an object and is directed towards a being which is external in nature. What Descartes actually offers, in the final analysis, is, just like in Plato, nothing but essence. Then, in the philosophy of Descartes, there is the mention of parenthesizing. The thing which Descartes parenthesizes, however, is the knowledge of that very thing; whereas, in Husserl’s opinion, it is the thing itself.

According to Kant, the really existing objects are not phenomena but indeterminate noumena. Noumena are not chronological and spatial in nature and cannot be reasonably categorized, and they, therefore, are the things about which we know nothing. They have no time and no space. Husserl, however, regards both Plato and Kant to be rationalists; and as there is no difference between the two in respect of their consideration of a phenomenon to be something unreal and to be something perceived, Husserl emphasizes strongly that the self is to be sought for only within phenomena. He asserts that phenomena are to be sought for; he says, “let’s return to phenomena”. Therefore, he differs from both Plato and Kant, and has been able to establish a safer system of philosophy. Husserl is closer to Plato, for he attributes importance to recollection. According to him, too, the key to the secrets of the universe is not hidden in this very moment, but in a covered ‘recollection’ which is to be uncovered (Sözer, 1976, pp. 99-100).

Husserl, like Descartes and Kant, considers perception, namely intuition, to be an act of primary importance and attributes to intuition a task of the utmost weight. He points out that knowledge would emerge together with the act of understanding, without which it would be hollow and blind. He, therefore, is, to some extent, closer to Kant. According to him, concepts without perception are hollow, and perceptions without concept are blind. On the other hand, the distance between Husserl and Kant widens, for he construes perception as a ‘means to visualize’, and he states that the purer the perception

is, the more definite and absolute the essence visualized will be. Husserl is an empiricist when he claims that the self emerges as it is taken by the subject; he is closer to solipsism when he claims that the self knows and is able to know nothing but its own modifications and states; since he brings the object within the subject, within the transcendental consciousness, when he gives priority and importance to the act of perception, he inclines towards the danger of idealism. Although he is a Cartesian, he is at a distance from Descartes, for he not only claims that intuition comes into being not all of a sudden but after a long and complicated period of preparation, but he points out that there are numerous 'cogitos', not only one 'cogito', in contrast to what Descartes makes the starting point of his philosophy; Husserl

furthermore assumes the unity of body and spirit to be a centre of orientation, whereas Descartes supports the idea of separation of the body and the spirit.

It could, therefore, be said that Husserl, the modern philosopher, believes in the presence of the unchanging, permanent and identical truth as the original in the same manner as Plato, the great philosopher of the classical Greek period; it could be said that Husserl, differing from Plato, holds that the truth can be reached only by way of phenomena thanks to the act of sensual perception; and it could be said that, by depending upon the philosophies of Plato and Kant, what Husserl really wants to achieve is to bring their way of thinking down to earth from the clouds.

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