

Phenomenology (or, “Husserl: Apply Directly to the Head”)

Our discussions have shown that the mark which distinguishes general presentations – whether we understand by these general meaning-intentions or the corresponding fulfilments of meaning – from intuitive individual presentations, can be no mere difference of psychological function, no mere difference in the part played by certain individual presentations of inner or outer sense in the continuous stream of mental life. We need not, accordingly, pay any further attention to expositions of the theory of representation merely as such a psychological function, and say nothing about the fundamental phenomenological fact, the new modes of consciousness responsible for the whole character of our individual experiences of general expression and thinking. This cardinal point may be touched on here and there in passing: individual utterances show that the phenomenological facts are not wholly ignored. Such theorists would in most cases reply to our remonstrances that what we emphasize is, likewise, what they think. Naturally the representative function will reveal itself by way of some phenomenally peculiar character. A general presentation is thereby only an individual presentation, but one *tinged in a somewhat distinctive manner*: what is intuitively presented, when tinged in this fashion, counts as a *representative* of a whole class of mutually resembling individuals. Such a concession will not help much, if what is logically and epistemologically most important gets treated as a trivial addition to an individual intuition, making no important difference to the descriptive content of such an experience. The new type of act which animates word and illustrative image with thought, may not be wholly overlooked, but is not thought to require special descriptive interest directed upon itself: superficial talk of ‘representation’ is treated as quite sufficient. Men do not see that everything that relates to logic is summed up in this, and in similar characters of acts, that wherever we talk logically about ‘presentations’ and ‘judgements’ and about their manifold forms, acts of this sort alone determine our concepts. Men do not see that it is the immanent essence of such act-characters that makes them the consciousness of what is general, and that all types of intended generality which are of concern to pure logic, whether in its forms or its laws, only come to be given by way of corresponding forms of such intentional characters. Men also fail to see that while individual intuitions in a certain manner provide the basis for the novel acts of cogitative presentation that we build upon them

Logische Untersuchungen
[Logical Investigations]
Edmund Husserl, 1900

Intentional analysis is the search for the concrete. Notions held under the direct analysis of the thought that defines them are nevertheless, unbeknownst to this naïve thought, revealed to be implanted in horizons unsuspected by this thought; these horizons endow them with meaning – such is the essential teaching of Husserl. [TI 28]

Thus, intentional analysis begins from the unreflective naïveté of what Husserl calls the natural attitude. Through the operation of the phenomenological reduction, it seeks to describe the deep structures of intentional life, structures which give meaning to that life, but which are forgotten in that naïveté. This is what phenomenology calls the concrete: not the empirical givens of sense data, but the *a priori* structures that give meaning to those seeming givens. As Levinas puts it, ‘What counts is the idea of the overflowing of objectifying thought by a forgotten experience from which it lives’ (TI 28). This is what Levinas meant when he used to say, as he apparently often did at the beginning of his lecture courses at the Sorbonne in the 1970s, that philosophy, ‘c’est la science des naïvetés’ (‘it’s the science of naïveties’). Philosophy is the work of reflection that is brought to bear on unreflective, everyday life. This is why Levinas insists that phenomenology constitutes a deduction, from the naïve to the scientific, from the empirical to the *a priori* and so forth. A phenomenologist seeks to pick out and analyse the common, shared features that underlie our everyday experience, to make explicit what is implicit in our ordinary social know-how. On this model, in my view, the philosopher, unlike the natural scientist, does not claim to be providing us with new knowledge or fresh discoveries, but rather with what Wittgenstein calls *reminders* of what we already know but continually pass over in our day-to-day life. Philosophy reminds us of what is passed over in the naïveté of what passes for common sense.

Critchley writing about
Emmanuel Levinas
writing about Husserl (!)

