

**Internal Time Consciousness in Husserl's
*Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins***

Handout for “Logic and Cognition” – February 21st, 2005

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The topic I am going to deal with is the inner time consciousness as discussed in Husserl's *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (“Lectures on the phenomenology of internal time consciousness”). Since the analysis assumes some familiarity with Husserl's phenomenology, I shall start by giving an overview of the latter. But such an overview depends heavily on the perspective chosen, namely that of making phenomenology understandable and interesting for colleagues not necessarily devoted to the details of transcendental philosophy, nor the *statu quo* of philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century. In particular, an attempt is made to avoid very unfriendly terminology first introduced by Husserl (like *noema* or *epoché*), as well as classical terms impregnated with unusual connotations within Husserl's production (like *essence* or *monad*).

What is Phenomenology?

In his *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (“Philosophy as rigorous science”) of 1910 Husserl distinguishes between philosophical systems whose goal is to show how to perform this or that life style, from those other systems of a more theoretical character whose aim is to illuminate the world we live by. Phenomenology, according to him, belongs to the second group. Now, to say that phenomenology is a theoretical philosophy asks for further specification. We have to move to the very beginning of a text called «Phenomenology», which was originally conceived as an entry for *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* at request of its editors in the late twenties, for reading that phenomenology is «a new kind of descriptive method which made a breakthrough in philosophy at the turn of the century, and an a priori science derived from it». In other words: phenomenology is both a *method* as well as a *philosophical discipline* which results from applying that method to the classical problems of philosophy.

So far it doesn't seem to be very problematic. All we have to do at this stage is to characterize the method –and I can tell you in advance that it is based on meticulous descriptions of whatever is given to the consciousness, rejecting energetically any assumption about the existence and/or properties of the given phenomenon. In this sense phenomenology goes back to the well known task of *sozein ta phainomena*, “to save or keep in a safety place the phenomena”, which Simplicius, in his commentary to the aristotelian *De Caelo*, attributes to Plato. Though this is by no means an exhaustive description of the phenomenological method, it should suffice for now.

But difficulties are likely to arise if one seeks in Husserl's enormous legacy what exactly is supposed to be phenomenology as a discipline, for one will soon realize that there are several answers, which in addition are not so clearly related to each other. Thus, with respect to its scope, phenomenology is sometimes considered a discipline among other disciplines, a discipline which focuses on its own field of objects (the given phenomena of our consciousness), but at other times is intended to be a sort of unifying force that join together all the philosophical disciplines into a renewed version of *philosophia perennis*; and still if you restrict yourself to the phenomenology as a single discipline, then you have to be very careful in separating its "low-level" structure, so to speak, in which phenomenology is presented as a propedeutic to the descriptive psychology, from its "high-level" structure, where phenomenology is defined (so for example in *Ideen I*) as an a priori science of the consciousness. Of course we can forget about the *philosophia perennis* business, and similarly avoid the subtle relation between phenomenology and descriptive psychology. In this case we shall be pleased enough with the standard view according to which phenomenology is an a priori science concerned with what is directly given to the consciousness.

So we can approach Husserl's analysis of time consciousness from at least two points of view having to do with phenomenology, namely (1) as an *application* of the phenomenological method to the specific problem of time consciousness, or (2) as a *fragment* of a systematic discipline called phenomenology and divided into explanatory fragments about time, space, meaning, epistemology, moral values, and so on. There are good reasons for preferring (1) rather than (2), but let me mention just one of them. Along with the lack of assumptions about the physical time, we would like to face time consciousness with the intellectual apparatus of someone who is about to make use of the phenomenological method for the first time; someone who doesn't care about the relevance or legitimacy of other phenomenological analyses spread over thousands of pages written by Husserl or by some of his followers. The reason for doing this is that if, according to phenomenology, we have to set aside the existence of the object to be investigated, as well as strongly rooted convictions about its properties and behaviour, then the phenomenological study of an specific topic should be independent from similar considerations concerning yet other objects.

Since phenomenology is the observation and description of whatever is given to the consciousness, regardless of its existence and/or properties, it is necessary to sharpen the underlying notion of consciousness. In doing it we will proceed with the help of a historical perspective, showing first the problems and then exposing the philosophical concepts as solutions to those problems.

From the empirical to the transcendental consciousness

As with many philosophers at the beginning of the twentieth century, the main interest of Husserl in that period lay in the foundations of science. In his *Logische Untersuchungen* ("Logical Investigations"), published between 1900 and 1901, he firstly attacks the prevailing view of psychologism, and secondly points to a new field of research, which in subsequent publications will be called "the kingdom of the unknown", *das unbekannte Reich*, a revival of the tragical view –already there in crucial passages of

Aristotle and Kant— by which philosophy is the science to be looked for without any possibility of neither success nor interruption of the search.

Psychologism is a philosophical doctrine whose principal claim is the reduction of epistemology to empirical psychology. The argument runs as follows: since epistemology is concerned with the cognitive nature of perceiving, believing, judging and knowing, and all of these phenomena are psychological (at least in the sense that they take place in our brains and have a temporal beginning as well as a temporal ending), it is psychology that must investigate their structure; therefore it is psychology that has to be regarded as truly epistemology. As an immediate consequence, psychology provides the deepest understanding on every particular science (including logic and mathematics), for each science is originated, maintained and communicated by means of cognitive processes.

But the last observation gives rise to great difficulties. First of all, if psychology is to validate all the other sciences, but is indeed another science, how are we going to validate psychology? Is psychology legitimated from psychology itself? Secondly, since psychology is an empirical science whose statements can vary from time to time along to new experiments and discoveries, epistemology crucially depends on new empirical facts, so epistemology is transformed into a natural science and hence cannot be regarded for more time as a philosophical discipline. Thirdly, although the “perspective” of psychology is privileged in that it can take as subject matter other sciences (but they cannot do the same with respect to psychology), the “status” of psychology as science becomes as problematic as the status of the other sciences. All these considerations, however being undesirable consequences of psychologism, don’t refute it.

Psychologism, like some strong versions of the psychology of science today, does not distinguish correctly between the *object* of knowledge and the *act* of knowing, since it subsumes the former into the latter, and consequently asserts that all what is to investigate about the object of knowledge lies in the empirical act of knowing. Psychologism thus simply ignores the transcendental nature of the object of knowledge.

So much for the illness, now for the diagnosis. Once the error of psychologism is detected, it becomes easier to refute that doctrine. The main argument is based on the possibility of repeating similar —yet countably and empirically different— acts of knowing directed to the same object, for if the objects of knowledge are reduced to the acts of knowing, how is it possible that I can think at different times of $7-2 = 5$ as being always true, or how can I apply commutativity and think of $5 = 7-2$ as being not only true but also related with the previous statement, or how can you think of the previous statements in different times? Similar arguments can be exhibited with respect to the possibility of communication and scientific knowledge: if there were only individual acts of knowing, then multiple references to the very same object of knowledge would be impossible, therefore science and human communication would be impossible; but they do take place, therefore different acts of knowing are able to denote the same object.

The moral of this critique is that epistemology cannot restrict itself to the study of empirical entities and events, for it doesn’t allow us to deal with both acts of knowing and objects of knowledge. Furthermore, psychologism is —as we have already seen— plenty of circularities and paradoxes. What Husserl tries in the more constructive chapters of his *Logische Untersuchungen* to do is to apply once more the transcendental method of Kant, which essentially claims that philosophy is not concerned with the description of natural processes but rather with their underlying conditions of possibility. It means that given

any kind of entity, process, event, situation, state of affairs... called A, the transcendental question is not *how does A happen* but instead *how is it that A comes to happen*. Consider this seminar on “Logic and Cognition”. The naturalistic approach tells you that it is given on Mondays from 12:15 to 15:00, that we have to read a collection of papers, that we have a short recess at 13:15, that we can obtain 10 credits, and so on, whereas a transcendental approach takes all this for granted and tells you that, in order this seminar to occur, the following a priori conditions must be met: a teacher well aware of epistemology and logic is needed, a few students are needed, every person should be able to be present every week, the University of Amsterdam has to support this event by means of a classroom and official recognition of the course, etc. Transcendental philosophy, in a word, approaches already existing objects (the kantian *Faktum*) as if they were not yet real and the philosopher had to prepare very carefully their “coming to reality”. These objects are considered not as they are in themselves but as they appear; and the notion of apparition is so general that, to put it in a very extreme way, considerations of transcendental philosophy should be not only valid for humans but also for animals or artifacts that in some degree are able to manage knowledge. Applied to epistemology, the transcendental method does not interrogate the way in which external stimuli give rise to perceptions, how they are distilled into concepts, or how the perceptions and concepts interact to each other. In place of all these processes, the transcendental method seeks for the a priori conditions of possibility of knowledge.

If the fundamental mistake of psychologism was to ignore the role of the objects of knowledge, and we are to try the transcendental method instead, then we have to start by saying that, for the *Faktum* of knowledge to occur, two conditions have to be fulfilled, namely the subjective condition of the act of knowing and the objective condition of what is given to the consciousness. In this point Husserl departs from the Kantian orthodoxy, represented at those times by philosophers like Hermann Cohen or Paul Natorp, in that he doesn't reject subjectivity as purely empirical. But to take subjectivity into account, he argues, is not to return to a new version of psychologism, for (1) objectivity is not reduced to subjectivity but only correlated to it, and moreover (2) subjectivity is to be explained from an a priori perspective.

Because of (2), Husserl's discourse is about the *transcendental consciousness*. It is not by the way something esoteric akin to the mind of God or to some supra-individual consciousness. Transcendental consciousness differs from the empirical one in that it is not an empirically given subjectivity, the subjectivity that I or you already have, whose structure depends on very specific empirical constraints, like memory limitations or perception thresholds, and whose description changes quickly along with new discoveries of psychology and the neurosciences. On the contrary, the transcendental consciousness is merely the set of minimal requirements for subjectivity in general to occur.

What remains to be explained is, according to (1), the correlation between the subjectivity of knowing on the one hand, and the objectivity of what is known on the other. It is in order to understand this correlation that Husserl introduces the concept of intentionality –which is in fact a scholastic term revived by Franz Brentano in his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* of 1924/25 for characterizing the psychological facts as distinct from the empirical ones. Now, as we shall see in the following section, intentionality is the name of the problem rather than its solution.

The concept of intentionality

In modern dictionaries of philosophy, intentionality is usually defined as a property of certain mental states by which these are directed to something else. It is pointed out that a wish is a wish to do something, a belief is a belief that “such and such” is the case, a fear is a fear of something (putting aside the Heideggerian *Angst*), an expectation is an expectation that something is going to happen, etcetera. This is the common meaning of intentionality from Brentano to Searle, and as if it were a slogan it is even said that intentionality amounts to aboutness or directedness.

But intentionality has a complicate history which, in the case of Husserl at least, provides the concept with very specific connotations not to be derived from the slogan “intentionality is aboutness”. We have already seen that in Husserl intentionality is a feature of the transcendental consciousness: there must be some directionality from the acts of knowing to the objects of knowledge for knowledge as such to happen. Such directionality, however, is not going to be investigated from the ontological point of view of what exists and the way in which it exists, since phenomenology only takes care of the objects as phenomena. To summarize: the subject matter of phenomenology is the logical structure of a transcendental consciousness directed to objects.

We cannot assume that the conscious states are affected causally by the objects of knowledge, since this explanation doesn't cover all those conscious states whose object is non-existent (Don Quijote, the planet between Mars and Earth...), contradictory (a squared circle, the last prime number...) or ideal (the tolerance, the second prime number...). In fact we only need to consider conscious states directed to an existing object which is not causally given, i. e. causally responsible for the conscious state, as in the case of someone who is thinking of her apartment during a lunch break in the office. Now, this rejection of objectivism shouldn't direct us towards a subjectivism in which every object is a product of the imagination, which places the objects “in” the conscious acts. This approach doesn't allow us to refer properly to external objects, like a car or a monetary payment, and –what is worse from the transcendental point of view– accords the same status to both the acts and the objects, ignoring that objects are synthetical identities made up from multiple appearances whereas acts are just singular acts.

From these remarks, we can conclude that the intentionality of a conscious act doesn't depend of whether or not its intended object exist. Such objects are not mental constructions; what is more, if I think of your wife, then I'm sorry but it is your real existing wife, and not a mental construction induced by long observations, who is being the intentional object of my act –hence the statement *zu den Sachen selbst*, “to the things themselves”, so often mentioned by Husserl. The transcendental connexion between the act and the object is not mediated by physical chains of causes and effects (objectivism), nor by mental constructions (subjectivism). Such a connexion is immediate. In particular, we don't experience mental representations of things: in place of it, our experiences of the world could be said to be representational.

Since the correlation between acts and objects is purely transcendental, there is nothing to be said about the existence of those objects. Recall at this point that some philosophers, like Jean-Paul Sartre for instance, make use of the intentionality as a tool for showing the existence of an external and mind-independent real world. The argument is essentially this: if the consciousness is directed at something that is different from the

consciousness, then there must exist an external world independent from the consciousness. The problem is that *difference*, which is everything that flakes off the phenomenological analysis, doesn't imply *independence*; therefore the external world to which intentional acts are directed could be different in nature from the consciousness but at the same time dependent on it, like the persons you can dream of or the conspiracies imagined by a schizophrenic. From the fact that a conscious state refers to something else, we cannot conclude that external and mind-independent things must exist out there. Intentionality is not conceived as an external relation between two preexisting entities. Another consequence is that the subject-object problem cannot be considered a problem any more, just because the subject is defined as related to its object (and viceversa). This is not a mystical negation of the object, of course; the object can very well exist out there, but this is not a necessary condition for it to be intended by a conscious act.

From the subjectivity of the act together with the objectivity of the object, we have derived the intentional character of the act towards the object. Now, if we want to focus on the objects of scientific knowledge as a legitimate topic of phenomenological study, we have to ask how the object is *constituted* through different conscious acts. But first of all, what is the constitution of an object? The constitution of intentional objects in the consciousness is not a production of objects: we produce neither trees nor mathematical statements in our mind –they were already there before we started to think about them. By constitution of the object Husserl understands the process by which the transcendent object, with or without empirical existence, appears to the consciousness as an unitary object through different conscious acts. In other words: constitution of an object is the transcendental process by which the consciousness becomes aware of that object. We then move from the conditions of possibility for knowledge in the abstract, to the conditions of possibility for the knowledge of a given object.

The movement from abstract to more concrete considerations requires a more careful account of temporality. Almost every object we experience involves endurance and succession; the identity of the object is not eliminated by the flow of time, rather we observe that to be an object is to be continuously the same object within the time fluxus. What is more enigmatic, some objects (think of a melody) need to be expanded during a period of time before becoming themselves. Because temporal objects are constituted as objects in the consciousness, phenomenology must connect the intentional character of conscious states with the temporal dimension of the constitution.

The Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins

The *Vorlesungen* were initially oral expositions (*Vorlesung* means “lecture”) held by Husserl between 1904 and 1910 at the University of Göttingen. But they remained unpublished until Martin Heidegger's edition of 1928, which was requested by Husserl since at least April 1926. This edition was published both in the journal *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, Band IX, pages 367-498, as well as in the form of a booklet by the editorial Max Niemeyer, in Halle, during the same year. The most authoritative edition nowadays is that of Rudolf Boehm in *Husserliana*, Band X, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1966. It contains not only Heidegger's first edition of the lectures, but also many comments and more substantial additions that Husserl himself wrote in separate sheets or even in the margins of the original manuscripts.

The *Vorlesungen* are divided into two parts. The first stem from (the fourth part of) a series of lectures given by Husserl during the winter semester of 1904/05. The original handwritten text for the lectures was typed out, and slightly modified, by Edith Stein in the summer of 1917. Some years later, in February 20 of 1928, it was submitted by Husserl to Heidegger for preparing what should have been a critical edition of the manuscript, although Heidegger didn't feel any more a pupil of Husserl and consequently made no attempt to improve Stein's manuscript, which was published virtually word by word. But in despite of the philological controversy, this manuscript is still the most important contribution of Husserl to the phenomenology of time consciousness. Hence it is the text we are going to focus on. The second part of the *Vorlesungen* consists basically of different working papers elaborated between 1905 and 1910 for giving talks and lectures. There are further sources in which Husserl reworked his ideas about time consciousness, namely the Bernau manuscripts of 1917/18 and the so-called C manuscripts written between 1929 and 1935. Nevertheless we shall restrict ourselves to the first part of the *Vorlesungen*, which remains the standard reference.

Putting aside all these bibliographical details, let's move to the contents, the most urgent of them being doubtless the very topic of the lectures. What is being discussed? An usual way of describing what the *Vorlesungen* are about is this: the subject matter is not the physical time, but our consciousness of time. In other terms, we don't care about what an objective duration is, but only about how we experience such a duration. Now, the problem is that these statements, without being completely false, are very unsatisfactory from a philosophical point of view. They suggest that there is a harmless disjunction between physical time on the one hand and psychological time on the other –and hence they suggest that one could decide to analyze one of them in despite of the other, in the same way as one can decide between, say, drinking a glass of wine or a glass of beer. But at the same time those statements assume, if only tacitly, that physical time is causally (and maybe logically) previous to the experienced time, since the consciousness of time is presented as consciousness of “the” real time. If you say you are going to study how we perceive time, then you have to begin with a number of assumptions about real time, and only afterwards can you understand how the empirical subjectivity receives and/or transforms the physical phenomenon of time.

But Husserl's method, as we have seen, is *transcendental* and *phenomenological*. The first means that the topic of the *Vorlesungen* is not the question of time itself: *what is time*, be it the objective time of clocks or the subjective time of the perceptions, but rather the question of time consciousness: *how do we constitute temporal objects in our consciousness*. And this perspective supports, Husserl says, a triple distinction:

- 1) The objective time of the physical measures
- 2) The experienced time of the immanent time
- 3) The time of the inner time consciousness

Since intentional consciousness is essentially temporal, phenomenology has to consider temporality a crucial aspect of intentional acts. All very well, but which temporality out of (1), (2) and (3) plays a role in the constitution of objects? For sure not the physical temporality of (1), since it has nothing to do with the transcendental consciousness. The psychological temporality of (2) is not a good candidate either,

because the experienced time is just an empirical phenomenon and we are looking for conditions of possibility. This point is pretty subtle. Husserl doesn't reject the study of experienced time because it is subjective and thus it is difficult to describe, nor in the sense that it can vary from person to person; what he rejects is precisely its empirical character, i. e. the fact that experiences of time are after all facts which take place in the world. So the only time to be analyzed is that of (3). As a very brief definition, Husserl says that (3) is the time in which the experienced time of (2) is founded; he also says that the it is a phenomenological absolute, something we cannot go beyond.

Leaving (2) aside is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is a nice decision in that we avoid the following difficulty: experiences of time, since they are empirical, take place during a certain period time, therefore we should investigate whether the time we are experiencing is the same time in which the very experience is happening. On the other hand, by postulating the time (3) of the transcendental consciousness, Husserl opens a new field of problems, the most important of them being the lack of a clear relation between (3) on the one hand and (1) or (2) on the other hand. The time of the transcendental consciousness is very hard to understand, and many interpreters claim that it is just a bad product of idealism. Husserl speaks about (3) as if it were an eternal now or a kind of atemporal stream; to complicate things, this peculiar entity is related to the process of self-consciousness. Fortunately it is possible to throw away this embarrassing problem by claiming, although this is a very personal interpretation, that for Q to be a question is not required that Q be an object; therefore for the inner time consciousness to be a topic of transcendental philosophy, it is not necessary to assume the existence of something like a "third time", lying somewhere between the physical and the experienced time. Just think of the inner time consciousness as what it is: a condition of possibility.

So far the transcendental aspect of the method. Now, if we demand that the very same method be phenomenological, then we have to recognize that, albeit empirical in nature, the second kind of temporality must be in some way pertinent for us. In order to investigate how do we constitute temporal objects in our consciousness, the experienced time is not the field of study, but in a sense it is the field from which we are going to recollect the main facts having to do with the temporal dimension of intentionality. We are not directly interested in how real persons organize their perceptions according to a before-now-after order, nor do we ask how they experience the flow of time. What we are interested in are the conditions of possibility of those experiences. This is worth noting because sometimes Husserl states the question as if the main problem of the phenomenology of time consciousness were the constitution of the objective time, and not the constitution of temporal objects; to put it in a more pragmatic fashion, Husserl seems to be also interested in whatever phenomenology has to say about the philosophical foundations of the physical time. But we think that this question can be achieved by phenomenology only in a secondary manner. Phenomenology is concerned with the knowledge of temporal objects; on the contrary, to be aware of the objective time is to be aware of periodic processes which are synchronized to each other; therefore the investigation of external time should be subordinated to the investigation of our knowledge of the temporal process of synchronization.

Finally, if we decide to continue the analysis of temporality from this narrowed perspective, which rejects the existence of such a thing as a third temporality, then all we can do is to specify the temporal dimension of intentional acts.

Primal impression, retention and protention

The main thesis of Husserl with respect to the inner time consciousness is that every intention, far from being a mere *primal impression* of the givenness in its current actuality, has both a *retention* of the object as it was perceived one moment ago, and also a *protention* of the same object as it is expected to be in the forthcoming moment. Hence intentionality is not temporally punctiform, but rather a synthesis between three intentional horizons, one focusing on the actuality of the object, other directed backwards to the immediate past, and a third pointing forwards to the immediate future.

As we did before when introducing the transcendental method, here we are going to present the temporal multidimensionality of intentionality with the help of an historical exposition, i. e. showing first the problems and next explaining the new ideas as solutions to those problems. So, what is the problem now? The identity of intentional objects, since there seems to be a contradiction between the identity of any intended object and the multiplicity of intentional acts directed to that object. According to traditional empirism, from Locke to Mach, every perception is punctiform, which amounts to say that every perception has an atomlike duration, and moreover that all that can be perceived in this duration must be purely static. From this premise, the identity of temporal objects only can be assumed because of practical reasons. Similarity between different phenomena, together with their nearness to each other, is all that we have to constitute the object.

Husserl's main argument against this epistemological tradition is very short in essence. He argues that if we were only able of atomlike experiences, then we couldn't constitute unitary objects across different acts and appearances; a series of isolated now-points doesn't suffice to constitute any object at all. But we commonly have the experience that a temporal objects is unitary in despite of its multiple appearances. Therefore there must be some kind of temporally extended presence of the object whenever our consciousness is directed to it.

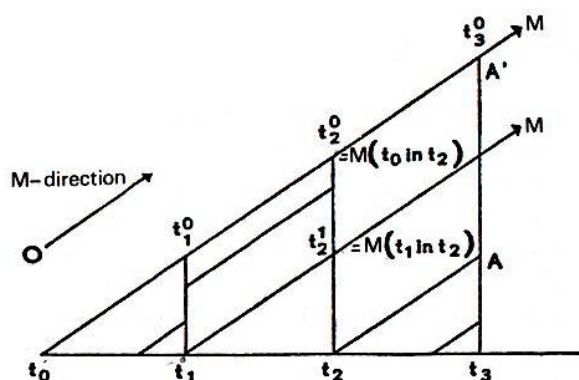
Since we are in the transcendental perspective, the following dilemma is spurious: (a) either the subjective act is punctiform but directed to an persisting object, (b) or the subjective is a continuous stream focusing on discrete objects, (c) or, most probably, both the consciousness and its object are temporally extended. Alternative (a) says that the subjectivity of knowing is static whereas the objectivity is dynamic. Alternative (b) says the opposite. Alternative (c) concedes that both the objectivity and the subjectivity are ongoing events. In every case, however, what is under the focus is some empirical fact; maybe the third is the most acceptable, but still it is a empirical hypothesis which in addition has to deal with the difficulty, already mentioned in the previous section, of the connexion between the time I am experiencing and the time in which I am having the experience. None of these alternatives concerns phenomenology. They all presuppose the condition we are interested in, namely the intentional structure in which objects are referred to via retentions, primal impressions and protentions.

For similar reasons, Husserl rejects the explanation of Franz Brentano, to whom intentionality is atomic and the imagination helps us to conceive objects as temporal objects. Husserl answers that this is a very unnatural explication. We see trees, but do not imagine trees. We hear a melody, don't imagine a melody. Retention and protention provide us with a consciousness of the past and future phases of the objects. They are not

added to intentionality from any other faculty, like the memory or the imagination. Furthermore, neither retention is to be confused with *remembrance*, nor protention is to be confused with *expectation*. Both remembrance and expectation are intentional acts deliberately directed to non-existing objects, while retention and protention are integral parts of every intentional act. As a consequence, every remembrance has its own retention, its own primal impression, and its own protention; the same holds for every expectation. What is more convincing, some animals seem to have retention and protention without having neither memory nor the faculty of expectation.

That the primal impression, or consciousness of the now-phase, is not enough in order the constitution of objects to happen, implies merely that there must be some other phase. Why did we introduce two new phases, one directed to the past and the other to the future? For the sake of symmetry? The only obvious thing is that, since the object was already given to the consciousness, the retention of that givenness can be very reasonably added to the primal impression. Thus we shall focus now on the retention and afterwards shall argue for the necessity of protention (note by the way that arguments towards the necessary existence of something are typical in the transcendental method, in contrast with arguments for the specific structure and/or behaviour of something).

But first of all, let's fix these ideas with a diagram. Mathematical analogies are common in Husserl, which is not to cause surprise if you consider that he initially studied mathematics (besides philosophy, physics and astronomy) in 1876-1882, defended a doctoral dissertation on variation calculus at the end of that period in Vienna, and prepared his *Habilitation* at the University of Halle with (a preliminary version of) his *Philosophie der Arithmetik*, published in 1891. In the *Vorlesungen* there are two very simple diagrams that Husserl probably drew on the blackboard during his lectures. They don't add anything new to the written text. But in *Husserliana*, X, page 331, we find this diagram (what you see below is in fact an English version downloaded from the internet, so instead of "direction" read "Richtung", and instead of *M* for *memory* read *E* for *Erinnerung*).



The horizontal line represents the ordered series of now-instants, labelled by t_0 , t_1 , and so on. Every vertical line is relative to a now-instant t and represents the stored retentions already present at t . The diagonal *M*-direction must be read as relative to its origin, and stands for the persistence of a given object under the form of retention. We can postulate that the angle of a given *M*, or equivalently the vertical distance between any t and *M*, determines something like the "intensity" with which the origin of *M*, as retention, still appears in successive intentional acts.

This diagram reveals that, apart from analyzing isolated intentional acts, the phenomenology of time consciousness can also be concerned with a sequence of intentional acts, each of them having its own retention, primal impression and protention. In such a succession the ordered multiplicity of intentional acts gives rise to relationships between the primal impression of any t_n and the retention of t_{n+1} . But after revealing this fact, the diagram as such should be considered misleading, as it assumes a sort of inertia for every retention (from its very beginning as primal impression in a certain t_n to its unending death in t_{n+1} , t_{n+2} , ..., t_{n+100} , etcetera). But this inertia is illusory unless you consider an extremely short period of time.

An advantage of the diagram though is that it presents retentions as qualitative phenomena different from primal impressions. The former occupy a bidimensional space on the top of the horizontal line, whereas the primal impressions are only placed in such a line. This makes sense because the past-phase of retentions and the now-phase of primal impressions are not homogeneous; they are not like the pen and the dictionary I see on my desk at once, instead they are intended by two different modes of the same conscious act. Note that if retention and primal impression were given to the consciousness in the same mode, then we couldn't distinguish between them, and consequently we would perceive them as two simultaneous fragments of the same static object.

So far the investigation about retention and primal impression. Everything we have pointed out about the relation between those modes of the intentional act holds for the third mode we already mentioned: the protention. But we deserve a couple of paragraphs to the protention because of the original way in which it is introduced.

The possibility of being surprised is exhibited as the main argument for the existence of protentions. It is an observable fact, Husserl says, that we all can be at every moment suddenly surprised; now, in order one to be surprised, she must experience an unexpected event; therefore we have at every moment some expectation about the most immediate future. We anticipate the future whenever we are having intentional acts.

As in the case of retention, we can accept that the order of now-instants t_0 , t_1 , etcetera, gives rise to some connexion between the protention of t_n and the primal impression of t_{n+1} . In other words: each current protention must be somewhat related to the following primal impression, which was already anticipated by the former. The above diagram though doesn't contain any representation of protentions, and Husserl himself laments the absence of a convenient representation of the protention (*es fehlt aber eine Signatur für die Protentionen*). You can discover that such a representation is provided in subsequent diagrams just by extending downwards the diagonal lines. But then, why don't we comment on the more complicated diagrams? The truth is that they are very imperfect representations of the time consciousness, when compared with the explanations of the text. You cannot so easily place in the same vertical line what in t_0 was only a protention, in t_1 is the primal impression, and in t_2 will be retention. There is simply no such coincidence between the previous protention and the future retention. If it were the case, then the primal attention of t_1 would disappear as a limiting case between the protention of t_0 and the retention of t_2 (from the uniqueness of the now-point in empirism we would move to its dissolution), which is not completely absurd, but insufficient as an integral explanation of how retention, primal impression and protention are articulated.

Summary

The question Husserl tries to answer is: how is it possible that knowledge comes into being? For knowledge to occur different conditions of possibility are required, namely an object of knowledge, an act of knowledge, a non physical linkage between the act and the object, and finally a triple orientation of the act towards the past, the present and the future phases of the object. The way in which Husserl comes to this conclusion is said to be an observation of the own experiences, since the topic to be investigated is the very possibility of such experiences; however, an important dosis of theoretical sophistication is also required for dealing with the conditions of possibility which underlie the experience.

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From "The Husserl Page", <http://www.husserlpage.com>, you can virtually reach every relevant site having to do with Husserl and/or Phenomenology, such as the different Husserl Archives (Leuven, Freiburg, Cologne, Paris, New York...), the *Husserliana* homepage, *Analecta Husserliana* and *Husserliana Materialien* resources, phenomenological societies, phenomenological journals like *Husserl Studies*, tables of recommended translations from German into other languages, etc.