

# **The Essentials of Husserl**

Studies in Transcendental Phenomenology

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Pondicherry University

and

Centre for Phenomenological Studies, India

**Series in Philosophy**



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*Dedicated to Lucy, Anisha and Ashish  
For what they are to me*



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**V. C. Thomas**



# Preface

This book, *The Essentials of Husserl: Studies in Transcendental Phenomenology*, consists of ten well-studied and intensely researched essays, apart from an introduction and a brief appendix. After having studied the various phases of Husserl's phenomenology, namely, the realist, the static, the transcendental, the genetic, as well as the writings of the post-*Crisis*<sup>1</sup> (*of European Sciences*) period, I have selected topics considered to be representative of each period, for this book. Surely one can argue that other topics are important as well. I do not deny it. However, the importance of the topics selected here is undeniable as well.

*Phenomenology: A Study of Self and Beyond* (**Chapter 2**) focuses on the fundamental aspects of phenomenology as a study of modes of self, irrespective of its different phases. *Consciousness and Intentionality: The Perspective of Husserl* (**Chapter 3**) is the fulcrum upon which phenomenology rotates, considering the same to be a study of our conscious experiences. I am of the firm belief that *Husserl's Investigation of Meaning* (**Chapter 4**) is a very important topic in *Logical Investigations*. Although there is cosmetic change in Husserl's understanding of meaning from time to time, the sum and substance of his understanding of meaning remains almost the same throughout his phenomenology. One thing is for sure: phenomenology is a search for meaning, not for the meaning of words and expressions (these can be found in lexicographical works) but a search for the most personal and subjective kind of meanings. *Natural Attitude, Epoché and Reductions* (**Chapter 5**) and *Husserl's Treatment of Noesis and Noema: Conflict and Convergence* (**Chapter 6**) are the cruxes of the transcendental phases represented by *Ideas I*. It is this phase that distinguishes Husserl's phenomenology from all other phenomenologists, be it Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty.

*Husserl's Examination of Lived-body* (**Chapter 7**), based on *Ideas II*, is a link indicating a transition from transcendental to genetic phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology, which finds its culmination in genetic phenomenology, is represented here by *Life world: A Conceptual Overview* (**Chapter 8**) and is based primarily on the *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. *Husserl's Notion of the Other and Intersubjectivity* (**Chapter 9**) is based mainly on *Cartesian Meditations*. *Husserl's Understanding of Lived Time* (**Chapter 10**) is based on the various

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<sup>1</sup> *Crisis* refers to Husserl's book *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and *Post Crisis* refers to Husserl's writings after the book *Crisis*.

volumes of *Husserliana*, specifically *volumes VIII, X and XXXIII*. Since Husserl's study on time commenced in 1893, long before his phenomenological career, and continued even during his post-*Crisis* period, this book covers not just the various phases of Husserl's phenomenology but his entire career as well. Special attention has been rendered to Husserl's 1904-05 lectures on time consciousness, edited by Heidegger in 1928 and published entitled, *On the Phenomenology of Consciousness of Internal Time*. In addition, short discussions on time consciousness based on *Bernau Manuscripts* and *C-Manuscripts* (*Husserliana volumes VIII and XXXIII*) have been included. The latter includes Husserl's contributions to time analysis during his pre-phenomenological, realist and transcendental phases. In my opinion, Husserl's study of time, spread across the different phases of his phenomenology, unifies the various phases of his philosophy. The *Appendix (Chapter 12)* concerns Husserl's contention that phenomenology is a presuppositionless science, which is a widely misunderstood concept amongst several authors and commentators. This brief note is the result of my personal studies and inquiries.

I have utilized several examples and simple diagrams to illustrate the nuances of phenomenology to my readers, and especially for the benefit of students. Through these, I strive to put forth my views and thoughts in a simple and straightforward manner.

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

The principal theme in *Phenomenology: A Study of Self and Beyond* (Chapter 2) is a discussion on the various aspects of phenomenology, including the origin and development of the term itself. I attempt to describe it with an example since nowhere does Husserl define the term phenomenology. While Euclid used the term '*Phainomena*' to characterize heavenly or astronomical bodies, philosophers such as Friedrich Oetinger, Johann Lambert, Earnest Mach and others also attempted to describe the same. There is no evidence to show that Husserl was aware of the contributions of Lambert and Oetinger, but he was well acquainted with and very much appreciative of the part played by Mach. Kant and Hegel were two great philosophers who contributed immensely to the growth of the term 'phenomenology'. While Hegel's contribution can be considered all too important, it was Husserl's teacher, Franz Brentano, who was his immediate source of inspiration.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the notion of the term, 'self'. Though the word 'self' may not appear explicitly in Husserl's realist (static) phenomenological phase, he accepts a kind of Humean understanding of self. But his transcendental phenomenological phase is devoted entirely to the study of transcendental ego in all its richness and variations. In the genetic phenomenological phase, his concern is not just the self or the transcendental ego, which is more or less identified with the human being, but several other things connected with the human. And I refer to the term 'beyond-self' to address his concern for humans and other things connected with the human. This concern for things connected with the human did not appear in his philosophy all of a sudden. A careful study of *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Husserl, 2006g) (Husserl's 1909-10 winter semester lectures) indicates that these concerns were in Husserl's mind right from the beginning of his philosophical career. However, he worked them out carefully, patiently and systematically throughout his life.

*Consciousness and Intentionality: The Perspective of Husserl* (Chapter 3) is devoted to Husserl's perspectives on consciousness and intentionality. All conscious states are intentional, but it can be pointed out that certain physiological acts like nausea and dizziness cannot be said to be intentional, though they are somehow conscious. Is intentionality the same as consciousness? I disagree with their identification. Consciousness has reference to an object, regardless of whether it is real or imaginary. Husserl derived the

dictum that consciousness was always in reference to the consciousness of an object from his teacher Brentano, though his understanding of this principle was significantly different from the latter. While Brentano's understanding is akin to an object-theory of intentionality, Husserl leans toward a meaning-theory of intentionality. Intentionality is the primary characteristic of consciousness. It is devoid of not just a causal relationship but also any reference to the Freudian notions of consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness. The fundamental role of consciousness lies in discovering and establishing meanings. Certain aspects of the well-known Husserlian distinctions among act, content and object are also dealt with in this chapter. In the context of meaning, a brief discussion on *noema* describing the relation between object and meaning is also dealt with, though a full-fledged discussion is reserved for Chapter 5. The rest of the chapter focusses on the static and dynamic aspects of intentionality, with reference to *Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 1977s, 1977t) and *Ideas I* (Husserl, 1976d). The fundamentals of intentionality such as the ability to refer to an object, intentionality as the self-transcending phenomenon, intentionality and constitution, horizons and temporality of intentionality, intentionality and the human body, etc., are also dealt with. To conclude, theses by Prof. J. N. Mohanty, delivered in a lecture in 1996 at Bryn Mawr College, Philadelphia, USA are discussed (Mohanty, 2002b).

*Husserl's Investigation of Meaning* (Chapter 4) draws attention to the fact that Husserl focuses primarily on meaning in *Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 1977s) followed by several discussions on the same after *Crisis of European Sciences* (Husserl, 1970e). Throughout his journey in phenomenology, Husserl is committed to the question of meaning, not in the lexicographical sense, but rather in the personal sense, posing the question: what does it mean to *me*? Though meaning is usually signified by an expression, in the phenomenological sense, Husserl points out that meanings are ideal entities constituted in our interpretative acts and in our acts of understanding.

We can have different expressions with different meanings referring to one and the same object. In contrast, we can also have multiple acts referring to the same object, which, according to Husserl's identical or ideal meaning, are called universals. In the context of non-linguistical expressions and monologues, Husserl points out that meanings can be expressed outwardly, and articulated words can be dispensed with in the form of monologues or soliloquy, which are not communicative speech in the sense of speaking with others; rather it is a kind of confirmative speech with oneself. We thus transition from communicative speech to confirmative speech, a device in Husserl's subsequent philosophising for inner voice, namely, self-presence. This implies a kind of prefiguration of phenomenological reduction. We move

on to touch upon meaning and reference and the Frege-Husserl controversy (Frege, 1960), during which Husserl corrected his own position in *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (Husserl, 2003) while reviewing Schröder's work. The question of the existence of a Platonic element in Husserl's Theory of Meaning is dealt with, along with a discussion on the Aristotelian notion of essence and the Husserlian notion of meaning. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Husserl's position on meaning-intention and meaning-fulfilment, and an exploration of Husserl's treatment of meaning in genetic phenomenology.

The principal theme of *Natural Attitude, Epoché and Phenomenological Reductions: Transcendental Phenomenological Method of Husserl* (Chapter 5) articulates and elucidates 1) natural attitude, 2) epoché, and 3) phenomenological reductions. The discussion on natural attitude includes its definition and basic aspects, how to suspend it, and finally, how to establish the superiority and supremacy of consciousness. Natural attitude is an epistemological problem. It is a negative expression, compelling us to avoid commitment to existence. Epoché is a methodological device enabling us to abstain from accenting the ontological status of the perceived object. This implies that I do not pay attention to the existence of the object perceived since I am concerned phenomenologically with its essence. In other words, in my search for essence, existence becomes irrelevant. After epoché is performed, we arrive at the essence or meaning of the object and at the transcendental ego, which is the source of all meanings, the irreducible foundation from which all reductions arise and all meanings originate. Finally, we reach the phenomenological reduction, the crux of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which raises the question, how many reductions are there in Husserl? He starts with one reduction in his *The Idea of Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1999) and concludes by stating that there are eight in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970e). Despite such inconsistencies, from a phenomenological point of view, Husserl upholds and defends four reductions: eidetic, psychological and transcendental reductions, mentioned in *Ideas I*, and finally, reduction by way of the ontology of Life world, according to *Crisis of European Sciences* (Husserl, 1970e). To conclude, Husserl should have paid a lot more attention while discussing these reductions, they being such a crucial issue in phenomenology and a source of contention between Husserl and his disciples. However, Husserl held on to the validity of his positions on his reductions until the very end.

The first part of *Noema and Noesis: Conflict and Convergence* (Chapter 6) is a detailed inquiry into Husserl's definition of *noema*. Though Husserl developed the notion of *noema* only in *Ideas I*, its seed was already sprouting in *Logical Investigations*, whence he had an intuition of the same while describing the notions of the content of intended objects, intentional and real content. I,

myself, am the real content (*noesis*). The relationships between the essence and *noema*, *noema* and *noesis* and *noema* and transcendent object are also explored in this chapter. The second part of the chapter focuses on the conflict between Aron Gurwitsch and Dagfinn Føllesdal on *noema*. These two remain great milestones in the discussion of *noema*, and a deeper exploration reveals that they seem to be on two sides of the same coin. Gurwitsch's is a notion of perceptual *noema*, i.e., the perceived meaning. Though this notion is not found in *Logical Investigations*, it can be observed in its rudimentary form, especially when Husserl makes a distinction between quality and matter. But Husserl discusses the notion of *noema* in every possible manner in *Ideas I*. One thing is for sure: Gurwitsch's notion of perceptual *noema* goes far beyond the notion of sense perception, and it refers to meanings. The twelve theses of Føllesdal with regard to *noema* based on *Ideas III* are also analysed. In fact, this is the only major source of reference for Føllesdal, though he occasionally referred to *Ideas I*, which in turn is the sole source for Gurwitsch. Apart from Gurwitsch and Føllesdal, scholars like David Smith, Roland MacIntyre, William McKenna, Lenore Langsdorf, Mary Jeanne Larabee and several others have explored the notion of *noema* very seriously, though none surpassed Gurwitsch and Føllesdal. Apart from these, several first-generation disciples of Husserl like Alfred Schütz, Joseph J. Kochelmans and many others also examined the notion of *noema*. Critical analyses of these two scholars' works on *noema* prove that there is little difference between their works, akin to the description of two different sides of the same coin, both of which are essential to paint a complete picture of *noema*.

There is hardly any discussion of the human body in traditional philosophy, and even when the latter was discussed in philosophical contexts, it was held to be an objective, material and physical thing existing in space and time. In *Husserl's Examination of Lived Body* (Chapter 7), we explore Husserl's notion of the lived body, which differed in a very fundamental and foundational manner from traditional philosophy. Its significance grows even now, the distinction between *Körper*, the worldly, physical and objective body, and *Leib*, the living human body. He further added a revolutionary statement that *Leib* was a priori necessary condition to have *Körper*. Husserl's study of body varied at different periods. He started his discussion on body in 1907 in his lectures, *Thing and Space*, and continued the same during his winter semester lectures of 1910-11, *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, *Ideas II* and *Ideas III*, *Nature and Spirit*, *Phenomenological Psychology*, *Cartesian Mediations* (Husserl, 2006g), *Problems of Inter-subjectivity*, *Life world* and in several other manuscripts. *Leib* has several characteristics, such as organ and field of freedom, organ of perception, zero point of orientation. Husserl's contention that lived body is inserted between the material world and the subjective sphere of consciousness is worth noting. Husserl discusses, not only one's

own body, but also the lived body of the other, and this is made possible by means of his concept of empathetic transfer. The importance Husserl confers to the primacy of touch is also studied very carefully. This poses a hypothetical question: what happens to me if I do not have a lived body? The answer to such a question is this: I shall definitely fall into solipsism. In conclusion, a few points essential to the understanding of lived body are discussed.

*Husserl on Life world: A Conceptual Overview* is the central theme of discussion in Chapter 8. This is a very crucial notion in later Husserlian literatures, especially in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. What does it consist of? Who were its architects? What does it mean? The crisis originated when western philosophy began to move away from concrete and positive realities of everyday experience towards abstract generalisations and objectively valid statements that provide knowledge. In other words, the everyday experiences of the real objective world, the bedrock of phenomenology, were pushed to the background, and instead, the exact and objectively valid knowledge of abstract constructions were brought to the forefront and treated as the most important concerns of daily life. The most eminent scholar who brought out this transformation was Galileo Galilei. Husserl, being a trained mathematician, realized the danger of grasping the universe in mathematical, geometrical terms and abstract frameworks. This is the crisis, not only of European sciences, but rather of any science whatsoever. It consists precisely in this transformation from the concrete to the abstract, from singular to the general. What might then the solution be? The solution consists in retracing one's roots and restart philosophising from the very foundations of one's life. This origin of philosophical speculation is called Life world, the world of the positive and concrete. The world of science is a superstructure built upon it, without which the former is not self-conscious, as claimed correctly by Husserl. Does it mean, therefore, that science, scientists and scientific theories are excluded from the purview of Life world? It appears to be so early on, but Husserl brings them into the purview of Life world in the later part of the discussion. Here, one might accuse Husserl of being unfaithful to his original insight, but a deeper analysis reveals that this is a requirement for expanding the horizon of phenomenology. Furthermore, Husserl defends his contentions with valid reasons and cogent justifications.

Chapter 9 speaks of *Husserl's Notion of the Other and Intersubjectivity*. Several scholars consider the fact that Husserl hardly speaks of the other as one of his fundamental weaknesses. This might be true for those familiar only with *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I* (Husserl's static phenomenology phase). This paints an incomplete picture in the understanding of Husserl's phenomenology since his directions transformed completely in *Ideas II* and *Ideas III* (genetic phenomenology phase) (Husserl, 1980b, 1989c). This

crystalizes further when one probes Husserl's 1909-1910 Winter semester lectures published entitled, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, wherein Husserl speaks of the ontology of individuality of I-monads, the plurality of I, monads found through empathy, empathy and other I, the plurality of egos, and the empathy and inter-subjectivity. Later, in *Cartesian Meditations, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, and in the post-*Crisis* period, he speaks extensively about the other. Ultimately, we need to understand that the *V Meditation* in *Cartesian Meditations* is exclusively devoted to the notion of the other. The distinctions between perception and apperception, presentation and appresentation are crucial to the discussion on the notion of the other. Husserl continued to work on the notion of the other until the last days of his philosophical career. Post-*Cartesian Meditations* discusses the notions of horizontal intentionality, open subjectivity, etc. There is no contradiction between Husserl's transcendental phase and genetic phase with regard to the notion of the other. I do not claim that Husserl solved the problem of the other absolutely, all he does is pave a sure and certain path, not just towards understanding the issues connected with the notion of the other, but also a possible solution to the same.

Chapter 10 focuses on *Husserl's Understanding of Lived Time*. Husserl analysed the issue of time from 1893, long before his phenomenological insight, starting with *Logical Investigations*. In fact, temporality is the only notion that Husserl studied throughout his life at different times. His lectures on time consciousness in the winter semester of 1904-1905 were edited first by Edith Stein and later on by Heidegger, and it was published under the title, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness and Internal Time* (Husserl, 1991b), followed by *Bernau Manuscripts* (Husserl, 2001d) in 1917-18, and finally, *C-Manuscripts* (Husserl, 1999) in 1920-36. According to Husserl, the question of time provides unity to all phenomenological notions in general, and that a phenomenological elucidation of time consciousness cannot be undertaken without looking into the constitution of temporal objects. Husserl, being completely convinced about the validity of his initial insights on time, never changed it, rather, developed and enriched it, eventually appending increasingly important phenomenologically notes and significant thrusts to it, some of which are discussed here. Temporality is grounded in the intentionality of consciousness, and the latter being temporal, infuses everything associated with it to be temporal. It is essential to distinguish temporal objects from the three temporal moments of inner time structures, viz., primal impression, retention and protention. Lived time is subjective, whose characteristics are its spreadoutness and flowing nature. Amongst the three temporal moments, primal impression, i.e., the now phase, enjoys a certain privileged position. It is the absolute point of reference for our conscious life. It is only in relation to the now phase that the past and future

appear. Retention or fresh or primary memory is the consciousness of the immediate past or the just past. Finally, protention is intuition directed towards what is yet-to-come, it is an openness to the immediate future. Husserl speaks of three different modes of the same time consciousness, the first being the consciousness of the object, the intentional consciousness that constitutes objective time. The second is subjective time constituted in our experiences, namely, lived time, which is the temporality of subjectivity, the source of which is absolute time consciousness. It constitutes, not just subjective time, but also itself. In other words, absolute time consciousness arises due to the self-temporalisation of the transcendental ego, and according to the same, I am my experiences, i.e., there is an identity between myself and my experiences, cemented by self-temporalisation.

Chapter 11 is an *Appendix on Presuppositionlessness in Phenomenology*. Husserl's claim that phenomenology is a presuppositionless science has disturbed me immensely since the commencement of my studies in phenomenology for various reasons. Articles and books by eminent scholars only served to confuse me further. Finally, after a search of almost two decades, I have managed to understand the core of this idea, which is elucidated in this chapter.

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