



THE RELEVANCE OF HUSSERL'S *EIDETIC* REDUCTION METHODOLOGY AND ITS EFFECT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a critical examination of Edmund Husserl's eidetic reduction as a method for accessing the essential structures of human knowledge. By bracketing the natural attitude our everyday, unquestioned engagement with the world Husserl sought to purify consciousness, allowing for a direct intuition of essences. This inquiry delves into the nature of this method, exploring its potential to illuminate the fundamental structures of human experience. Through the use of conceptual analysis and phenomenological method, the paper will assess the efficacy of eidetic reduction in revealing essential knowledge. It will examine the strengths and limitations of this approach, considering its contributions to understanding consciousness, perception, and intentionality. By critically evaluating Husserl's eidetic reduction, this paper thus contribute to ongoing philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge, the structure of consciousness, and the methodology of phenomenological inquiry. It seeks to clarify the value and limitations of this method as a tool for understanding the human experience

Keywords: Knowledge, eidetic reduction, phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, philosophy, consciousness

Introduction

Edmund Husserl is considered one of the main founders of the school of philosophical phenomenology. A central concept in Husserl's phenomenological method is "*eidetic* reduction," which refers to the systematic process of focusing on essences rather than facts to gain insight into the structures of conscious experience (Anthony, 2017:357–371). Through phenomenological reduction, Husserl tried to reach pure consciousness and perceive phenomena exactly as they present themselves to consciousness, without prejudices or beliefs. This paper examines in detail Husserl's *eidetic* reduction methodology and its effect on the development of human knowledge and understanding. It explores Husserl's view that essential truths or "*eidetic* laws" that govern phenomena can be intuited through phenomenological reduction. The subjective and objective context is divided into two, only the pure nature of the phenomena remains in consciousness. This essence can then be explored to reveal insights into the universal structures of experience.

The work further assesses the extent to which Husserl believed that *eidetic* reduction could advance philosophy and the sciences by grounding them in indisputable certainty understood through intuitive understanding rather than empirical facts. Possible limitations of Husserl's methodology are also considered, such as the accusation that total reduction is impossible to achieve and the risk of losing contact with lived experience (Adekola, J. 2018). The essence



of the study is to critically analyze Husserl's method and determine its value as an approach to gaining knowledge about the fundamental nature of conscious reality.

Understanding Husserl Reductionism

Reduction as a method of philosophical inquiry has a long tradition dating back to ancient thinkers, but Edmund Husserl developed it into a rigorous form known as phenomenological or *eidetic* reduction. According to Husserl, by practicing reduction, humans can suspend usual assumptions and prejudices in order to obtain a clearer picture of the basic structures of conscious experiences (Husserl, 2019). Although reductionism has both promise and limitations as knowledge, looking at it through personal experience can provide new insights into the inner world.

As Husserl explains, reduction suspends usual “natural attitude” where humans take the world and their place in it for granted (Marosan, 2021): Instead, it asks to reflect on the phenomena or objects directly given to the consciousness, bracketing aside questions of their correspondence to an external reality. In this way, reduction aims to uncover “the things themselves,” divesting people of theoretical overlay or blind spots stemming from habitual thought patterns. At its most reductive, it leads to a kind of radical introspection where even the notion of an ego or self is set aside, leaving only the flux and contents of experience (Dudley, and Stolton 2020).

But radical reductionism to that extent risks losing personal perspective and meaning. As we gain an understanding of essences, it distances us from the richness and complexity of lived experience. By using reduction to reflect on moments, individuals can see important structures of consciousness in a context close to their hearts. For example, reducing a happy memory suspends its objective conditions but preserves the quality of joy itself in a purer perceptual form, revealing its essential phenomenological structure. In this way, reduction does not have to deny subjectivity, but can embrace it as the key to self-knowledge.

Moreover, returning to personal experiences through reduction sheds light on how essence and existence interweave in consciousness. As Husserl notes, “essential truths are grounded in factual truths” — that is, *eidetic* insights have their wellspring in the real flow of lived events (Carta, 2021). By reducing a memory, emotion or perception from own biography, human see essence emerging within existence rather than abstracted from it.

Idea of Eidetic Reduction

Husserl's *eidetic* reduction, a fundamental concept in phenomenology, involves isolating the essential features or “essences” of an object or experience to reveal its fundamental structures (Husserl, 1931). This method, intertwined with the phenomenological *epoché* and reduction, aims to uncover the core essence of a phenomenon by stripping away accidental aspects (Husserl, 1970). Husserl's *eidetic* reduction provides a methodological framework for accessing and understanding the essential structures of human knowledge and consciousness, emphasizing the importance of uncovering the core essence of phenomena while eliminating external influences.

Eidetic reduction is a technique in the study of essences in phenomenology whose goal is to identify the basic components of phenomena. *Eidetic* reduction requires that a



phenomenologist examine the essence of a mental object, be it a simple mental act, or the unity of consciousness itself, with the intention of drawing out the absolutely necessary and invariable components that make the mental object what it is. This reduction is done with the intention of removing what is perceived, and leaving only what is required. *Eidetic* reduction in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology aims to uncover the essential and unchanging elements that define phenomena, whether simple mental acts or the unity of consciousness. This process involves the method of *Eidetic* variation, where the phenomenologist imagines an object under study and alters its characteristics to determine its essential features (Moran, 2005). By subjecting the object to changes and observing its survival, one can distinguish between essential and non-essential traits, thereby grasping the essence of the object or mental act (Kersten, 1983). This method allows for a deeper exploration of the nature of mental objects and aids in identifying the fundamental constituents that shape their being, contributing to a more profound understanding of consciousness and phenomenological inquiry (ibid).

The question delves into the concept of reductionism using the example of Cartesian polish, highlighting how its physical properties can change while still maintaining its essence as polish. This scenario aligns with the debate on whether the mind is physically reducible, as the wax's fundamental nature persists despite alterations in sensory attributes like taste, smell, and texture. Additionally, the spatial localization of sensory images and non-sensory elements in consciousness supports the idea that mental phenomena possess spatial characteristics; reinforcing the notion that reductionism may not fully capture the complexity of the mind.

By exploring the wax's transformations and the spatial aspects of consciousness, we can contemplate the intricate relationship between physical properties and underlying essence, shedding light on the limitations of reductionist perspectives in understanding complex phenomena like the mind. is necessary for the existence of that wax. Ideational reduction is a form of imaginative transformation that seeks to reduce phenomena to their necessary essence. This involves theoretically altering various elements of the real object (while mentally observing whether the phenomenon changes) to change the properties necessary for it to be that object and not something else. It is done by knowing if a property does not change the object, then the property is unnecessary to the object's essence and vice versa.

There are three basic steps in *eidetic* reduction. First, select a specific example (such as triangle). Then use your imagination to modify the example. The third step involves finding out what cannot be deleted while the example remains intact. What cannot be removed is part of the essence of this example. For example, a triangle remains a triangle if one of its sides is extended, but ceases to be a triangle if a fourth side is added. This indicates that a triangle must have three sides, but no particular side length is required.

Consciousness

The words “conscious” and “consciousness” are umbrella terms that cover a wide variety of mental phenomena. Both are used with a diversity of meanings, and the adjective “conscious” is heterogeneous in its range, being applied both to whole organisms creature consciousness and to particular mental states and processes state consciousness.



Consciousness is one of the most profound and debated topics in philosophy, cognitive science, and psychology. It refers to the state of being aware of and able to think about one's own existence, thoughts, and surroundings. The complexity of consciousness has led to various theories and perspectives, each attempting to explain its nature, origins, and functions. This critical discussion will examine key aspects of consciousness, its philosophical and scientific implications, and the challenges that arise in understanding this enigmatic phenomenon.

Consciousness is often described in terms of awareness and intentionality. Awareness refers to the subjective experience of being aware of something, while intentionality, a concept emphasized by philosophers like Edmund Husserl, refers to the directedness of consciousness towards objects or states of affairs. This duality of consciousness highlights its experiential and relational aspects. The essential structure of consciousness is a complex and multifaceted topic that has been explored across various fields such as philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive science:

Exploration of Intentionality

Intentionality is a fundamental concept in philosophy, particularly in the areas of phenomenology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. In other words, intentionality is the ability of mental states to be about something, to represent or refer to something beyond themselves. The concept of intentionality was first introduced by the German philosopher Franz Brentano in the late 19th century..

Edmund Husserl's philosophy is based on the idea of intentionality, which he defines as the directedness or aboutness of mental states towards objects or aspects of the world (Moran, 2000). He believed that intentionality is the fundamental structure of consciousness and is what allows us to experience and understand the world around us. He also believed that intentionality includes a wide range of phenomena, from perceptions, judgments, and memories to the experience of other conscious subjects as subjects (inter-subjective experience) and aesthetic experience, inactive mark of mental states, what sets them apart from physical states. He claimed that mental states are characterized by their intentionality, their ability to be directed towards objects or aspects of the world.

One of the key features of intentionality is its directionality. Mental states are not just passive receptacles of information, but are actively directed towards objects or aspects of the world. This directionality is what allows us to think about, perceive, and interact with the world around us.

Another important aspect of intentionality is its selectivity. Mental states are not just directed towards any object or aspect of the world, but are selective in what they represent or refer to. For example, when we think about a specific person, our thought is directed towards that person and not towards others.

Intentionality is also a contextual concept. The meaning and reference of mental states are determined by the context in which they occur. For example, the meaning of the word "bank" changes depending on whether we are talking about a financial institution or the side of a river.



The philosophy of intentionality has been developed and expanded by many philosophers, including Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and John Searle. Husserl, in particular, developed a comprehensive theory of intentionality, which he called "*phenomenology*." He argued that intentionality is the fundamental structure of consciousness, and that it is what allows us to experience and understand the world around us. Heidegger, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of intentionality in understanding human existence and our relationship with the world. He argued that our intentional states are not just passive representations of the world, but are actively engaged with the world and shape our understanding of it. Searle, a contemporary philosopher, has developed a theory of intentionality that emphasizes its social and cultural aspects. He argues that intentionality is not just an individual phenomenon, but is shaped by social and cultural norms and practices.

In addition to its philosophical significance, intentionality has also been the subject of scientific study, particularly in the fields of cognitive science and neuroscience. Researchers have investigated the neural mechanisms that underlie intentional states, such as attention and perception, and have developed theories of how intentionality arises from the interaction of cognitive and neural processes.

Husserl himself analyzes intentionality in terms of three central ideas: intentional act, intentional object, and intentional content. It is arguably in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* that these ideas receive their first systematic treatment as distinct but correlative elements in the structure of thought and experience. The clarity of these three notions based on Husserl's main commitments, though not always using his exact terminology.

Intentional Act

An intentional act is a purposeful action directed towards a specific goal or outcome, often involving control, knowledge, and a sense of agency. Control over an action is seen as a key element in making it non-accidental and intentional (Pacherie, 2008), while the sense of agency refers to the subjective experience of controlling one's actions and their consequences (Haggard 2008). Intentionality involves the projection of actions towards imagined goals, especially in contexts of uncertainty, where economic agents experiment with new courses of action and goals (Shackle, 1961). The complexity of intentional actions is further highlighted in the context of Tourette Syndrome, where the classification of tics as intentional actions challenges traditional frameworks and emphasizes the interplay between intentions, actions, and outcomes (Haggard, 2004). Understanding intentionality in actions involves a nuanced consideration of control, knowledge, agency, and the purposeful projection of actions towards desired outcomes.

The intentional act or psychological mode of a thought is the particular kind of mental event that it is, whether this be perceiving, believing, evaluating, remembering, or something else. The intentional act can be distinguished from its object, which is the topic, thing, or state of affairs that the act is about. So the intentional state of seeing a white dog can be analyzed in terms of its intentional act, visually perceiving, and in terms of its intentional object, a white dog. Intentional act and intentional object are distinct since it is possible for the same kind of intentional act to be directed at different objects (perceiving a tree vs. perceiving a pond vs. perceiving a house) and for different intentional acts to be directed at the same object. At the



same time the two notions are correlative. For any intentional mental event it would make no sense to speak of it as involving an act without an intentional object any more than it would to say that the event involved an intentional object but no act or way of attending to that object (no intentional act). The notion of intentionality as a correlation between subject and object is a prominent theme in Husserl's Phenomenology.

Intentional Object

Intentional objects play a crucial role in theories of intentionality, representing targets of mental states. Various philosophers have proposed different views on intentional objects, ranging from the denial of their existence in Extreme Realism to their acceptance as merely intentional objects in Moderate Realism (Searle, 1983). These intentional objects, such as immanent objects, entities "beyond being and non-being," and purely intentional objects, serve as targets of the subject's intention, replacing common sense objects of reference (Moran, 2001). Additionally, the analysis of intentionality extends to virtual objects, where the experience of virtual and physical objects shares structural similarities, highlighting the ethical significance of virtual objects and the need for further research in this area (Chalmers, 2017). However, criticisms have been raised regarding the conception of intentionality, such as Chisholm's differentiation between the ontological and psychological theses and the confusion between semantic and mental concepts, which obscure the true meaning of intentionality (Searle, 1983).

Intentional Content

The third element of the structure of intentionality identified by Husserl is the intentional content. It is a matter of some controversy to what extent and in what way intentional content is truly distinct from the intentional object in Husserl's writings. The basic idea, however, can be stated without too much difficulty. The intentional content of an intentional event is the way in which the subject thinks about or presents to herself the intentional object. The idea here is that a subject does not just think about an intentional object simpliciter; rather the subject always thinks of the object or experiences it from a certain perspective and as being a certain way or as being a certain kind of thing. Thus one does not just perceive the moon, one perceives it "as bright", "as half full" or "as particularly close to the horizon". For that matter, one perceives it "as the moon" rather than as some other heavenly body. Intentional content can be thought of along the lines of a description or set of information that the subject takes to characterize or be applicable to the intentional objects of her thought. Thus, in thinking that there is a red apple in the kitchen the subject entertains a certain presentation of her kitchen and of the apple that she takes to be in it and it is in virtue of this that she succeeds in directing her thought towards these things rather than something else or nothing at all. It is important to note, however, that for Husserl intentional content is not essentially linguistic. While intentional content always involves presenting an object in one way rather than another, Husserl maintained that the most basic kinds of intentionality, including perceptual intentionality, are not essentially linguistic. Indeed, for Husserl, meaningful use of language is itself to be analyzed in terms of more fundamental underlying intentional states. For this reason characterizations of intentional content in terms of "descriptive content" have their limits in the context of Husserl's thought.

Intentional content is also a key concept in phenomenology, especially in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. It refers to the directedness or aboutness of mental states how our thoughts,



perceptions, and imaginations are always directed towards something. This "something" is the intentional object, and the way it is presented or experienced constitutes the intentional content.

Intentional content is the essence of what makes mental states directed towards something. Husserl posits that every act of consciousness is intentional, meaning it is always about an object, whether real or imagined. This object is referred to as the intentional object, and the manner in which it is presented or experienced is the intentional content. For example, the experience of seeing a tree involves not just the tree as an object but the tree as seen its color, shape, and the context in which it appears.

Husserl distinguishes between *noesis* and *noema* in his phenomenological framework. *Noesis* refers to the subjective act of consciousness, the intentional directedness towards an object of experience, while *noema* represents the objective content or meaning intended in that act of consciousness (Husserl, 1931). The *noema* is the aspect of the intended object that remains within the transcendental domain after the phenomenological reduction, sparking debates on its relation to the object itself (ibid). The *noema* is a complex notion that arises from the *epoche*, aiming to maintain distance from transcendent objects, leading to a multiplication of intentional objects and complicating the notions of sense and meaning. Husserl's concepts of *noesis* and *noema* have also been considered valuable in contemporary feminist, gender, and transgender theories, showcasing their enduring relevance and potential for diverse philosophical applications (Dorion, 1960).

Conclusion

Edmund Husserl's *eidetic* reduction is a methodological tool designed to purify our understanding of the world by bracketing out the natural attitude, or our everyday, unquestioned beliefs about reality. Through this process, we aim to access the essential structures of consciousness, or *eidetic* structures. These are the universal, unchanging forms that underlie our experiences. Husserl argued that by focusing on these essential structures, we can achieve a rigorous and objective knowledge of the human mind. The *eidetic* reduction, he believed, allows us to bypass the complexities of the empirical world and delve directly into the realm of pure consciousness, in doing so, we can uncover the fundamental principles that govern our perception, thought, and experience.

By employing the *eidetic* reduction, Husserl hoped to establish phenomenology as a rigorous science of consciousness. He sought to demonstrate that through careful introspection and analysis, we can attain a level of certainty about the structure of the mind that is comparable to the certainty of mathematics or logic. Husserl's *eidetic* reduction is a powerful and innovative approach to understanding the human mind. It offers a method for systematically investigating the structures of consciousness, thereby providing a foundation for a rigorous science of the mind. However, the method is not without its challenges.

Critics argue that the *eidetic* reduction is overly idealistic and that it neglects the embodied and social dimensions of human experience. Additionally, the claim to achieve a level of certainty comparable to mathematics or logic has been questioned. Despite these criticisms, Husserl's work remains influential and continues to inspire philosophical and psychological inquiry.



While the *eidetic* reduction may not provide a complete or definitive account of human knowledge, it offers a valuable tool for exploring the complexities of consciousness. By carefully considering the strengths and limitations of this method, we can gain deeper insights into the nature of human experience and the structure of the mind. Ultimately, the *eidetic* reduction serves as a reminder of the importance of philosophical reflection in our pursuit of knowledge.

In essence, Husserl's *eidetic* reduction invites us to step back from our ordinary world and examine the very structures of our consciousness. It is a call to philosophical rigor and a search for the essential truths underlying our experiences. While the journey may be challenging, the potential rewards in terms of understanding ourselves and the world around us are profound

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