The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy

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Instinct

Publication details
Nam-In Lee
Published online on: 25 Aug 2020

How to cite: Nam-In Lee. 25 Aug 2020, Instinct from: The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy Routledge
Accessed on: 27 Jun 2023

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Edmund Husserl first addresses the issue of instinct in the Fifth *Logical Investigation* and develops the phenomenology of instincts in his later phenomenology as the deepest layer of genetic phenomenology. This development can shed new light on the basic character of his phenomenology as a whole. Moreover, it has the potential to be developed further in many different directions. In order to understand the phenomenology of instincts properly, one has to begin by clarifying the ambiguity of the concept of instinct itself.

**Two concepts of instinct: instinct as instinctive behavior and as innate drive**

As Max Scheler points out, instinct is a “very controversial and unclear concept” [*ein seiner Deutung und seinem Sinne nach sehr umstrittenes dunkles Wort*]. It is ambiguous in many respects. Among the various concepts of instinct, the following two are the most important: 1) instinctive behavior; and 2) the innate drive that is specific to a species.

First, instinct as instinctive behavior means the “distinct behavior pattern” of a species such as the nesting of birds or the copulation of animals. Instinct is something that every entity of a species is innately equipped with, like a kind of automaton. Its operation is completely determined, just like the operation of a machine.

Whereas instinct in this sense plays a decisively important role in an animal's life, it does not play any important role at all in human life. The reason for this is because the various instincts that have been decisively engraved in an animal’s life have been reduced in human life so that their activity has become insignificant. This is precisely the central point of Arnold Gehlen’s theory of “instinct-reduction,” implying that there is a “surprising deficiency in genuine instincts” in the case of humans.

The concept of instinct as instinctive behavior is used in some natural-scientific disciplines, such as evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology, and animal psychology, as well as in some disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, such as philosophical anthropology and theology. It was first widely used in the theory of the animal mind in the Christian theology of the Middle Ages. Creatures were considered to be endowed by God with instinct through the act of creation. This concept of instinct was handed down to the empirical sciences of the nineteenth century, even though the latter took a critical stance toward the notion of the divine origin of instinct.
Second, instinct as innate drive means the innate power that propels an organism belonging to a species to head toward specific types of objects. It is a power working inside the organism. Therefore it is different from a physical force that can be transferred from one object to another.

Yet it is not just animals who possess instinct as innate drive; humans do as well, and, indeed, possess more instincts than animals do. Humans possess most of the instincts that animals possess, such as the slumber instinct, the hunger instinct, the sexual instinct, and so on. But in addition, humans have instincts that are inherent only to humans and that animals do not possess. Representative examples are the knowledge instinct, the artistic instinct, the moral instinct, the religious instinct, and so on. One could certainly not propose the idea of instinct-reduction with respect to this concept of instinct. Instead, the number of instincts is enlarged in humans, and the idea of instinct-reduction should be replaced by that of instinct-enlargement.

Instinct as innate drive manifests itself through the organism’s behavior. In this respect, there is no essential difference between humans and animals. The difference between them simply lies in the kind of behavior through which each respective type of instinct is manifested. Whereas instinct in animals manifests itself through behavior without deliberation, instinct in humans manifests itself in many cases after having gone through rational deliberation.

This concept of instinct has a long history. One can find it, for example, in Aristotle, who opens his discussion in *Metaphysics* with the remark that man desires to learn. The desire [*orexis*] that Aristotle mentions there is instinct, since it is the innate drive that propels humans to pursue knowledge in general. In addition to Aristotle, there are many proponents of this concept of instinct, such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who deals with an innate moral drive as the central concept of moral philosophy; Friedrich Schiller, who deals with an innate aesthetic drive as the central concept of aesthetics; and William James, who deals with “special human instincts” that are inherent only to humans.

The phenomenological concept of instinct

Among the two concepts of instinct discussed above, it is the concept of instinct as innate drive that could qualify as a phenomenological concept of instinct. The phenomenological concept of instinct differs from the natural-scientific one. Whereas the latter is established through “observation from the outside” [*Aussenbetrachtung*], the former is established through “observation from within” [*Innenbetrachtung*]. The concept of instinct as instinctive behavior is a natural-scientific concept, since instinctive behavior is experienced through “observation from the outside” [*Aussenbetrachtung*]. In contrast, the concept of instinct as innate drive is a phenomenological concept, since instinct as innate drive is experienced in “observation from within” [*Innenbetrachtung*].

It is the phenomenological concept of instinct that Husserl relies upon in developing his phenomenology of instincts. Instinct as innate drive is a kind of intentionality, and as such, it has the structure of a noetic–noematic correlation. On the one hand, it has the noesis as a kind of intentionality that Husserl calls “instinctive intentionality.” On the other hand, it has the object toward which it is directed, namely, the noema. In this case, noema means the “specific types of objects” toward which the instinct is heading. For example, in the case of the hunger instinct, food becomes the noema, and in the case of the slumber instinct, sleep becomes the noema. Since diverse types of instincts exist, the noema too will differ in correlation with the different types of instinctive intentionality.

The phenomenological concept of instinct can be clarified in two different attitudes, namely, in the phenomenological–psychological attitude and in the transcendental-phenomenological attitude. Correspondingly, the phenomenological concept of instinct takes two different forms,
namely, the phenomenological-psychological concept or the “psychological concept of instinct” (Hua XLII, 119) on the one hand and the transcendental-phenomenological concept of instinct on the other. The former is the basic concept of the phenomenological psychology of instincts, whereas the latter is the basic concept of the transcendental phenomenology of instincts.

**Phenomenological psychology of instincts**

It is the task of phenomenological psychology to clarify the “essential forms” [*Wesensformen*] of the various kinds of lived experience. It is the task of the phenomenological psychology of instincts, as a sub-discipline of phenomenological psychology, to clarify the essential forms of instincts. The preliminary analysis of the phenomenological concept of instinct carried out above is in part a phenomenological-psychological analysis of instinct.

Husserl’s analysis of instinct as a topic in phenomenological psychology has its beginning in the Fifth *Logical Investigation* from 1900/1901. The phenomenology developed there is a phenomenology of the natural attitude, and as such, it is a phenomenological psychology, not a transcendental phenomenology. As the title of the Fifth *Logical Investigation*—“On intentional experiences and their ‘contents’” [*Über intentionale Erlebnisse und ihre ‘Inhalte’*]—shows, there Husserl attempts to analyze the structure of intentionality. He makes a general distinction between intentional experience and non-intentional experience. Intentional experience contains as one of its constitutive components an objectifying act as “the conscious representation of its goal” [*die bewusste Zielvorstellung*], whereas non-intentional experience does not contain such an act.

After Husserl establishes the distinction between intentional experience and non-intentional experience in the sphere of perception, he raises the question whether it is possible for us to make such a distinction within the “sphere of natural instinct” (Hua XIX/1, 409/Husserl 2001, 111). He gives a positive reply to this question: It is also possible for us to make a distinction between an intentional instinct that has “the conscious representation of its goal” and a non-intentional instinct that does not have such a representation. He interprets the “conscious representation” contained in an intentional instinct as one carried out in the mode of “indeterminateness” [*Unbestimmtheit*] (Hua XIX/1, 410/Husserl 2001, 111).

In his later philosophy, however, Husserl no longer follows this line of investigation in his intentional analysis of instincts, and he drops the idea that instinct is founded on an indeterminate conscious representation. The invalidation of this idea leads him to characterize the genetically lower instincts—which would be characterized as non-intentional experience in the Fifth *Logical Investigation*—as intentional wherever they display the trait of “directedness-toward.” And, as can be gathered from the extensive manuscripts written after the 1920s, in his later philosophy Husserl does actually ascribe intentionality to the lower instincts. Thus, for example, he characterizes “inborn instincts as an intentionality that belongs to the original essential structure of psychic being” (Hua-Mat VIII, 169).

After the shift in the concept of instinctive intentionality, the instinctive intentionalities are divided into those that are not interwoven with conscious representations and those that are. The former represent the less developed form, whereas the latter represent the more developed form. Thus the distinction between “intentional” and “non-intentional” instinct made in the Fifth *Logical Investigation* turns out to be merely a distinction between two different genetic modes of intentional instinct.

In addition to the task of clarifying the possibility of defining instinct as either intentional or non-intentional experience, there are many other tasks of the phenomenological psychology of instincts. For example, one of its important tasks is to clarify the essential structure of each of the
various kinds of instinct such as the instinct for nourishment, the sexual instinct, the maternal instinct, the social instinct, the instinct of curiosity, the instinct of objectification, the instinct of self-preservation, and so on. On the basis of the clarification of the various kinds of instinct, one can then try to clarify whether there are “layers of instincts” [Stufen von Instinkten] (Hua XLII, 118). Another task of the phenomenological psychology of instincts is to clarify the distinction and the relationship between instincts and “acquired drives” [erworbene Triebe] (Hua XLII, 83), as well as the relationship between instinct and habituality [Habitualität] (Hua XLII, 93). The relationship between instinct and “reason” is also an important topic of the phenomenological psychology of instincts, as Husserl unexpectedly defines “reason itself” as “a transformed instinct” [Vernunft selbst <ist> verwandelter Instinkt] (Hua XLII, 134).

Now, as we have seen, the phenomenological-psychological analysis of instincts forced Husserl to withdraw some basic assumptions that guide the intentional analyses of the Logical Investigations and Ideas I. This withdrawal results in a radical change of his phenomenology in his later philosophy. As already mentioned, one assumption is that there is a sharp distinction between intentional and non-intentional experience. But there are also two other assumptions—namely, the second assumption that “Each intentional experience is either an objectifying act or has such an act as its ‘foundation’” (Hua XIX/1, 514/Husserl 2001, 167, trans. altered), and the third assumption that there is a sharp distinction between cognition, emotion, and volition.

Let me consider the second assumption. As indicated above, the genetically lower instinct that is not founded on an objectifying act as a conscious representation is nevertheless called intentional experience, since it is directed toward some object. Contrary to what Husserl thought in the Fifth Logical Investigation, it is directedness toward something that is the essence of intentional experience. Thus, the assumption that the intentional experience is either an objectifying act or has such an act as its “foundation” is withdrawn. And once this assumption has been withdrawn, Husserl can speak of the “intentionality” (M III 3 II 1, 29) of mood or of “unconscious intentionality,” even though they are neither an objectifying act nor have such an act as their foundation.

I will now consider the third assumption that there is a sharp distinction between cognition, emotion, and volition. The clarification of the structure of any experience reveals that such a distinction cannot be made. Let us take the experience (E) of tasting a meal (M) carried out by a person (P) who wishes to satisfy the instinct of nourishment. E has cognition as one of its components, since E could not take place if P does not know that M exists. Moreover, E has will as another of its components, since P strives to satisfy the instinct of nourishment, and this striving is nothing other than a will. Finally, E has feeling as a third component, since in tasting M, P experiences satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and this is nothing other than the feeling. Thus E turns out to have at least three components—cognition, will, and feeling—and is a mixture of these components. But since E has all of these components, it could be named after any one of them; it could be called cognition or will or feeling. This implies that there is no sharp distinction between cognition, will, and feeling, and Husserl accordingly maintains “that reason allows for no differentiation into ‘theoretical,’ ‘practical,’ ‘aesthetic,’ or whatever” [daß Vernunft keine Unterscheidung in ‘theoretische,’ ‘praktische’ und ‘aesthetische’ und was immer zulässt] (Hua VI, 275/Husserl 1970, 341).

**Transcendental phenomenology of instincts**

It is the aim of transcendental phenomenology to clarify the structure of the transcendental constitution of the world and worldly objects. Husserl conceives of his transcendental phe-
nomenology as a systematic whole comprising both static phenomenology and genetic phenomenology. It is the aim of static phenomenology to clarify the structure of the foundation of validity [*Geltung*] in transcendental constitution, whereas it is the aim of genetic phenomenology to clarify the structure of the foundation of genesis [*Genesis*] in transcendental constitution. As blind intentionality, instinct cannot be the origin of validity, but is the genetic origin of the various kinds of consciousness. This implies that the transcendental phenomenology of instinct is a discipline of genetic phenomenology; it is the most original among the various fields of genetic phenomenology.

It is thus the aim of the transcendental phenomenology of instincts to clarify the constitutive function of the different kinds of instinct in the different layers of transcendental genesis. In order to develop the transcendental phenomenology of instincts systematically from the perspective of transcendental genesis, we have to distinguish different layers within the unity of transcendental genesis, such as the scientific layer, the pre-scientific layer, the sensual layer, and the pre-sensual layer, and we have to analyze the transcendental function of different kinds of instinct on each of these layers.

Let us begin with the analysis of the pre-sensual layer as the most original layer of transcendental genesis. The pre-sensual layer of transcendental genesis is devoid not only of scientific intentionality, but also of the different kinds of intentionality at work in the constitution of the pre-scientific lifeworld and the sensual world, since it is a layer that we get by dismantling the scientific, the pre-scientific, and the sensual layer of transcendental genesis. This does not mean, however, that it is a layer totally devoid of intentionality. In fact, it is a layer equipped with different kinds of instinctive intentionality. Let us clarify this point by taking as an example of this layer the transcendental genesis of a subject in the state of sleep. A subject in the state of sleep is different from an inanimate thing without any intentionality. In order to survive, this subject has to be in constant exchange with the world and worldly objects, and this exchange is carried out through different kinds of instinct working unconsciously, such as the instinct for breathing, the instinct for self-preservation, and so on. The instincts at work on this layer are not objectifying instincts, but non-objectifying ones. As such, they are directed to the world and worldly objects, and for this reason they are called “instincts of worldliness” [*Instinkte der Weltlichkeit*] (A VI 34, 34). It is through these non-objectifying instincts that the pre-sensual world is constituted unconsciously as the most original form of the world.

Let us move from the pre-sensual to the sensual layer. The sensual layer of transcendental genesis comes into being on the basis of the pre-sensual layer. It has all the components of the pre-sensual layer. However, in contrast to the pre-sensual layer, it is also equipped with new types of intentionality—namely, different kinds of sensual intentionality such as visual, auditory, haptic, and so on. Moreover, it is equipped with the lowest level of consciousness, since sensual intentionality requires that the subject is conscious of the sensual objects. It should be noted that these new types of intentionality and the lowest level of consciousness on the sensual layer function because the subject has the striving to “know” the different kinds of sensual objects. The striving to know the different kinds of sensual objects is called the “instinct of objectifying” [*Instinkt der ‘Objektivierung’*] (Hua-Mat VIII, 258) or the “instinct of curiosity” [*Instinkt der Neugier*] (AVI 26, 60ff.). Thus, the instinct of objectifying or curiosity turns out to be the origin of the transcendental constitution of sensual objects in general.

Let us move from the sensual to the lifeworldly layer. The lifeworldly layer has new types of intentionality that could not be observed on the sensual layer, types such as memory, expectation, imagination, picture-consciousness, judgment, inference, intersubjective intentionality, moral intentionality, aesthetic intentionality, religious intentionality, and so on. These new types of intentionality are different from sensual intentionality in that they are directed to life-
worldly objects that go beyond the scope of the “here and now,” whereas sensual intentionality is directed to the sensual objects that are confined to the “here and now.” Various kinds of instinct function as the genetic foundations of various kinds of intentionality observable on the lifeworldly layer. As the instinct of objectifying repeatedly comes into play on the sensual layer, different kinds of objectifying intentionality come into being. Similarly, as different kinds of non-objectifying instinct such as the instinct of nourishment, the sexual instinct, the aesthetic instinct, the religious instinct, and the moral instinct repeatedly come into play, the different kinds of non-objectifying intentionality come into being. The different kinds of instinct and the different kinds of intentionality founded on them are the constitutive origin of the different types of world such as the world of meals, the aesthetic world, the religious world, and the moral world as partial worlds within the pre-scientific lifeworld.

Finally, let us move from the lifeworldly layer to the scientific layer. The scientific layer consists of the different kinds of scientific intentionality. There are as many types of scientific intentionality as there are different scientific disciplines. The act of carrying out transcendental reflection is also a kind of scientific intentionality. All the different kinds of scientific intentionality have their genetic origin in the instinct of curiosity discussed above. It should be noted, however, that the instinct of curiosity that is at work on the scientific layer has a different mode than the one at work on the sensual and the lifeworldly layer. It is a habitualized and systematized instinct. The instinct of curiosity and the different kinds of intentionality based on it are the constitutive origin of the different kinds of scientific world.

The following points should be added with respect to the transcendental phenomenology of instincts.

First, the different layers discussed above are the layers of the transcendental genesis that is carried out in the present horizon of transcendental subjectivity. However, each of them is something that has been built up in the past horizon and is still at work in the present horizon. For this reason, it is a further task of the transcendental phenomenology of instincts to clarify the process of “building up” each of the layers in the past by taking into account the role of various kinds of instinct in building up each of these layers.

Second, each of the different kinds of instinct is teleological, since it is directed to its object as the “telos” or the end that could satisfy it. Not only the individual instinct, but also the totality of the different kinds of instinct is teleological, since the latter is directed to the self-preservation of transcendental subjectivity as its telos. Since the totality of the different kinds of instinct is teleological, Husserl speaks of “the total instinct that comprises all the individual instincts” [der Totalinstinkt, der alle Sonderinstinkte umfasst] (E III 9, 18) or “the universal instinct that synthetically unifies all the individual instincts” [der universale Instinkt, der alle Sonderinstinkte synthetisch vereinheitlicht] (A VI 34, 37). There is thus a teleological tendency running through the total instinct or the universal instinct, and Husserl calls this tendency the “transcendental instinct” (Hua-Mat VIII, 260). Transcendental instinct is a teleology that runs not only through each individual transcendental subjectivity, but also through intersubjectivity as the totality of the individual subjectivities. This is why Husserl calls the transcendental instinct a “universal teleology” (Hua-Mat VIII, 260).

Third, the transcendental phenomenology of instinct shows that Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology has “two faces” [Doppelgesicht] (Hua XV, 617). Transcendental phenomenology is often considered to be a kind of Cartesianism, a philosophy of consciousness, or an intellectualism. However, it should be noted that this assessment represents only one of its two faces. There is another face that is represented by the phenomenology of instincts and genetic phenomenology. As the phenomenology of instincts shows, the other face of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is universal teleology is a voluntarism that emphasizes the decisive role of instinct.
for the constitution of the world and worldly objects. As such, it is a “scientific philosophy of life”\(^\text{17}\) that aims to clarify the structure of life by having recourse to the clarification of instinct as the origin of life.

**Phenomenology of instincts in post-Husserlian phenomenology and future tasks**

The different types of post-Husserlian phenomenology do not address the issue of the phenomenology of instinct. The main reason for this might be that Husserl's manuscripts on this topic were not published during his lifetime and remained unknown to phenomenologists after Husserl.

Max Scheler could have dealt with the phenomenological concept of instinct as one of the important topics of his phenomenological material ethics as well as his philosophical anthropology and his sociology of knowledge. Unfortunately, he does not deal with the phenomenological concept of instinct as a basic concept of his philosophy. This is due to the fact that in his analysis of instinct he is guided by the concept of instinct as instinctive behavior. In this context, confessing that instinct is a very unclear concept, he attempts to cope with this difficulty by defining the concept of instinct “exclusively from the so-called behavior of the living being” \[\text{[ausschliesslich vom sog. Verhalten des Lebewesens aus]}\].\(^\text{18}\) Then, guided by the concept of instinct as instinctive behavior, he speaks of “reduced instincts” \[\text{[zurückgebildete Instinkte]}\]\(^\text{19}\) in a manner similar to Arnold Gehlen.

In *Sein und Zeit*, clarifying the structure of “care” \([\text{Sorge}]\), Heidegger addresses the issue of “urge” \([\text{Drang}]\),\(^\text{20}\) which is closely related to the phenomenological concept of instinct. However, he considers “urge” to be a mere derivative mode of “care” and does not deal with the related issue of the phenomenological concept of instinct. If he had paid attention to the fact that instinct has the power of revealing the world and the existence of Dasein, he could have analyzed the phenomenological concept of instinct in a detailed manner.

As the founder of the phenomenology of freedom, Jean-Paul Sartre does not deal with the issue of instinct as the origin of moral value in *L'être et le néant*.\(^\text{21}\) However, in his later phenomenology, he holds the view that “the root of morality is in need.”\(^\text{22}\) If he had clarified “need” in a more detailed manner, he could have dealt with the phenomenological concept of instinct as the origin of value.

In *La structure du comportement*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty addresses the issue of instinct in order to clarify the structure of behavior, but he is guided by the concept of instinct as instinctive behavior.\(^\text{23}\) He does occasionally address the issue of instinct in *Phénoméologie de la perception*. But here too he is guided by the concept of instinct as instinctive behavior.\(^\text{24}\) Even though he was decisively influenced by Husserl in developing his phenomenology of perception, he was influenced by Scheler rather than by Husserl in employing the concept of instinct as instinctive behavior. His phenomenology of perception could have been enriched in many respects if he had adopted the phenomenological concept of instinct and utilized it for the clarification of various topics in phenomenology of perception.

Let me conclude with two remarks concerning the future tasks of the phenomenology of instincts.

First, if phenomenologists after Husserl had had a chance to become acquainted with Husserl’s phenomenology of instincts, the various types of phenomenology they developed could have been enriched in many respects. Husserl’s phenomenology of instincts provides plenty of resources for such enrichment. It is one of the future tasks of the phenomenology of instinct to promote a dialogue between post-Husserlian phenomenology and Husserl’s phenomenology of instincts.
Second, there are various fields within the phenomenology of instincts that Husserl himself did not explore. Typical examples include the phenomenology of moral instinct, the phenomenology of aesthetic instinct, and the phenomenology of religious instinct. In recent years, there have also been concrete investigations of other types of instinct such as the language instinct, the art instinct, and so on. It is another task of the phenomenology of instincts to develop different areas within the phenomenology of instincts through a dialogue with research on instinct conducted outside of the phenomenological tradition.

Notes

1 Scheler 1976, 17. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
2 I have dealt with this issue in a more detailed manner in Lee 2015.
3 Gehlen 1974, 25.
4 Gehlen 1974, 34.
5 Funke and Rohde 1976, here 414ff.
6 Aristotle 1924.
7 Fichte 1971.
8 Schiller 1962.
9 James 1981.
10 Hua XLII, 98.
12 Hua-MatVIII, 169.
13 Hua IX, 259/Husserl 1997, 111–12.
14 Hua XIX/1, 409/Husserl 2001, 111.
16 Hua XV, 615–17.
17 Hua XXXII, 241.
18 Scheler 1976, 17.
19 Scheler 1976, 21.
21 Sartre 1943.
22 Jean-Paul Sartre, Lecture given in Rome, May 1964, at the Gramsci Institute, cited in Anderson 2002, 381.
23 See e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1942, 178–9, 196; Merleau-Ponty 1963, 164–5, 181.
24 See e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1945, 92–3; Merleau-Ponty 1962, 77–8.
25 For example, Dutton 2009; Pinker 1994.

References

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