Introduction

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is the founder of the method of scientific and philosophical research called phenomenology. Husserl’s phenomenology is largely recognized as the source of one of the two major philosophical trends in the 20th century, continental philosophy (the other trend being analytical philosophy). Husserl’s thought influenced many major figures of the last century, including Martin Heidegger (who was Husserl’s assistant for three years), Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Derrida.

Husserl was educated in mathematics and philosophy by some of the leading mathematicians and philosophers in the second half of the 19th century in Germany and Austria, including Karl Weierstrass and Leopold Kronecker (in mathematics), and Franz Brentano and Karl Stumpf (in philosophy). He completed two Ph.Ds. The first was in mathematics (1883), on the calculus of variations (under Weierstrass’ student Leo Königsberger) and the second in philosophy (1891), on the concept of number (under Stumpf, who was a student of Brentano and who also was one of the founders of experimental psychology).

Husserl published four books during his lifetime: The Philosophy of Arithmetic (1891) (Husserl 2003), Logical Investigations (Part I, 1900; Part II, 1901) (Husserl 1970a), Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (1913) (Husserl 2014), and Formal and Transcendental Logic (1929) (Husserl 1969). A selection of his lectures on internal time consciousness edited by Martin Heidegger (based on work done by Edith Stein) was also published in his lifetime (1928) (Husserl 1964) in Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung (Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research), the journal he founded in 1913. Husserl also left over 40,000 pages of unpublished research manuscripts, many of which have been edited and published in the 50-plus volumes of his collected works. Among the most influential posthumously published volumes of Husserl’s writings are Cartesian Meditations (1950) (Husserl 1960) and The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1976) (Husserl 1970ab.

Husserl’s phenomenology may be succinctly characterized as a method for investigating the essential structure of consciousness, where consciousness is not understood as the mind or as a mental being. Rather, by consciousness, phenomenology understands the basic mode of being awake that is behind the appearances of the respective objects of human sense perception,
imagination, and thought. The meaning of "object" in Husserl's phenomenology is therefore not limited to the kind of objects perceived in sense perception. It embraces anything with a sufficiently stable identity to be capable of appearing repeatedly, which is why Husserl also considers appearances in imagining and thinking that meet this criterion to be objects.

**Epochê and bracketing of natural attitude**

One of the most basic tenets of Husserl's phenomenology is that native to consciousness is the belief that what is really real are the physical objects of sense perception and that these objects exist independently of the human being. Husserl calls this native belief in the independent existence of physical objects the "natural attitude" and the content of this belief - the independent existence of physical objects - the "thesis" of the natural attitude. In modern times, Husserl maintains that the natural attitude and its thesis have been reinforced by the success of the natural sciences, especially physics. A consequence of this reinforcement is the conviction that consciousness' native belief in the independent existence of physical things is a fact, a fact whose truth has been unquestionably established by natural science.

Because consciousness includes the appearance of objects that are not physical, Husserl's phenomenology had to develop a method to counteract the natural attitude's conviction that only physical things are truly objects. This is especially necessary when the thesis of the natural attitude is elevated to the status of a philosophical claim, which results in the philosophical bias called naturalism. Husserl's method to neutralize this bias involves two interrelated steps. The first is the suspension of the belief behind the natural attitude's conviction that what is really real are the independently existing physical things perceived in sense perception. Husserl employed the Greek word "epochê" which means "suspension," to characterize the method of consciously acting to suspend this belief, which he also described as "putting it out of action." Husserl also used a convention of modern mathematics for excluding a part of a formula in a mathematical expression, the convention of "putting into parentheses" or "bracketing," to describe the result of this first step. Thus, by suspending the belief in the thesis of the natural attitude, the phenomenological "epochê" in effect "brackets" it. In line with the meaning of this mathematical convention, the thesis that what is really real are independently existing physical things is excluded, in the precise sense that its truth is no longer taken for granted. On Husserl's view, this is different than denying the thesis outright and thereby treating it as false: the content of the thesis remains what it is, namely, that what is really real are the independently existing things perceived by sense perception. Only now, subsequent to the methodical intervention of the epochê and bracketing, the natural attitude's conviction that the thesis is true is annulled.

**Transcendental phenomenological reduction**

Together, the epochê of the belief in the natural thesis and that thesis' bracketing prepare the way for another important phenomenological method, the phenomenological reduction. Once belief in the thesis of the natural attitude has been suspended and the thesis itself bracketed, the philosophical claim implicit in it, that what is really real are independently existing physical objects, loses its privileged position as the guiding paradigm for understanding what is really real. Crucial to Husserl's method of phenomenological reduction is the generalization of the thesis of the independent existence of objects beyond the paradigmatic physical objects posited by the natural thesis. Once generalized, Husserl then brackets the thesis that any kind of object exists independently of consciousness. Husserl's phenomenology capitalizes on this universal bracketing to the end of investigating consciousness on its own terms rather than in terms of its relation
to something else. The methodical intervention that makes this possible is the phenomenological, or more precisely – the transcendental phenomenological – reduction. Husserl’s reduction, like all reductions, reduces something to something else, although in this case what is reduced is not quantitative and therefore not diminished in any way. Rather, Husserl makes the claim that by focusing on an aspect of that which is reduced, the transcendental phenomenological reduction, on the contrary, opens up an aspect of it that is disclosed by systematic phenomenological investigation to be infinite.

Husserl calls what is reduced “lived-experience,” by which he understands our experiencing of everything there is to experience, namely the objects of outer and inner perception, the objects of the imagination, and the objects of thinking. Lived-experience is reduced in the precise sense that the thesis of the independence of all the objects of lived-experience from the consciousness of them in such experience is bracketed, which results in consciousness itself being made into an object. As such, namely, as a repeatable identity, consciousness becomes the subject matter of phenomenological investigation. The isolation of consciousness as an aspect of lived-experience, however, as mentioned, does not represent its diminishment for Husserl. This is the case because the nature of the being of consciousness, which he opines is discovered for the first time by the method of phenomenological reduction, is infinite. To understand properly the infinite being of consciousness, Husserl maintains that its peculiar phenomenological being must be kept distinct from the various dimensions of material being presupposed and investigated by natural science, the likewise various dimensions of non-material being (Geist) presupposed and investigated by the human sciences, and, finally, the formal being presupposed and investigated by logic and mathematics.

According to Husserl, properly understanding the infinite phenomenological being of consciousness involves mastering the methodological protocols necessary, first, to secure consciousness as an object and, second, to investigate it systematically in a manner appropriate to its being. The first two of these protocols have already been mentioned. Thus, initially, there is the reduction of the lived-experience of every kind of object to the consciousness of them, such that consciousness itself is made into an object. It is important to stress here that the status of consciousness as an object is established because it satisfies Husserl’s criterion for an object, namely, the exhibition of a stable identity capable of appearing repeatedly. Anything capable of satisfying this criterion counts as a phenomenon for Husserl. But, as will be seen, the phenomenon of all phenomena for Husserl is consciousness itself. It is so not only because its phenomenological being is infinite, but also because the nature and structure of its being elevates it to a place of preeminence among all other kinds of phenomena.

**Methodically reflective appearance of consciousness as an object**

In order to appreciate the philosophical significance of these last-mentioned claims made by Husserl’s phenomenology, as well as the related claim that the being of consciousness is absolute, it is imperative to grasp how he understands consciousness to appear as an object in the phenomenological reduction. The appearance of consciousness, like all appearances, must appear to something. That to which consciousness appears, however, is consciousness itself; it thus appears in, or better, as self-consciousness. The moment of consciousness’ consciousness of itself is termed “reflection” by Husserl.

By reflection, Husserl understands a modification of the consciousness moment of lived-experience. The default mode of this conscious moment is characterized by him as “straightforward.” By this he means to indicate that prior to reflecting on itself, the conscious moment of lived-experience is directed toward the objects that are encountered by that lived-experience.
For example, the conscious moment of the lived-experience of external perception is directed toward perceptual objects like trees and writing desks, that of inner perception is directed toward perceptual objects like a toothache and an itch, that of imagining is directed toward objects like honest politicians and unicorns, and that of thinking is directed toward objects like the Pythagorean theorem and Plato’s idea of the good. When reflectively modified, the conscious moment of lived-experience shifts its directedness from the objects encountered in its straightforward directedness to its own consciousness of those objects. When this reflection has been prepared for by the methodological protocols leading up to and including the reduction, consciousness itself appears as an independent object. It does so in the precise sense that once the thesis of the truth of the independent existence of the objects of its straightforward directedness has been neutralized by the reduction, consciousness itself now appears as an object that is independent of the truth or falsity of what is posited by that thesis. That is, whether or not those objects are really independent of consciousness’ directedness toward them, that it is directed toward their appearance and that their appearance is inseparable from consciousness being directed toward them is something that is irrefutably established. It is so established because consciousness itself appears in the reflection that makes the phenomenological reduction possible.

Husserl characterized the reflection connected with the phenomenological reduction as an “inner perception.” This, of course, invited its interpretation as an act of mental observation, of what the empirical tradition calls “introspection.” Husserl further characterized the reflective inner perception in terms of its “immanence” to the reflecting act, again inviting the interpretation of its nature as psychological. What should have been clear to those who accept these invitations, however, is that the reductive context of the appearance of consciousness as an object precludes limiting the reduced lived-experience in which it appears to a particular region of lived-experience; in this case, to the non-material lived-experience in which the psyche appears as an object.

Apart from the obstacle that an improper understanding of the transcendental phenomenological reduction presents to the attempt to grasp the appearance of consciousness as an independent object, there is also the obstacle presented by the proximity of Husserl’s thought and terminology to that of his mentor Franz Brentano. For Brentano, ‘inner perception’ referred to the intrinsically indirect self-awareness possessed by consciousness in its awareness of mental objects. As such, he distinguished it from the direct self-awareness characteristic of self-observation that is the salient characteristic of introspection. He based this distinction on the view that introspection has as its condition a higher act of consciousness, which he understood to presuppose an act that is intrinsically foreign to the indirect self-awareness characteristic of inner perception. Brentano, therefore, did not understand the proper object of inner perception to be consciousness itself. Rather, he understood it to be a mental object “immanent” to inner perception, which he characterized using Scholastic terminology as an “intentional” object.

The reductive context of Husserl’s characterization of reflection as inner perception, however, rules out its object being the mind or an aspect of mental reality. This context also rules out its interpretation as introspection. The former is the case because, as we have seen, the thesis of the independent being of all regions of objects, including the psyche (and with it, the mind), is bracketed by the reduction. The latter is the case, because subsequent to the reduction, the appearance of the objects of the various regions of material, non-material, and formal being appears inseparably from the appearance of consciousness itself as an object. This is to say, that subsequent to reductive annulment of the truth of the independent existence of the objects composing the various regions of being, consciousness as an object appears together with the appearance of the various objects encountered by the lived-experiences in which these objects are encountered.
Transcendental reflection

Given the transregional scope of the reflection in which the transcendental phenomenological reduction is effected, Husserl characterized it as a transcendental reflection. Likewise, because of this, he characterized the objective appearance of consciousness to transcendental reflection as transcendental consciousness. That said, the question emerges, why did Husserl continue to use Brentano’s terminology of ‘inner perception’ and ‘immanent object’ to characterize this reflection, given their psychological associations and Husserl’s wish to dissociate the method and content of transcendental phenomenology from psychology? The answer to this question lies in the scientific aspiration of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. Crucial to the realization of this aspiration is that all the cognitive claims made by phenomenology have their basis in direct, unmediated evidence. Husserl thought such evidence is free from presuppositions, insofar as no claim made on its basis exceeds what it makes evident. Thus, phenomenology’s cognitive claims are constrained by their commitment to scientific rigor, which entails that they limit their scope to that which appears in the direct, unmediated evidence exhibited by transcendental reflection. Because such reflection functions to make manifest something that is intrinsic to consciousness, Husserl characterized the perceptual awareness of what is made manifest in this way as ‘inner perception’. What transcendental reflection makes manifest is the appearance of consciousness as an object, an appearance that includes the objects whose thesis of independent existence has been bracketed and therefore put out of play. Because of this, the evidence in which the appearance of consciousness as an object appears is characterized by him as being immanent to the reflective modification of consciousness.

The inner perception characteristic of the transcendental reflective modification that is behind the transcendental reduction is therefore radically distinct from both Brentano’s notion of inner perception and the empirical understanding of introspection. Brentano’s notion, as mentioned, referred to the indirect self-awareness that he argued accompanies inner perception’s directedness to the immanent mental object proper to the psychological act of perception. Husserl’s notion, on the contrary, refers to the reflectively modified conscious moment of lived-experience, the objects of which, as mentioned, are not limited to the lived-experience of objects perceived by acts belonging to the non-material region of the psyche. Husserl’s account of transcendental reflection is likewise contrary to the empirical understanding of introspection. This is the case because the object of the latter is the mind, whereas for Husserl the object of transcendental reflection, consciousness, is understood neither as the mind nor limited to acts, psychological or otherwise. It is not so limited, because the transcendentally reduced phenomenon of consciousness includes the appearances of the objects belonging to the various regions of being. And while these regions include the being of the psyche, they are not exhausted by it.

The failure to take into account these distinctions is responsible for the contemporary debate about whether the reflective modification of consciousness is a necessary condition for consciousness itself to appear and thus to become a phenomenon. The terms of the debate present the following alternatives: 1) self-awareness accompanies all acts of consciousness directed toward objects other than consciousness, and therefore inner perception does not need a special, higher-order act of consciousness that objectifies the act of perception for its (the act’s) self-awareness to come about; or 2) an explicit act of conscious self-objectification – reflection – is required in order for the self-awareness of the act of inner perception to come about.

The reductive context of transcendental reflection

Once the reductive context of Husserl’s account of the appearance of consciousness as an object is taken into account, and with this, the transcendental character of the acts of reflection that
effect the reduction acknowledged, the terms of this debate resolve themselves into a pseudo-problem. To begin with, the association of Husserl’s notion of transcendental reflection with the reflection at issue in the debate has its basis in an equivocation. Transcendental reflection is not identical with the reflection that occurs in the natural attitude. As we’ve seen, transcendental reflection presupposes the methodical protocols of the reduction. To be sure, these protocols are executed in acts of reflection, but these acts are radically distinguished by Husserl from both the empirical characterization of reflection and his own account of phenomenologically psychological reflection. In the case of empirical reflection, Husserl characterizes it in terms of inner perception, with its interiority being marked by 1) its contrast with the outer perception directed to an external object and 2) the ontological status of the mind as an internal object. The non-perceptual interiority of the latter, and not the perception directed toward it, is therefore responsible for the empirical account of reflection as inner perception. Phenomenologically psychological reflection, in contrast, is characterized by Husserl in terms of its objectification of the lived-experience of both inner and outer perception. Phenomenologically psychological reflection is therefore characterized by Husserl in terms of the immanence to its regard of perceptual lived-experiences directed toward the appearances of inner and outer objects.

Transcendental phenomenological reflection is distinguished from its phenomenologically psychological variant by its bracketing and suspension, respectively, of the natural attitude and its thesis, and the reductive generalization of this thesis. As mentioned, Husserl’s characterization as ‘immanent’ of the evidence in which the phenomenologically reduced objects of all regions of being appear and the transcendental reflection to which they appear as ‘inner perception’ can give rise to equivocations. Specifically, equivocations arise if these characterizations are understood in terms of either empirical or phenomenologically psychological reflection. These equivocations are behind the contemporary controversy mentioned above. On the one hand, the terms of the controversy have their basis in the formulation of the opposition between reflection as an inner-directed act of internal perception and external perception as an externally directed act. On the other hand, the alternatives proposed as the condition for self-consciousness, either 1) the indirect phenomenon of self-relation inseparable from all acts of objectively oriented perception, or 2) the objectification of acts by higher-level acts of reflective consciousness, are posited in blissful ignorance of Husserl’s account of the sine qua non for phenomenological evidence: its immanence to transcendental reflection’s peculiar inner or immanent mode of perception. Only the evidence given in this immanence, together with the reflective inner consciousness to which it appears, is capable, for Husserl, of establishing whether unreflectively modified lived-experience is composed of acts that are indirectly self-conscious or not. Arguments in favor of either alternative are clearly incapable of resolving the controversy phenomenologically. They are so because either alternative presupposes rather than accounts for the only evidence capable of providing these arguments with a phenomenological basis: the reductive appearance of consciousness as an independent object.

This last point can be seen quite clearly when the following is considered. Either of the alternatives proposed cannot account for that which their comparison presupposes: the consciousness of each as distinct phenomena, i.e., of 1) an indirect self-awareness accompanying the straightforward directedness of conscious acts and of 2) a natural act of reflection that objectifies acts of consciousness. The comparison of 1) and 2) therefore presupposes a methodical reflection capable of objectifying each as a possible candidate for the answer to the question: how does self-consciousness initially come about? As such, it presupposes the phenomenologically transcendental reflection that effects the transcendental reduction and, with it, the possibility of consciousness itself appearing as an independent object, the appearance of which includes both the act of being conscious and the object of this consciousness. Put differently, the very possibil-
Edmund Husserl

Intentionality as the essential being of consciousness

The infinite being of consciousness manifests itself to transcendental reflection when that reflection attends to the way in which the reduced phenomenon of consciousness, as an independent object, shows up to its reflective regard. According to Husserl, consciousness most fundamentally shows up as the unity of two irreducibly distinct moments. On the one hand, there is its moment of awareness, which Husserl characterizes as the primitive quality of being aware of something. This quality is primitive in the sense that it can neither be analyzed further into more basic qualities, nor can it be made more intelligible by relating it to other qualities. On the other hand, there is the object moment of consciousness, the stable identity of which the moment of consciousness that is aware of something is aware. This moment, too, belongs to consciousness, or better, it belongs to the transcendentally reduced phenomenon of consciousness. It does so in the precise sense that the philosophical meaning of its stable identity is restricted to the scope and limits of its appearance to consciousness. Which is to say, that when the epoché and bracketing of the generalized natural thesis is in effect, the being of what appears to consciousness is taken to be a function of consciousness itself rather than of the independent being of nature or any of the other regions of being.

Husserl calls the unity that binds these two fundamental moments of consciousness its “intentionality.” These two moments, in turn, as moments of the intentionality of consciousness, are designated by Husserl with either the Latin or Greek philosophical terms for thinking and thought. Thus, in Latin, the ‘awareness of’ moment of the intentional unity of consciousness is termed “cogito” and its object moment “cogitatum.” In Greek, the two moments are termed respectively “noesis” and “noëma.” Husserl treats these terms as being phenomenologically equivalent.

The infinite being of the reduced phenomenon of consciousness becomes manifest for Husserl when the ways in which these moments of consciousness appear are investigated, both in terms of their relative distinction from one another and their relationship. In all three cases, Husserl makes the claim that the appearances in question, the noesis, the noëma, and their intentional relationship, all appear as the unities of multiplicities. These multiplicities, in term, appear as unlimited. Husserl’s claim here, it must be stressed, is not empirical. That is, he is not claiming that, as a matter of fact, the being of consciousness is infinite. Rather, his claim is phenomenological, in the precise sense that subsequent to the enactment of the methodological protocols of the epoché, bracketing and reduction, consciousness, as a region of being, appears to transcendental reflection as an infinite region.

Or better, Husserl’s claim is that the intentional essence of consciousness so appears. This is because Husserl formulates phenomenology as a science that provides knowledge of the essences of phenomena. In the case of intentionality, this means that consciousness isn’t sometimes intentional, sometimes not, depending on factors other than consciousness. Intentionality therefore does not designate a fact about consciousness. Rather, Husserl’s claim is that the very structure of consciousness, as a transcendentally reduced phenomenon, and therefore, as something that appears to transcendental reflection, is intentional. As such, however, the philosophical status of the essence in question must be sharply distinguished from the metaphysical essences of the Aristotelian tradition. For Husserl, the essences at issue in phenomenology are not posited on the basis of philosophical orthodoxy. Rather, they are apprehended on the basis of the evidence made manifest in the object immanent to the conscious regard of transcendental reflection.
Burt C. Hopkins

**Essential seeing of the intentional structure of the infinite being of consciousness**

The apprehension of an essence takes place in the phenomenological method Husserl calls “essential seeing” (Wesenserschauung). This method has been controversial since its inception, because its reference to seeing invites understanding it in analogy with perceptual vision. When this invitation is accepted, the expectation is created that the objects it sees, namely, the phenomenological essences, somehow appear to this method like physical objects appear to vision. That is, just as visible objects appear to vision passively, in the sense that their being looked at is sufficient to make them appear – provided, of course, there’s sufficient light – so, too, it is expected that phenomenological essences will appear to essential seeing in the same way. This expectation, however, overlooks the two interrelated and interdependent methodological protocols that Husserl maintained are necessary to apprehend a phenomenological essence. One is that the phenomenon whose essence is in question must be varied and the other is that its variation must be guided. Far from being the result of a passive looking, then, essential seeing requires the methodological intervention of the phenomenologist.

Husserl developed essential seeing on the basis of his pre-transcendental phenomenological method of ideation. Ideation was formulated by him as the method to bring to evidence, as empirically pure phenomena, the ideal structures presupposed by logic. Its point of departure is the lived-experience of general meaning, which is brought to prominence and then isolated. Ideation accomplishes the former by generating a manifold of lived-experiences. The latter is accomplished by thematizing the logical content of the unity that encompasses the instances of general meaning common to each of the discrete lived-experiences composing the manifold. Crucial to the generation of the manifold in question is that its composition exceed empirically given lived-experiences. The comparison of empirically given general meaning can only make prominent and isolate empirical generalities, and not the “pure” – because unconditional – universality coincident with logical meaning. Generation of a manifold that is unrestricted by empirical limits requires the imaginative variation of an originally given empirical manifold. Despite Husserl’s initial characterization of this variation as “free,” from the beginning the crucial methodical protocol for the imaginative extension of the empirically given manifold was that the variation involved be guided: guided initially by 1) the empirical style characteristic of the unity yielded by the comparison of the empirically general meaning common to the members of the empirically given manifold, and then by 2) the pure essence eventually yielded by the empirical style’s imaginative extension.

Husserl’s early critics, alas, either missed or ignored this protocol with their worry that ideation disregarded or otherwise undervalued the empirical or factical dimension of experience. For Husserl, the empirical is clearly there in the phenomenon from the start; as the undeniable point of departure for the comparison that yields the empirical style that functions as the guiding clue for the ideation proper, the empirical dimension of experience, or better, its intelligible structure, is manifestly not disregarded. Nor does the highlighting of its intelligible structure undervalue, for instance, its ontological status, since that status is the very basis for the appearance of the pure phenomenon in ideation. This same early criticism is equally misguided when directed at the essential seeing developed out of ideation. Essential seeing follows the same methodological protocols as ideation, save for its extension of the guiding clue to include empirical styles common to all aspects of lived-experience, not just those whose unfolding yields the idealities that comprise the species of pure logic.

The essential seeing of the intentional essence of consciousness takes its point of departure from any arbitrarily reflected, phenomenologically reduced, conscious lived-experience,
which is compared with other such arbitrary conscious lived-experience. The resulting series of conscious lived-experiences, which is generated with the addition of each arbitrary conscious lived-experience, eventually leads to the recognition of a common style “running through” and thus shared by each arbitrary “exemplar” of conscious lived-experience. Reflectively objectified, this style then functions as the “guiding clue” for introducing further arbitrary exemplars of conscious lived-experience. In the present case, the objectivation of the style in question yields two interrelated and interdependent invariants: the directedness of consciousness to the appearance of some object, and that object itself, as that which appears to consciousness’ directedness. Husserl terms the peculiar ‘consciousness of’ characteristic of the directedness moment of consciousness its “intentional directedness” and the object of that conscious directedness its “intentional object.” Intentionality, then, is the structure of consciousness highlighted by the interrelation and interdependence of consciousness’ intentional directedness and its intentional object.

Essential seeing properly transpires when this style is used as a guide for comparing exemplars of conscious lived-experience that no longer originate in arbitrarily reflected, phenomenologically reduced, conscious lived-experiences but in the imaginative variations of such lived-experiences. According to Husserl, these imaginative variations have the capacity to generate an unlimited multiplicity of “as if” conscious lived-experiences, each of which exhibits the characteristics of intentionality. At a certain point in the process of generating this multiplicity, Husserl maintains that the insight is arrived at that the generation of any further possible imaginative exemplar of conscious lived-experience will yield an exemplar with the same structure of intentionality. The moment this insight is arrived at, the multiplicity is transformed into what Husserl calls an eidetic manifold, and the invariant structural status of the guiding style transformed into an eidetic generality. These transformations then make it possible for the conscious regard of the transcendental reflection operative in the process of essential seeing to shift its regard from the imaginative exemplars in the series to the invariant structure running through them, and to objectify that structure. Husserl calls the structure so objectified the pure essence or “eidos” and the transcendentally reflective consciousness of the eidos “essential seeing.”

The essence of the conscious moment of lived-experience, as an infinite being, therefore appears in the eidetic manifold generated by the method of essential seeing. As such, the appearance of consciousness’ infinitude is coincident with the appearance of intentionality as its essence and the objective apprehension of that essence as an eidos. Husserl articulated the intentional eidos of consciousness in terms of both the essential correlation between the cogito and the cogitatum and their respective essential structures. On his view, the structure of each of these aspects of the eidos of consciousness appears as an infinite manifold, in the precise sense of the appearance of a unity that itself necessarily appears only through the appearance of an unlimited multiplicity. The appearances of the unity and unlimited multiplicity therefore appear inseparably from one another, despite their phenomenal distinctness. Husserl characterizes the sense of the most universal aspects of these unities as the triad: ego-cogito-cogitatum. And he assigned transcendental phenomenology the “infinite task” of investigating their eidetic structures for every region of being.

**Regional ontology of the natural, human, and formal sciences**

Consciousness itself, however, is not only a region of being but a region of being that is irreducible to the material and non-material regions of being investigated by the natural and human sciences. Because of this, Husserl maintained that the investigation of the eidetic structure of the intentionality of its transregional being, or better, its *transcendental* being, counts among
transcendental phenomenology's infinite tasks. Husserl grouped these tasks under three headings: regional ontology, phenomenological psychology, and transcendental phenomenology. The task of regional ontology is to provide a foundation for the natural, human, and formal sciences. The task of phenomenological psychology is to investigate the eidetic structures of consciousness within the horizon of the natural attitude. And that of transcendental phenomenology is to investigate the eidetic structures of transcendental consciousness. As the self-conscious founder of a new science, Husserl viewed himself as a pioneer whose task was to make a rough map of the new terrain of the region of consciousness and leave it to those who follow him to explore it more exhaustively. One result of this was Husserl's tendency to intermix programmatic announcements of tasks for future research with his presentation of both phenomenology's epistemic necessity and concrete phenomenological investigations. Indeed, in some cases, for instance, his account of the regional ontologies underlying the natural and human sciences, Husserl provides little more than general accounts of their cognitive incompleteness before making programmatic pronouncements about future tasks. Most of Husserl's concrete phenomenological research focused on the formal region of being and transcendental consciousness.

Husserl's general argument that the natural, human, and formal sciences are cognitively incomplete focuses on their uncritical epistemic relationship to the natural attitude and its thesis that what's really real are independently existing physical objects. He argues that these sciences elevate this uncritical relationship to a matter of methodological principle, which systematically limits their cognitive claims to evidence based on sense perception. The problem with this, according to Husserl, is that the cognitive claims of all of these sciences, and thus not just the formal sciences, include references to ideal concepts whose meaning cannot be accounted for by appeals to physical evidence. This is a problem for Husserl, because it means that the methodologies of these sciences are, in principle, incapable of establishing the truth of the ideal concepts that inform their cognitive claims about the specific region of being they present themselves as investigating. Moreover, to the extent that the cognitive claims of these sciences are formulated using modern, symbolic mathematics, there is the added problem of the mathematical formalization of the region of being that they ostensibly investigate. This is a problem, according to Husserl, because apart from the objects of the sciences of logic and mathematics, the being of the objects investigated by the natural and human sciences is not intrinsically formal.

Husserl took the term “a priori” from rational philosophy, and which in that context designated the concepts and conditions for cognition that cannot be traced to the sense perception of physical objects, to refer to the status of the ideal concepts that are employed but unaccounted for by the natural, human, and formal sciences. However, unlike traditional rational philosophy, which opposes the a priori to what can be experienced in sense perception, Husserl maintained that such conditions and concepts are capable of being experienced. However, the experience they are experienced in is not that which is limited to sense perception but rather experience that has been expanded phenomenologically, namely, the lived-experience that makes up the point of departure for phenomenological cognition. The isolation and apprehension by the method of essential seeing of what, for Husserl, amounts to the a priori presuppositions of the natural, human, and formal sciences, is how he formulates the task of their respective regional ontologies. And this formulation of that task is what is behind the two mottos that Husserl used in the presentation of his phenomenology. The first, that the goal of phenomenology is to be a “presuppositionless” science, and the second, that this science is most essentially characterized by its “return to the things themselves.” From the preceding, it can be seen that the presuppositions in question are above all the unaccounted for (because they are in principle incapable of being accounted for by the existing sciences) a priori aspects of the cognitive claims of the natural, human, and formal sciences. Likewise, it can be seen that the terminus ad quo of the
phenomenological return to the things themselves are the ideal meanings that compose the a priori presuppositions of the sciences, especially the mathematical formalization of scientific cognition, while its terminus ad quem is the apprehension of their essential a priori structure in essential seeing.

**Phenomenology of transcendental consciousness as transcendental idealism**

Husserl’s investigation of the infinite intentional being of transcendental consciousness systematically uncovered the essential structure of its being in roughly three discernable phases. The ordinality of these phases marks both their place in the development of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and in the systematic order of transcendental phenomenology’s investigations. The first uncovered and explored the intentional structure of the pure immanent being of the region of transcendental consciousness. The second uncovered and explored the functional dimension of transcendental consciousness, what Husserl called transcendental subjectivity and which includes transcendental intersubjectivity. And the third uncovered and explored the intentional historical horizon inseparable from the meaning of all intentional objectivities that are mediated by tradition. The concrete phenomenological investigations that characterize each of these phases are guided by Husserl’s philosophical self-interpretation of transcendental phenomenology as a transcendental idealism. This interpretation has two pillars. One is the eidos that is apprehended in essential seeing. The other is the independent being of the region of consciousness apprehended in the transcendental reduction. As we’ve seen, the methodological intervention that yields the eidos does so as the essential structure of a unity that encompasses the infinitude of the intentionality of consciousness. Because the science of phenomenology uncovers and investigates the intentional eide of the various regions of being, and especially the region of consciousness, one aspect of Husserl’s philosophical interpretation of it as a transcendental idealism focused on the ideal status of its eidetic subject matter. The other aspect of this interpretation focused on the independence of the being of the transcendentally reduced region of consciousness from all other regions’ being. On Husserl’s view, this independence renders the phenomenological being of transcendental consciousness preeminent among all other regions of being, i.e., natural, human, and formal. And it does so because the phenomenological being at issue, intentionality, is the source of the appearance of the objectivities proper to all the other regions of being.

Consideration of this last point led Husserl to characterize the phenomenological being of consciousness as an absolute being. His reasoning was that the appearances of the objectivities of all other regions of being are fundamentally dependent on transcendental consciousness, while its appearance is independent of all these other regions of being. The appearance of consciousness, in other words, is dependent only on itself, unlike the other regions of being, whose appearances are relative to consciousness. Thus, for Husserl, this non-relativity in relation to the appearance of all the other regions of being is what defines the absolute being of transcendental consciousness.

Husserl’s philosophical self-interpretation of transcendental phenomenology as transcendental idealism presented a major obstacle to the realization of his vision of his method and major findings becoming the point of departure for the renewal of philosophy as a unitary enterprise. His closest students, like Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrebe, and early critics alike, like Martin Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, shared the worry that Husserl’s philosophical self-interpretation has its basis in phenomenologically unwarranted philosophical presuppositions that block rather than provide access to the things themselves. Fink, in fact, got Husserl to share this worry when it came to the first stage of transcendental phenomenology’s account of the pure immanent
being of the region of transcendental consciousness. In this case, the worry was that a Cartesian bias rendered its approach to the things themselves overly formal, in a manner that presented the results of the reduction as apparently empty of content. However, what is easily lost in the consideration of the history of the critical reception of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is that its followers and critics alike advance their criticisms of it from within the horizon, if not on the ground, of the philosophical issues that are inseparable from its guiding mottos of presuppositionlessness and return to the things themselves. If there were nothing else to Husserl’s legacy than this continued recognition of his formulation of what most radically determines philosophy’s inner most nature, that would be enough to establish the importance of that legacy beyond the historical past. But a brief review of the salient results of the three phases of transcendental phenomenology adumbrated above is sufficient to establish an even greater importance of that legacy.

**The three phases of transcendental phenomenology**

Husserl’s investigation of the eidetic structure of the immanence of pure consciousness articulates the formal a priori that structures intentionality. In addition to the essential correlation between noesis and noêma, he articulates their structures as, respectively, the subject and object poles of intentionality. In the case of the latter, its appearance is structured by the object’s thematic prominence and the horizontal limit of that prominence. In the case of the former, its consciousness of the objective appearance is structured temporally, in accordance with its thematic intentional directedness to its present appearance and its horizontal directedness to its just past appearances and appearances to come. The horizontal appearance of both the object and subject poles of intentionality are structured by a unitary limit. In the case of the object pole, that limit is the horizon of the world, which appears indirectly through the infinite manifold of objective appearances. The unitary limit of the subject pole appears as the transcendental “I” (Ego), and as such appears as the unity that necessarily encompasses the infinite manifold of intentional directedness.

The essential formality proper to the a priori of the intentionality of the immanence of pure consciousness exhibits the eidetic structure of any act of consciousness rather than that of the specific acts determinative of the natural, human, and formal regions of being. The concern with its apparent emptiness of content is therefore misplaced, since that emptiness is methodologically necessary in order to uncover the eidetic structure of transcendental consciousness in its widest universality. Once uncovered, this eidetic structure provides, as it were, the guiding clue for the specific phenomenological investigations that comprise its infinite tasks.

Husserl’s investigation of the functional dimension of transcendental consciousness articulates the eidetic structure of the genesis of the unitary limits of the subject and object poles of the immanence of pure consciousness. He characterizes this functional dimension as transcendental subjectivity and maintains that its eidetic structure includes transcendental intersubjectivity. Husserl formulated the contrast between the transcendental phenomenological investigation of the genesis of unitary limits of the subject and object poles with the investigation of the eidetic structure of those limits in terms of the methodological distinction between the “static” character of the investigation of the latter and “genetic” character of the former. Rather than represent two completely distinct methods, Husserl understood the genetic investigation of the origin of the unities of the objective and subjective pole to have as its sine qua non their prior articulation in a static investigation. Husserl characterized the genetic investigation as regressive, in the precise sense of the reflective uncovering, in the statically articulated unities in question, references to meanings that function as a part of the intelligibility of those meanings despite
nevertheless not appearing in their objective appearance. Such meanings, according to Husserl, are therefore sedimented in a dimension of transcendental consciousness that he termed transcendental subjectivity. Following up these references, to the end of uncovering the sedimented meanings in question and then reactivating the acts that originally generated them, is the task of genetic phenomenology.

Husserl’s investigation of the intentionality of the historical meaning inseparable from the unity of some objective meanings has its basis in the radicalization of the genetic investigation of the origin of the unity belonging to objective meaning. This radicalization proved necessary in the case of the unities of meaning operative in the sciences, given their mediation by tradition, and indeed, of the unities of meaning operative in philosophy itself. The investigation of the intentionality of historical meaning is structurally analogous with that of the genetically reflective uncovering of sedimented meanings and the reactivation of the acts that generated them, with one decisive difference. The sedimented meanings and acts regressively uncovered in genetic phenomenology originate in the living experience of the transcendental subjectivity belonging to both the transcendental “I” and the intersubjective community of transcendental Egos to which it belongs. Those meanings uncovered in transcendental phenomenology’s investigation of the intentionality of historical meaning, however, do not originate in the living experience of an Ego and its intersubjective community. Rather, their origin must be traced back to no longer living lived-experiences that once upon a time belonged to an intersubjective community of transcendental Egos.

References