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## Husserl's Phenomenological Theory of Intuition

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## 1. EVIDENCE, INTUITION, AND KNOWLEDGE

The central theme of Husserl's phenomenology is the phenomenal intentionality of consciousness or the fact that our experiences seem, from the inside, to be directed beyond themselves in a way that makes the external world manifest.<sup>1</sup> In Husserl's view, this experiential fact is the most fundamental phenomenological fact there is. As such, intentionality serves as a starting point in phenomenological description of all our experience.<sup>2</sup> And it is for this reason that the descriptive elucidation of intentionality from the first-person perspective in experience is the centerpiece of Husserl's theory of the nature and possibility of knowledge.

Husserl's conception of knowledge stands squarely in the Kantian tradition, which understands knowledge as the product of intuition and concept. The correlate of this duality in Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is the descriptive phenomenological difference between an act of "empty" intentional meaning (*Meinung*) and "fulfilling" intuition (*Anschauung*). The epistemological feature that fulfilling intuition lends to the act of meaning in the unity of an act of knowing is what Husserl calls "evidence" (*Evidenz*). This term is often translated into English as "self-evidence." The reason for this is that "evidence" is a feature of consciousness that lends justification to cognitive states without having justification previously conferred upon it; states of consciousness with "evidence" are intrinsically justified in an immediate, non-inferential way without also being infallible or absolutely indefeasible.<sup>3</sup> Evidence is to be understood as a feature that is conferred upon acts of pure meaning by being brought into union with a sensuously intuitive act in an act of "fulfillment" (*Erfüllung*). And an act of fulfillment is an act that brings an act of pure meaning into a non-inferential union with a sensuously intuitive act in a way that confers the evidence of the intuitive act on the act of meaning. Thus,

evidence must be distinguished from “justification,” where this term is understood to be a feature derived from (inferential) relations with beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

Suppose I believe the honeysuckle in my yard is blooming. All I have here is the performance of an act of meaning: a warranted thought that intends the relevant state of affairs. Now suppose I go into my yard and see the bushes covered in newly blossoming honeysuckle. “Where this happens,” Husserl says, “we experience a descriptively peculiar consciousness of *fulfillment*: the act of pure meaning, like a goal-seeking intention, finds its fulfillment in the act which renders the matter intuitive” (*LI VI* §8, p. 694). What the intuitional component in an act of knowing delivers is an awareness of the “thing itself” that satisfies the intentional content of the act of meaning: an awareness of the object “in the flesh” (*leibhaft*), “with intuitive fullness,” actually now here before me, just as it is meant or intended in the act (cf., *LI VI* §16, pp. 719–720, *TS* §§4–5).

Throughout Husserl’s writings, there is a consistent observation of the essential distinction between the act, the act’s intentional content, and its object (given that it has one). In *LI*, it is clear that what Husserl calls the “matter” of an act is an element in the subject’s psychological activity by virtue of which it is intentionally directed to its object (*LI V* §20). Drawing on the mereological theory of dependence outlined in *LI III*, we might say that the matter is a dependent part of the psychological event that represents the relevant object (in this case, the honeysuckle itself), in other words, a part of the psychological act that cannot exist without the act of which it is a part.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the matter is distinct from the object itself, which is represented in the act; it is distinct from the ideal “meaning content” itself, of which the matter is an instance. The ideal meaning can be expressed as *what* is believed, seen, imagined, remembered, desired, and so on, from the first-person perspective in the experience. And in the following I will sometimes express the meaning of the act in this way. However, it should be observed that this is different from mentioning the object of the experience itself.<sup>6</sup>

Later, in *Ideas*, Husserl modified this view, drawing a further distinction between the ideal essence of the intrinsic features of an act of consciousness (the *noesis*) and the ideal essence of the meaning of the act (the *noema*). I will discuss this modification further in [section 3](#). Until then, for simplicity, I will follow the usage of *LI*, referring to the intrinsic intentional feature of the act as the “matter,” the ideal meaning of the act as the “meaning,” and the object the act is directed upon as the “object.”

Acts with the structure of fulfillment constitute knowledge. Every part of the expansive body of human knowledge, in Husserl’s view, finds its origins in some act of fulfillment, be it in my own personal psychological

history or in that of some other individual or group of individuals that has been handed down in scientific practice and culture. And so, every part of human knowledge is, in some way, “founded” on the sensuous components of acts of fulfillment. But, as I will discuss in greater detail later, there are a variety of different ways in which acts of knowledge can be founded on (or dependent on) sensuous, straightforward perceptual intuition of individual objects. Some forms of foundation are epistemic in character, where the evidence associated with the bit of knowledge derives directly from the sensuous perceptual act, for example, in the unity of an act of fulfillment. Other forms of foundation are non-epistemological or merely ontological, where the evidence of the belief does not derive from the sensuous perceptual experience, but could not be without the existence of the perceptual experience: for example, I couldn't have an intuitive awareness of the essential truth that red is a color if it weren't for my sensuous awareness of red objects, even though the evidence associated with my belief in this essential truth does not depend on the evidence associated with my beliefs about individual red objects.

Husserl distinguishes at least three different kinds of fulfillment, each of which is founded on sensuous perceptual experience in different ways: an act of “straightforward” perceptual intuition, which is a direct and *de re* awareness of individual objects and their dependent parts (or “moments”); a “synthetic” categorial intuition of states of affairs (or of individual objects and properties bound together by ideal categorial forms); and an “essential intuition” (*Wesensschau*) or “ideation” that is a direct awareness of ideal essences and categorial forms themselves.

Husserl also distinguishes at least three grades of evidence to be found among these three different kinds of intuitive fulfillment (*CM* §6). Some acts of fulfillment yield absolutely certain or “apodictic” evidence. This constitutes the ideal of self-evident knowledge: (i) it is completely “adequate,” in other words, the intuitive givenness of an item just as it is meant, for every aspect which is meant; and (ii) the evidence is *indefeasible*, that is, the object cannot conceivably be otherwise than as it is meant and intuited in the act. The next level down is what Husserl calls “adequate” fulfillment.<sup>7</sup> It involves an element (i) of the apodictic grade of fulfillment, but it lacks feature (ii). Rather, it is only conditionally or defeasibly certain: its object could be other than it is meant and intuited in the act; and it has a kind of evidence that can be overturned by the course of further experience. The lowest grade of fulfillment is like adequate fulfillment in that it too is defeasible, but it also lacks the achievement of adequacy. Instead, it yields an intuitive presentation that fulfills only part of the total intentional matter of the act.

By combining these distinctions, Husserl reinscribes the Aristotelian conception of the regionality of evidence within his phenomenological epistemology. For it is a view that takes seriously the idea that “it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits” (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1094b24–5; cf., *Ideas* §§13, 73–5). It does not try to press all forms of knowledge and evidence into one mold. Instead, it understands each grade of evidence as constitutive of a different grade of intuitive fulfillment and a different variety of knowledge, which is founded on sensuous experience in a way that is appropriate to its epistemic essence.

So, even though Husserl’s view of the origins of evidence contains resounding “echoes of British empiricism,” as Emmanuel Levinas (1995, p. 71) put it – the strongest of which is Husserl’s belief that all evidence comes on a foundation of sensuous experience – and even though Husserl is fond of drawing out parallels between his approach to epistemological issues and the method of skeptical doubt taken by Descartes, we should be careful to distinguish Husserl’s views from the foundationalist views of these two traditions. For, unlike the Cartesian approach, Husserl does not attempt to found all knowledge on an apodictically certain foundation. And, unlike the empiricist approach, he does not try to reduce all evidence to that kind that derives from sense experience.

## 2. “COINCIDENCE” AND FULFILLMENT

In this section, I attempt to bring the structure of fulfillment into sharper focus before outlining the distinguishing phenomenological characteristics of the three different kinds of intuitive fulfillment found in straightforward perceptual experience (section 3), synthetic categorial intuition (section 4), and essential intuition (section 5).

Husserl understands acts of fulfillment to be acts that bring two phenomenologically distinct kinds of act – an act of pure meaning and an intuitive act – into a “unity of identity” (*LI VI* §8, p. 696). This unity of identity is constituted in a higher-order act of recognition of the “congruence” or “coincidence” (*Deckung*) of the meanings in the act of pure meaning and the intuitive act. In other words, it is a recognition that “the semantic essence of the signitive (or expressive) act reappears identically in corresponding intuitive acts, despite phenomenological differences on either side” (*LI VI* §28, p. 744). Or, in cases of inadequate forms of intuitive fulfillment, coincidence consists in the partial identity of the semantic essences of the intuitive and meaning acts. An act of fulfillment is essentially

a “founded” act, in other words, a kind of act that ontologically depends on another act (cf., *LI III*, [chapter 1](#)).

Now, as previously mentioned, Husserl's epistemology is Kantian in the sense that knowledge is to be understood as the function of an act of meaning and an act of intuition. So one way to bring the structure of fulfillment into sharper focus is to bring out the phenomenological differences between the two founding acts. Consider again my belief that the honeysuckle is blooming and the intuitive presentation of the blooming honeysuckle in perception. Husserl suggests that there are two key phenomenological differences between these founding acts, as they are experienced independently of synthesis in fulfillment:

- (1) A *qualitative* experiential difference: in intuition, the relevant object is presented with “bodily presence” (*Leibhaftigkeit*), the quality of an object's being actually now, here, before me.<sup>8</sup> In thinking that the honeysuckle is in bloom, in contrast, I am not necessarily presented with any particular kind of sensuous quality or imagery.
- (2) A *non-qualitative* experiential difference: in thinking of an object, it is phenomenologically evident that I am engaged in an intentional activity of “bringing the object to thought” or of directing my mind toward some object. However, in perceiving an object, I do not necessarily have an intention to bring some particular to mind. Rather, the object is simply present to me in perceptual consciousness, without a prior intention aimed at it in the course of my perceptual activity.

Husserl calls the feature of intuitive acts that is responsible for the qualitative difference from acts of mere meaning the “representative” (*Repräsentant*) content or (in later work) the “hyletic data” of an intuitive act (*LI VI* §55, p. 807; *Ideas* §85). This sensuous content is different from the intentional content of an act. Its presence in experience does not make a direct contribution to what is sensuously intended in the act. It is not an intrinsically intentional feature of experience. Rather, the representative content makes a contribution to meaning only “in and with the interpretation put upon” it in the act (*LI VI* §22, pp. 730–731). This combination of sensuous data and interpretative content constitutes a sensuously constrained meaning intrinsic to the intuitive act. Husserl calls this the “intuitive substance” or “intuitive content” (*Gehalt*) of an act of intuition (*LI VI* §22).<sup>9</sup> It is the “coincidence” of the intuitive content and the matter of the act of meaning that is recognized by the founded higher-order act in an act of fulfillment.

This touches on the second, non-qualitative difference between acts of meaning and intuitive acts. Intuitive acts have an intentional matter (and an intentional essence) that are constitutive of their intuitive content. But this intentional matter shares an “essential, internal” relation with the representative content in the unity that these constitute in the intuitive content of the intuitive act (*LI VI* §26, pp. 740–741). In *LI*, Husserl characterizes this as a relation of resemblance (*ibid*). However, this is not true of an act of pure meaning. It is true that we always find these acts “clinging to some intuitive basis” (*LI VI* §25, p. 739). Unlike an intuitive act, however, there is no essential correlation between the sensuous intuitive data and what I intend in the act of meaning. For “what goes beyond this content . . . *can be varied at will* without disturbing the sign’s signitive function” (*ibid*). The same thought may pass through my mind while I am watching television, watching the clouds pass, or conversing with someone about honeysuckle. The only time an “essential, internal” relation is established between an act of pure meaning and its intuitive basis is in the unity of an act of fulfillment, where the intuitive substance of the intuitive act is recognized, in a further higher-order act, as having the same intentional essence as that realized in the intentional matter of the act of meaning.

Characterizing the relation between representative content and intentional matter in the intuitive act in terms of resemblance faces a problem. In what sense can an intentional and a non-intentional entity resemble one another otherwise than by having some properties in common? And what could these properties be aside from either having the same (or similar) meaning contents – an option that transgresses the claim that representative content is not intentional – or by having the same sensuous features – an option that transgresses the claim that intentional matter does not have sensuous filling (cf. Hopp, 2008, esp. section III)?

One answer to this puzzle is to hold that the notion of resemblance in terms of sharing properties is not apt for this relation.<sup>10</sup> Rather, one should see the relation between sensuous data and interpretative meaning in the unity of the intuitive act as a one-sided dependence of types of meaning on types of complexes of sensuous data, in other words, a relation in which, necessarily, a certain kind of intentional matter can be instantiated in an act only if a certain kind of organization of sensuous data is also present (cf., Mulligan, 1995, section 5). Thus, when an intuitive meaning is instanced in the unity of the sensuous content of an act, it is in an ineluctably stable (pre-reflective) equilibrium with the sensuous data. In such a unity, “the original dialectic of sense and presence” (to use a phrase from Paul Ricoeur [1967, p. 6]) comes to a stable position of agreement.<sup>11</sup> In Husserl’s view, this

equilibrium is not achieved by accident, but it is a possibility grounded in the very essence of the representative content and interpretative activity. The important point here is that the notion of “resemblance” does not require a set of matching properties between the two acts, but rather only a mutually reinforcing conformity of representative content and intentional matter that, due to the unity they form in this equilibrium, makes it reasonable to describe each using the same terms. Outside of the unity of the intuitive content of the intuitive act, we could not describe a sensation of red as being “red.” For red is a color property of material objects, not a property of sensations. However, in and with the interpretation of it as “the sensuous appearance of a red surface,” it seems appropriate to apply this intentional description to it. For we seem to have no other way to refer to it, and this equivocal application of the term “red” (cf., *TCL* §1, p. 6) is anodyne, given the highly stable nature of the equilibrium of interpretation and sensuous feedback in an intuitive act, so long as we recognize that the application is equivocal.

### 3. “STRAIGHTFORWARD” PERCEPTUAL INTUITION

As previously mentioned, the incomplete overlapping or “coincidence” of the content of intuition and meaning in an act of fulfillment is the key to understanding how the evidence of perceptual experience can still qualify as knowledge, even though it is, in most cases, defeasible and inadequate. Nevertheless, Husserl holds to the empiricist thesis that perceptual intuition is the “originary source” of all knowledge – the place where “natural cognition” begins and ends, including theoretical cognition, such as in physics and applied mathematics (*Ideas* §1, p. 5). In this section, I want to highlight how perceptual consciousness realizes the general structure of fulfillment and unpack the reasons why Husserl thought of perceptual knowledge as a foundational form of evidence. For this will provide the necessary context for a proper understanding of how Husserl held to the empiricist thesis.

Husserl's primary reason for thinking of perceptual evidence as essentially inadequate and defeasible are phenomenological, based on first-personal descriptive observations about perceptual consciousness. Suppose I see a die. In this experience, I see this as an object with six sides, even though, because of the spatial character of visual consciousness, I can only *actually* see three sides from where I am. These “unperceived” sides are intended in this experience as sides that can be seen if I twist the die or move around it (cf., *Ideas* §44). In *LI*, Husserl claims that, to

each perceptual experience as of an individual object, there “corresponds phenomenologically a continuous flux of fulfillment or identification, in the steady serialization of the percepts ‘pertaining to the same object.’ Each individual percept is a mixture of fulfilled and unfulfilled intentions” (*LI VI* §14b, p. 714).

In my perceptual consciousness of the die, then, part of the total intentional matter of my perceptual experience is the fulfilled intention directed at the facing side of the die. The rest is a set of unfulfilled intentions directed to the sides facing away, the object’s innards, history, uses, and so on. But these unfulfilled intentions can be brought to fulfillment by further perceptual exploration of the object, by “retaining” the currently fulfilled intentions in memory (or, in the language of *TCL*, “retentions”) and following up certain unfulfilled intentions or anticipations (or, in the language of *TCL*, “protentions”) in the total content of my perceptual consciousness. To perceive, then, is essentially to undergo a temporally extended process of intention and fulfillment with the goal of bringing the object of perceptual consciousness – *this particular* object – to adequate givenness; nevertheless, given the perspectival and spatial character of visual consciousness, this goal is unachievable. Instead, it functions as a Kantian regulative ideal for perceptual cognition (*Ideas* §143).

In addition, because of this essential inadequacy, any perceptual evidence achieved in the partial fulfillment of the intentional matter at any stage of perceptual experience is, in principle, open to revision in light of future experience. For example, suppose I see the die on the table, then after turning it around, I discover that it is not covered by three square faces. In this case, an “explosion” (as Husserl characterizes it at *Ideas* §138, p. 332) of the initial meaning has occurred. I become aware that an anticipation of a backside of the die was part of how I was structuring the experience of what was immediately given in perception. And now I am forced to restructure my anticipations, taking what I see now to be only three flat square pieces, put together to form a corner that looks like a complete die from certain perspectives. Essentially correlated with this change in the interpretative activity is a change in the ideal meaning structure (the total ideal meaning content) essentially correlated with my act, and a change in the epistemic status of the previous stage of intuitive fulfillment. The evidence of latter intuition displaces the evidence of the former.

Restructuring the anticipations in perceptual experience is not reducible to a mere change in belief. I do not have beliefs that correspond to every aspect of what is merely anticipated in perceptual experience. Some of these anticipatory activities are “habitual,” grounded in accretions of bodily



perceptual skills, and culturally inherited background beliefs, values, and practices. Many of these are aspects of our anticipatory activity that many of us have never thought about and would probably have great difficulty expressing in words, if we were to become aware of them.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this essential inadequacy and defeasibility of perceptual evidence, Husserl maintains that perceptual consciousness is still to be phenomenologically described as delivering awareness of the object *itself*, “in the flesh” (*leibhaft*), and not just an image or mere appearance of the object. Together with the actual sensuous appearance, the anticipatory activity of perceptual experience brings the object as whole into the field of perceptual consciousness. In the language of the *Ideas*, each actual appearance is experienced as an “adumbration” or “shading-off” (*Abschattung*) of a side or aspect of the *same object*. This intuition of the identity of the object through the series of actual perceptual appearances is the correlate of an irreducibly demonstrative aspect of perceptual content, “the pure X in abstraction from all predicates” (*Ideas* §131, p. 313). It is an aspect of the intentional matter of each partial intention belonging to the total intentional content of the perceptual experience that is coincident with the matter of every other partial intention in the act. This is a part of the meaning activity that informs the sensuous, representative content in every phase of the perceptual consciousness of an individual object. Given that it is what it is in abstraction from all predicates, it is not to be understood a matter directed to a stock of common properties. It is, rather, better understood as a form of essentially demonstrative *de re* content, a form of content that directly refers to a particular object, by relying on non-qualitative aspects of the object in relation to the perceiving subject.<sup>13</sup>

Another way to characterize the “bodily presence” (*Leibhaftigkeit*) of the object in perceptual consciousness is to note its relation to Husserl’s notion of the “natural attitude” in the *Ideas* (cf., §§27, 31, & 47). As previously mentioned, perceptual experience is pervaded by a sort of ambiguity or duality of content wherein I *see* the presence of a die (a material object) *in*<sup>14</sup> my perspectival experience of a side (a mere appearance). But, when the appearance is in conformity with the structuring anticipatory activity and vice versa, in other words, when these two achieve a stable equilibrium, then this allows us, in an equivocal fashion, to apply the descriptors appropriate to appearing objects to the perspectival appearances. One problematic aspect of this, of course, is that one might not recognize that this is an equivocal application of the descriptor. And this is a real danger because the

ambiguity of perceptual content doesn't usually show up in the course of perceptual consciousness. (This may also be a reason that it also doesn't clearly "show up," as it were, in a distinction in ordinary language.) The normal course of perceptual experience achieves a highly stable pre-reflective equilibrium between our structuring anticipatory activities and what becomes actually presented that permits us to keep going with the standard set of anticipations without significant interruption from what is actually presented. And this highly stable equilibrium involves intentions that posit a natural world of inanimate and animate material objects, ordered by certain natural physical, biological, psychological, and sociological laws. In other words, it posits the *natural world*, which becomes confirmed (as "actually there, in the flesh" (*leibhaft*)) in sensuous intuition. Husserl calls this the "natural attitude." He argues that the key to advancement in phenomenological research is to somehow set aside this natural mode of comportment, in order to descriptively clarify the sensuous intuitive data and interpretative activities that constitute this normally highly stable equilibrium.

In *Ideas*, Husserl develops the concepts of "noema" and "noesis" to help provide a more perspicuous account of this complex structure of consciousness. The noema is an abstract meaning structure (much like Frege's notion of *Sinn*) that is a function of the actual presentations and anticipations concerning the object in an act of consciousness (cf., *Ideas* §§88, 90–95). The aspects of the noema corresponding to the actually perceived elements Husserl calls the "noematic core" of the act (*Ideas* §132); the totality of the anticipatory meanings in the act Husserl calls the "horizon" of the act; and the noematic core plus the horizon constitutes what he calls the total noematic content of the act (*Ideas* §130). In addition, it is the total noema of a perceptual act that enables the direct awareness of the physical object of perceptual consciousness. The noesis, on the other hand, is the experiential (i.e., "*Reel*" or temporally occurring) counterpart to the noema. The noesis is the set of structuring experiences, the actual activities of consciousness, that are essentially correlated with the abstract noematic contents of the act (*Ideas* §§98 & 100) and that attempt to structure anticipations in a way that is in conformity with the hyletic data – which is roughly equivalent to what Husserl calls representative content in *LI* – (*Ideas* §86). The noesis, in other words, is the activity of consciousness that gives meaning to the act, the hyletic data are what is interpreted in the noetic activity – as Husserl put it, they are "possible wefts in the intentional weave, possible stuffs for intentional forming" (*Ideas* §86, p. 189, translation modified) – and the noema is the ideal meaning that is given in the act.

## 4. SYNTHETIC CATEGORIAL INTUITION

Husserl maintains that the range of objects of intuition is wider than that of straightforward or simple *de re* perceptual intuition. There are also intuitive experiences that present particular objects bound together by pure categorial forms such as “relation,” “unity,” “plurality,” “identity,” and “part and whole.” The objects of these acts are concrete states of affairs (*Sachverhalt*), in other words, individual material objects bound together by categorial forms.

One way to approach Husserl's concept of synthetic categorial intuition is to make out how he answers a long-standing puzzle about this form of intuition. This is, in short, that even though the intentions in synthetic categorial acts find fulfillment in sensuous content of straightforward perception, the “surplus of meaning” directed to the categorial forms *in* the experience, “finds nothing in the appearance itself to confirm it” (*LI VI* §40, p. 775). For example, all I am aware of in straightforwardly seeing, say, a white piece of paper on the desk is “this white paper,” a particular without any logical form in itself. As Husserl puts it (voicing agreement with the Kantian thesis that being is not a predicate),

I can see colour, but not being-coloured. I can feel smoothness, but not being-smooth. I can hear a sound, but not that something is sounding. Being is nothing in the object, no part of it, no moment tenanting it, no quality or intensity of it, no figure of it or no internal form whatsoever, no constitutive feature of it however conceived. (*LI VI* §43, p. 780)

Husserl seems to be in paradox. On the one hand, he asserts that the intentional objects of straightforward perception lacks categorial form. Yet, on the other, he asserts that the straightforwardly presented object of perception can fulfill a categorial intention, which implies that the intuitive content of straightforward perception involves a representation of categorial form.

Husserl attempts to dissolve the paradox by showing how the same representative content sustain distinct “interpretations” (or could become coincident with different total noematic contents) in the unity of multiple different intuitive acts. The key to this approach is the fact that there are different ways in which sensuous content can found a meaning intention in the unity of fulfillment. As noted, in straightforward intuition, the intuitive substance of the act founds the intentional meaning of the act by having an intentional content that is partially identical to that of the meaning activity. In a synthetic categorial act, however,

The “content” which represents  $\alpha$ , will be functioning as the same content in a twofold fashion and, in so far as it does this, it will effect a coincidence, a peculiar unity of the two representative functions; we shall, in other words, have two coincident interpretations, both sustained by the representative content in question. (LI VI §48, pp. 793–794)

Thus, categorial intuition is a founded act with a more complex structure than straightforward intuition, consisting of *both* (i) an act of straightforward perceptual fulfillment and (ii) a categorial meaning intention that coincides with a certain part of the content of the straightforward perceptual act. In synthetic categorial intuition, there is also a higher-order meaning intention that “bring[s] to maturity a new awareness of objects which essentially presupposes the old” (LI VI, §46, p. 787). So, the structure of “foundation” (*Fundierung*) in a synthetic categorial intuition is different from that in straightforward intuition. Synthetic categorial intuition is an act that presupposes a prior act of fulfillment, a prior *cognitive* awareness of the world, which provides the “*point d’appui*” of the categorial act (LI VI §47, p. 791).

Developing this suggestion further, Husserl observes that one key descriptive phenomenological difference between straightforward and categorial intuition is that the higher-order act in categorial intuition is typically<sup>15</sup> experienced as a deliberate intentional *activity* of making explicit some part of the total content of straightforward perceptual intuition that was only implicit in the straightforward perceptual act (LI VI §47, p. 792). The key is that it is a kind of “active synthesis” of contents, which is phenomenologically distinct from the “passive synthesis” of horizontal meaning and actually given appearance in straightforward perception (cf. CM §38). For example, in straightforwardly seeing the die, the whole die is given to consciousness “in one blow,” “without the help of further, super-ordinate acts” (LI VI §40, p. 775). Given this experience, I (the subject) am put in a position to make the categorial forms also intended in the horizon of this act into thematic objects of awareness. This process can begin with a reflective recognition of the perspectival and spatial character of my experience: for example, the fact that the backside of this die is not actually given and that, as such, is an emptily intended *part* of the object (LI VI §48, p. 793). I can then take this intention, directed to the unseen part of the die, and thematize it as a horizontal element of my present experience, that is, as “the ideal possibility of bringing the part, and the fact that it is a part, to perception in correspondingly articulated and founded acts” (LI VI §48, p. 794).<sup>16</sup> With this, I bring to completion an act with a “surplus of meaning” that is not fulfilled in the straightforward perceptual intuition by itself (LI VI

§40, p. 775), but which finds fulfillment and confirmation in the appearance after I engage in “a novel act which, taking charge of such presentations, shapes and combines them suitably” (LI VI §48, p. 794).

The kind of foundation straightforward perceptual intuition provides is not one that directly confers evidence on a categorial intuition. Just seeing the die (in the natural attitude) does not also provide awareness of this actually appearing side of the die *as such*. Rather, this latter form of awareness also requires a further cognitive process of abstraction, wherein I consider the actual visual experience in light of a new meaning that emphasizes the implicit presence of this part-whole structure *in* the (horizontal) content of the straightforward perceptual act.

## 5. ESSENTIAL INTUITION

In this section I consider the form of categorial intuition that Husserl calls “ideation,” “eidetic intuition,” or “essential intuition” (*Wesenserschauung*) (cf., *Ideas* §18).<sup>17</sup> This kind of intuition takes formal relations and structures, sets, numbers, functions, and other mathematical entities as its objects. This is, by far, the most controversial part of Husserl's phenomenological theory of intuitive knowledge. For it is hard to see how our awareness of them could qualify as intuitive. However, like his approach to the puzzle of synthetic categorial intuition, Husserl intends to justify the claim to this kind of intuition by way of highlighting the analogies and disanalogies with the archetype of intuitive knowledge – straightforward perception.<sup>18</sup> And, here too, the key to understanding the analogies is to see the different ways in which straightforward perceptual intuition can serve as a foundation for acts of fulfillment.

To get a feel for the phenomenon of essential intuition, consider the structure of the Socratic search for the essence or “Form” of some entity in the early Platonic dialogues. The discussion may begin by taking as its topic a concrete instance of, say, piety or justice. But this serves as a launching point (a model) for a discussion about Piety or Justice itself: a discussion that attempts to cleave all factual information away from these concepts, leaving only their essential make-up, the set of predicates and laws that necessarily govern entities of that class or species. Essential intuition is an act that brings this ideal entity itself to intuitive awareness and so confers fullness and evidence on the categorial meaning act.

To bring out the phenomenological difference between essential intuition and merely intending an ideal entity, compare merely thinking about the Pythagorean theorem (perhaps by way of symbols:  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ ) with

constructing a proof this theorem. In elementary courses on geometry, it is commonplace to be asked to imagine variations of geometric figures. You might be asked to rotate, translate, or make the reflection of a triangle. Or you might be asked to shrink or extend the sides of the triangle. Eventually, if you arbitrarily vary this shape in imagination, you will come to realize that there are a set of properties of the triangle that remain constant under a certain class of variations (for instance, the class of so-called “rigid motions”). These constants Husserl calls essences (“*eide*” or singular, “*eidos*”). And Husserl believes that, at some point in this process of varying the image of the shape, we gain intuitive access to the essence.

Husserl calls this method of achieving an intuitive grasp of an ideal truth, which he developed first in *Ideas* (§§69–70), the method of imaginative variation. He envisions that it can be applied in intuition of all essential formations, not just geometric. And, as in geometric variation, since the concern is with the essential structure of the class of entities in question, that is to say, with *possibility* and not actuality, an imaginative series of variations will serve just as well as a series of actual perceptual experiences or the experiences of some other factive attitude. What makes this an *intuitive* grasp is that this consciousness of the essence serves to *constrain* the activity of variation, analogous to how the sensuous hyle constrain the activity of (implicit) anticipation and interpretation in perception. As Richard Tieszen puts it, “in the midst of all of our free variations we will come up against certain constraints, as though we have a swirling sea of changes around some islands of permanence” (Tieszen, 2005, p. 72).

Ultimately, Husserl hoped that this method of free variation could be applied to all domains of knowledge – to both exact (e.g., pure geometry, mathematics, logic) and non-exact (applied geometry, sciences of nature, phenomenology) fields of knowledge. However, since some essences are inexact and vague, “morphological” essences, the standards of systematicity and intuitive clarity have to be modified to accommodate the structure of the essences in question (cf. *Ideas* §§71–5). The conviction of the universal applicability of essential intuition in all science (*Wissenschaft*) is expressed in one of the most famous passages from Husserl’s corpus, the so-called “principle of all principles”:

No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the *principle of all principles: that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak, in its “personal” actuality) offered to us in “intuition” is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.* (*Ideas* §24, p. 44, emphasis in original)

Husserl envisioned a special role for imaginative variation in transcendental phenomenology: that, when applied alongside the other reductions, it would eventually unearth the logical structure of experience – “a universal apodictically experienceable structure” of experience that governs the reality of all phenomena that can appear to the subject (*CM* §12, p. 28) – bringing to completion the project of transcendental philosophy envisioned by Kant.<sup>19</sup>

This also helps reveal the reasons behind Husserl's claim that not all ideal possibilities are real possibilities. For only possibilities that belong to “the total realm of possible fulfillment” are knowable. “The realm of meaning is,” Husserl maintains, “much wider than that of intuition” (*LI VI* §63, p. 824). Consider, for instance, the concept of a round square or an “analytic contradiction” such as “an A which is not an A” or “All A's are 5's and some A's are not 5's” (*ibid.*). These concepts and statements are not meaningless or “non-sense” in the strict sense of a syntactically formless “heap of words” (e.g., “King but or like and.”) (*LI IV* §14, p. 522). They are not the kinds of meanings, however, that can be brought to intuitive fulfillment and so are not, by themselves, expressions of possible knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Now, at this point, there are two interrelated problems that Husserl must address. First, it is hard to know what the sensuous representative content of essential intuition could be.<sup>21</sup> Second, it is hard to see how straightforward perception can provide any evidential foundation for essential intuition, since the objects of straightforward perception are concrete and contingent existences, but essences are ideal and necessary.

First, concerning the representative content of essential intuition, we can see that the answer lies in the dual role that straightforward content can play in categorial intuition. Like synthetic categorial intuition, ideation is a process of active synthesis that requires the subject to take up an intention to make explicit something only implicitly meant in the horizon of straightforward intuition. However, unlike synthetic intuition, more is required than to make explicit the formal features that are implicit in a single straightforward experience. We must also take up the intention to grasp the structural features of this object that are common with every object of a certain class. So, like synthetic intuition, one must start with an example or “model” given in straightforward intuition; but, then, one must also actively produce an arbitrary and (ideally) complete multiplicity of variations that exhibit “coincidences” of invariant features.

Another way to understand this is that the phenomenologically evident constitutive activity of synthetic categorial intuition is (normally) involved in the constitutive activity of ideation. But essential intuition involves

more. Since its object is to grasp the essential structure of a given phenomenon, it cannot rest with the awareness of a categorial form in one instance. Rather it must construct a series of categorial presentations that vary in a perfectly arbitrary way and exhibits all possible transformations of the phenomenon that are consistent with its essence.

Concerning the second problem – about how sensuous intuition can provide a foundation for essential intuition despite the modal differences – we see that essential intuition is not an immediate “seeing” of the essence in one shot, as it were, but is instead more like what cognitive scientists today call “pattern recognition” (cf., Smith, 2007, p. 352). So, the contingency of the data in a single sensuous intuition does not sully the necessity of the eidetic claim confirmed in essential intuition. What matters is the invariant structural features of a class of intuitions (oftentimes each is sensuous, but not necessarily).

In addition, it is important to notice that the results of essential intuition too are fallible and subject to modification in light of further experience. For example, if we discover that the class of variations explored previously were not complete, or if we discover that there are other classes of variations to be included (as occurred, e.g., in the development of alternative geometries (cf., Tieszen, 2005)), then earlier results might need to be modified. The ideal is that of apodictic evidence, which is achieved by a complete articulation of possible variations compatible with a thing of a certain type. But, Husserl holds, even though it is not clear that any area of scientific inquiry has reached this pinnacle, it is a possibility adumbrated for us in the conscious activity of coming to know the essential structure of the world.

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#### NOTES

1. I cite Husserl's works using the following titles: (Husserl, 1970) = *LI*, (Husserl, 1997) = *TS*, (Husserl, 1991) = *TCL*, (Husserl, 1983) = *Ideas*, (Husserl, 1989) = *Ideas II*, (Husserl, 1960) = *CM*, (Husserl, 1973)=*EJ*, (Husserl, 1936) = *Crisis*. I include both the chapter number and page number of the English translation when citing a passage from one of these works. When citing *LI*, I will also cite the investigation number before the paragraph and page number.
2. This is not equivalent to the claim that all the phenomenologically salient features of experience are intentional. Husserl acknowledges the existence of non-intentional experiential data, which he calls sensuous "hyle" (*Ideas*, §85). However, unlike many in the Empiricist tradition, who acknowledge sense data as material for incorrigible knowledge, Husserl denies that *hyle* have any cognitive value by themselves. To have a cognitive value, they must also be combined with an intentional or "interpretative" act.
3. Husserl thus anticipates the "dogmatist" position in epistemology, inspired by the philosophy of G. E. Moore in analytic epistemology. It has been championed recently by James Pryor (2000).
4. Thus, unlike the view of the sensuous "given" articulated in the Kantian tradition by Wilfrid Sellars, sensuous contents do not guide conceptual acts of knowledge merely by causal influence (Sellars, 1968, p. 16), but by being constitutive of knowledge itself.

5. For more on Husserl's modal mereology see Simons (1982).
6. Husserl's view is also an early version of what has come to be known as a *phenomenal* intentional theory of consciousness: a view that understands the intentional content of experience to be determined by what is *subjectively* available, that is, by how things appear *to the subject* from within the experience. Thus, intentional content, on the phenomenal intentionality view, cannot be determined by causal, historical, or teleofunctional relations. See Kriegel (forthcoming) for a discussion of the differences between phenomenal and non-phenomenal theories of intentional content.
7. As Husserl uses this, it is close in meaning to the Latin *adequatio*, which means, roughly, "correspondent to."
8. Cf., *TS* §§4–6 and Smith (1989, chapter 5). John Foster (2000, pp. 49ff) calls this phenomenology the "presentational feel" of perceptual experience.
9. It's worth emphasizing that Husserl also clearly distinguishes hyletic contents as elements of the stream of consciousness from the qualities of objects that are intended or attained by perceptual intentionality. Cf., *TS* §14 and *Ideas* §§85–6.
10. At *TS* §§16–7, Husserl admits that the notion of similarity he employs in this relation "is not quite natural."
11. Dagfinn Føllesdal (1985) likens Husserl's conception of the ground of evidence to the holistic conceptions of justification developed in the pragmatist tradition. He pointed out that Husserl's conception of justification could also be understood as employing Rawls's (1999) concept of reflective equilibrium. Except that Husserl (like Rawls, 1951) would explicitly understand the presence of equilibrium in the unity of an intuitive act or in the unity of fulfillment as signaling more than the presence of agreement, but as also securing evidence or justification for the meanings that conform to the representative content. Husserl employs the notion of reflective equilibrium within the four major bodies of knowledge – empirical science, mathematics, logic, and ethics – individually, and he did not attempt to combine them in a way that would, e.g., allow one to bring intuitions or principles in ethics to bear on theorems or intuitions in mathematics (as is suggested by the famous image that closes Quine's "Two Dogmas" (Quine, 1951), in which our knowledge is an interwoven web of beliefs on which experience has greatest effect at the periphery, but which can, in principle, cause readjustments even at the tightly woven core).

Here I go beyond Føllesdal's application of the Rawlsian notion by also locating the presence of such equilibria in the "pre-reflective" spheres of consciousness with evidence, such as in the passive syntheses of basic perceptual consciousness. Rawls said of reflective equilibrium: "It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform and the premises of their derivation" (Rawls, 1999, p. 18). The equilibria achieved in basic perceptual consciousness, in contrast, are *pre*-reflective since we do not necessarily know to what ideal meanings our sensuous contents conform or what the logical implications of this content are.

12. The earliest phenomenological descriptions of these implicit cultural and "bodily" anticipations in the content of perceptual experience are to be found in *TS* and *Ideas II*. These aspects of the total intentional content of perception

became key elements in Husserl's conception of the inner- and outer-horizon of an object in *EJ* and the all-encompassing "Lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*) in the *Crisis*. These latter analyses were also great influences on Merleau-Ponty's (2002) analyses of the living, perceptual body.

13. For more on Husserl's conception of *de re* perceptual content, see Drummond (1979), Miller (1984, esp. chapter 3), and Smith (1989).
14. This notion of "seeing-in" is derived from Wollheim's (1998) work on the consciousness of objects in images. Cf., Noë (2004, chapter 3) for an application to seeing ordinary objects.
15. It is important to note that not all cases of categorial intuition are the result of a deliberate cognitive activity on the part of the subject. Sometimes the awareness of such things seems to just "dawn on us." Even here, Husserl would maintain that there is a further act carried out, perhaps compulsively out of habit or some other motive, it depends on a prior perceptual experience. See *EJ* §83.
16. Husserl describes intentional meanings in the "horizon" of an act as involving an "indeterminateness" that "necessarily signifies a determinableness which has a rigorously prescribed style. It points ahead to possible perceptual multiplicities which, merging continuously into one another, join together to make up the unity of one perception in which the continuously enduring physical thing is always showing some new "sides" (or else an old 'side' as returning) in a new series of adumbrations" (*Ideas* §44, p. 94).
17. Husserl's most detailed and mature study of essential intuition is to be found in *EJ* §§80–98. In this section, however, I will focus on the basics of the view presented earlier in *LI* and *Ideas*.
18. Kurt Gödel seems to have the same idea when he writes, "But, despite their remoteness from sense-experience, we do have something like a perception of the objects of set theory, as is seen from the fact that the axioms force themselves upon us as being true. I don't see any reason why we should have less confidence in this kind of perception, i.e. in mathematical intuition, than in sense-perception" (Gödel, 1983, pp. 483–484).
19. See Føllesdal (2006) for further discussion.
20. See Livingston (2004, chapter 3) for a discussion of the controversy between Husserl and Moritz Schlick concerning his conception of nonsense and its application in discovering the *a priori* logical structure of experience.
21. Charles Parsons (1979, note 8) avers that Husserl's treatment of this problem at *LI* VI §56 "lapses into obscurity."