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Lebendigkeit der Phänomenologie | Vitality of Phenomenology

Herausgegeben von
Hans Rainer Sepp

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Tradition und Erneuerung

Vitality of Phenomenology
Tradition and Renewal

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Introduction

Phenomenology: The Open

Giovanni Jan Giubilato

State University of Londrina, Brazil

As it's widely known, Paul Ricoeur in his famous essay *À L'école De La Phénoménologie* defined phenomenology “in a broader sense” as “the sum of Husserl's Husserlian work and the heresies issuing from it”.¹ In this definition of phenomenology it is possible to see how, on the one hand, it is interestingly depicted as a “school”, i.e. following the Greek etymology of the word *σχολή*, as “a group to whom lectures were given”, and lately as a “place of instruction”, but on the other hand, how it also claims the importance of what came after Husserl, what is to be called the “phenomenological tradition”. This particular historical and theoretical movement inaugurated by Husserl's pioneer work, thereafter successively developed in many ways – and by many voices – (as such probably somehow even “heretically” from Husserl's own point of view), despite their diversity of intents and contexts, always preserved a common ground. A common reference to the initial work of Husserl, its critique or even certain adjustments in some of its central concepts are examples of issues constantly preserved by this tradition. “Tradition” in fact comes from the Latin *tradere* and means “to transmit”, “to hand over”, “to give for safe-keeping”. Thus, when we think of phenomenology and ask ourselves about the meaning of phenomenology nowadays, we should probably conceive it “in a broader sense” as *a milieu of formation anchored in a worldwide established tradition*. Therefore, the *τόπος* of phenomenology could be characterized by a

1 P. Ricoeur, *À L'école De La Phénoménologie*, Vrin, Paris 2004, p. 9.

constant relation of continuity and opposition, of proximity and distance regarding the original Husserlian foundation and *Freilegung* (uncovering) of phenomenology as a possibility and as to what his breakthrough gave rise to.

But there could be no school, no place of learning and not even a tradition if “the vision of the essence’s master” had remained alone, if he hadn’t left any inheritance and if this one hadn’t been critically brought along by the “disciples” – by those who have had the opportunity to be involved and to learn from this “school of phenomenology”. It seems that Husserl was quite aware of the responsibility but also of the importance of transmitting such an inheritance beyond his own lifetime. Already in 1922, he writes in a letter to Natorp:

Perhaps, loaded with all possible tension of human forces, I’ll be working only for my *Nachlass*. So be it, if it could only be fully managed and come not too late.²

Fortunately for us, and thanks to the initiative of father Leo Van Breda, the rescue and conservation of Husserl’s *Nachlass* did not come too late. Husserl’s own effort in archiving his manuscripts over the years 1933-1935, with the help of Fink and Landgrebe, already manifests the will to consolidate and to express the systematics of his phenomenology, albeit all provisionality and apparent superficiality, in order to bequeath a full and scientific access to the labyrinth of his internal meditations and micro-analyses to posterity. As S. Luft exposes in his study on the *Archivierung des Husserlschen Nachlasses 1933-1935*, it is clear that the “guiding ideas and intentions” were to “enable future generations” to untangle and to study his *Nachlass*. This perspective was “by no means trivial to Husserl himself, but arose from his own philosophical intentions”.³

This particular intersubjective and over-personal dynamic that belongs to phenomenology as a project, as a movement and as a school of thinking – connecting several generations in a single tradition – is literarily confirmed in Husserl’s prologue to Boyce Gibson’s English translation of *Ideas I* (published 1931) by the metaphor of the “journey”. Husserl presents there his *Denkweg* and his philosophizing as a journey “in the trackless wilderness of a

2 E. Husserl, *Briefwechsel* (Husserliana-Dokumente III), Springer, Dordrecht / Boston / London 1994, Vol. V, p. 152.

3 Cf. S. Luft, *Die Archivierung des Husserlschen Nachlasses 1933-1935*, in: *Husserl Studies* 20 (2004), pp. 1-23.

new continent”, where he at first “undertook the virgin cultivation of some of its areas”.⁴ The further exploration of this unknown continent remained, for him, a task to be carried on by the next generations, what shouldn’t by any chance “excuse themselves from the pain of undertaking travels in the new land”.⁵ Of these painful and difficult theoretical ventures – just like the expeditions called “*bandeiras*”, by which the Portuguese explorers penetrated the interior of Brazil far south and west of the Tordesillas Line of 1494 – were expected to accomplish the task of progressively explore the new land and map its geography, providing a general new topography (or a “typology”, as Husserl would say), which would serve lately as a valuable guideline (*Leitfaden*) for further investigations.

Summing up, as distinctive elements of the phenomenological project and movement⁶ we could consider:

- 1) its conformation as a school;
- 2) its tradition;
- 3) the connections established over many generations;
- 4) the journey inside a new land;
- 5) the task of exploring it and mapping its various “regions”.

All these general elements concur to define what could be called the “chameleonic character” of the phenomenological project as a very particular “open system” of investigations which, through its innumerable micro-analytic and detailed works, never comes to a proper end, continuously facing new problems. A superb testimony of it was included by Husserl in a section of the manuscripts for his lecture *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time*:

Sometimes, after a long struggle, the longed-for clarity waves at us, and we believe the most glorious results are so close to us that we only need to grasp them. All aporias seem to dissolve, the critical sense mows the contradictions down in rows, and now there is one last step: we pull the sum, we start with a self-confident “thus”: and now we suddenly discover a dark point

4 E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, transl. R. Rojcewicz, A. Schuwer, Kluwer, Dordrecht / Boston / London 1989, p. 422.

5 Id.

6 Cf. H. G. Gadamer, *Die phänomenologische Bewegung*, in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 11/1 (1963), pp. 11-45; H. R. Sepp, *Edmund Husserl und die phänomenologische Bewegung*, Karl Alber, Freiburg / München 1988.

that becomes bigger and bigger; it grows up into a horrible monster that devours all our arguments and animates with new life the contradictions that have just been conquered. The corpses come alive again and grin smiles at us. The work and the fight start all over again.⁷

This particular kind of approach to philosophical problems, called the “zig-zag” method of phenomenological “*konkrete Arbeitsphilosophie*”, was pointed out by Husserl also in the introduction to the second volume of his *Logical Investigations* (1901). Accordingly, even if a systematic clarification of any mundane discipline or science “would in itself seem to require a stepwise following of the ordering of things, of the systematic interconnections of the science to be clarified”, the distinctive trait of phenomenological thinking consists precisely in the impossibility to follow such a narrow ordering. Phenomenological investigation – which is not merely a “descriptive phenomenology” nor a “part of a natural science” – can only securely proceed

if it repeatedly breaks with such a systematic sequence, if it removes conceptual obscurities which threaten the course of investigation before the natural sequence of subject-matters can lead up to such concepts. We search, as it were, in a zig-zag fashion, a metaphor all the more apt since the close interdependence of various epistemological concepts leads us back again and again to our original analyses, where the new confirms the old, and the old the new.⁸

The resulting movement of going backward and forward, of recasting the patterns and breaking the “systematic sequence” – which is due to the inevitable interdependence of the many regions and concepts discovered within the “unknown continent” – reappears more than thirty years later in Husserl’s *Crisis* (1936), as he methodologically discusses the possibility of clarifying the origin of modern science and the consequent opposition between objectivism and subjectivism. Proceeding forward and backward in a zig-zag fashion, phenomenology produces a circular thinking:

Thus we find ourselves in a sort of circle. The understanding of the beginnings [of science] is to be gained fully only by starting with science as given in its present-day form, looking back at its development. But in the absence

7 E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*, Nijhoff, The Hague 1966, p. 393.

8 E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations. Vol I*, transl. N. Findlay, Routledge, London / New York, 2001, p. 175.

of an understanding of the beginnings the development is mute as a development of meaning. Thus we have no other choice than to proceed forward and backward in a zigzag pattern; the one must help the other in an interplay. Relative clarification on one side brings some elucidation on the other, which in turn casts light back on the former.⁹

This continuous self-referential, self-reviewing and self-questioning character of phenomenology is once again highlighted by Husserl as he turns back to the results of the investigations carried out at the end of the *Cartesian Meditations* and identifies there an “essential reflexive relation of phenomenology to itself”.¹⁰ At this concluding point of Husserl’s *Meditations*, I believe that his statement does not refer so much to the (still Cartesian) claim for an “absolute grounding” (in *evidences*) of phenomenological philosophy (and subsequently of science in general) as to its *operative disclosure*, to its *systematic conformation* – understood by Husserl as an open system and as an “endless research program”. With regard to the field of transcendental experiences and its universal structures, for example, phenomenology must observe the following methodological necessity: it must initially follow a naive, simple and “straightforward” evidence as well as, at the same time, it shall obtain the essential descriptions without considering the “*systematic wholeness*” opened up through it. Only afterwards, journeying again and again through the analyses and repeatedly reflecting on the resulting descriptive work, a higher-level “critical consciousness” could be reached. Standing on this higher ground, the philosopher may then verify to what extent some previously unobserved and undiscovered pre-suppositions and pre-conceptions were still “standing” – *in Geltung* – in the initial and the “straight forwarded” descriptions.

What is thus meant by Husserl is that every concrete research work on each one of the different fields of phenomena must merged through that infinite self-questioning whose ultimate goal would be the constant reviewing and self-examination of the achieved results. In 1930 ca., as Fink and Husserl were deeply involved in the “full elaboration of the *Cartesian Meditations*’ German version into [a] systematic ‘magnum opus’”,¹¹ which should lead to “an entirely new systematic presentation of his [Husserl’s] phenomenology

9 E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, transl. D. Carr, Northwestern University press, Evanston 1907, p. 58.

10 E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, transl. D. Cairns, Nijhoff, The Hague 1977, p. 152.

11 E. Husserl, *Briefwechsel* (Husserliana-Dokumente III), op. cit., Vol. III, p. 254.

on the basis of its intrinsic principle and central dynamic”,¹² the young collaborator and co-thinker Eugen Fink formulated as follows the very idea of a certain singularity proper to the phenomenological way of working and to its “school of thinking”: on the one hand “no systematic scheme can precede its concrete researches, but it must be unfolded throughout its many singular analyzes”.¹³ On the other, as Fink had already stated in the introductory lines of his PhD thesis *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild*,:

no single analysis exists because of itself, and every single one is subordinated to the tension towards the whole of the system, being guided and set in motion by a fundamental question.¹⁴

Every introductory, general and systematic scheme must therefore come only after performing the concrete analyses, which, however, obtain their specific relevance only in the light of the whole systematic context. This means that the results of any single analysis and of any phenomenological inquiry cannot be measured to their full extent unless they have been subjected to an orderly self-criticism and self-questioning. The paradoxical pattern of this essential self-reflexive circling movement, originated by the impossible simultaneity of the two essential elements of the “phenomenological system” – namely 1. the concrete and tangible work on the specific phenomena (Husserl’s *Kleingeld*) and 2. the panoramic overview on the different domains of phenomenology as a whole – characterizes the dynamic of the phenomenological open system as an endless self-conquering movement. Such tension between the whole system and the single phenomenological analysis essentially belongs to the phenomenological thinking, which should constantly remain “open” by never absolutizing any results or findings of an inquiry. As every concrete

12 R. Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl & Eugen Fink. Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology*, Yale University Press, New haven / London, p. 28. On this see the Fink’s assistant drafts for Husserl’s systematic work in: E. Fink, *VI Cartesianische Meditation. Teil 2: Ergänzungsband*, Kluwer, Dordrecht / Boston / London 1988, pp. 3-105; and Husserl’s own manuscripts in: E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, Nijhoff, Den Haag 1973, pp. 79-459.

13 E. Fink, *Phänomenologische Werkstatt. Vol 2: Die Bernauer Zeitmanuskripte, Cartesianische Meditationen und System der phänomenologischen Philosophie*, ed. by R. Bruzina, Karl Alber, Freiburg / München 2008, p. 333.

14 E. Fink, *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild*, in: Id., *Studien zur Phänomenologie 1930-1939*, Nijhoff, Den Haag 1966, p. 2.

phenomenological analysis necessarily lays on some “reductive level”, it may eventually become aware of the “limits of its relevance” and of its “range” and, therefore, it may discover the “hidden, anonymous horizon of its validity”. Thereby, once a singular position is assumed in the “open infinity of the phenomenological problematic”, this assumption necessarily implies its limitation and restriction. The assumed position must therefore be considered as an “essentially provisional” one.¹⁵

In the broader context of what we’ve been referring to as the phenomenological tradition, we have plenty of different theoretical perspectives that explicitly resort to the inheritance of the conception of phenomenology as an open system.¹⁶ Among them, we could mention e.g. Merleau-Ponty’s claim of an “impossibility of a complete reduction” set down on the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* – in which he provides his complex and notorious answer to the question “What is Phenomenology?”.¹⁷

But we could also allude to Luciano Anceschi’s theory of “artistic poetics”, conceived by the Italian philosopher as an open system formed by different elements to be disclosed through critical and hermeneutical work. The concepts of “open system” and “phenomenology of art” in Anceschi’s thought were shaped out of a correlation between aspects of traditional poetic theory and literature. More recently, an approach to phenomenology as an open system has gained increasing visibility in the context of interdisciplinary relations between the so-called “naturalized phenomenology” and empirical sciences (such as psychology, psychiatry, medicine, etc.) apart from neurosciences in general. Phenomenological thinking and research has proven to be highly flexible and adjustable to different models of integration and collaboration with regard to those particular sciences.¹⁸

In 1988, Robert Sokolowski edited a book dedicated to *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, explicitly recognizing the cultural and philosophical fruitfulness of the “movement” inaugurated by Husserl. Now

15 Id.

16 Cf. V. Costa, A. Cimino (Eds.), *Storia della Fenomenologia*, Carocci, Roma 2012.

17 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, Routledge, London 1962, p. xiv.

18 See for example D. Zahavi, *Naturalized Phenomenology*, in: D. Schmicking, S. Gallagher (Eds.), *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, Springer, Dordrecht 2010 pp. 3-19.

thirty years later, the essays presented in the current edition are meant to illustrate not only the polymorphic actuality of the phenomenological movement and the (often critical) comprehension both of phenomenological philosophy and of its significance, but also its richness and vitality within a constant interplay of tradition and renewal. Special attention has been paid to the investigations and intersections developed outside Europe and particularly in Brazil and in Latin America, where phenomenology and its creative reception have given rise to a rich variety of new forms of thinking.

Finally, I want to thank all the authors of this volume for their contributions and for their kind participation in this project. In particular, I want to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Dr. Hans Rainer Sepp for his helpful support and to Anna Luiza Coli for her incomparable effort in translating some of the texts. Many thanks also to Dr. Aengus Daly for his competence in proof-reading and correcting the English language.

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Giovanni Jan Giubilato
Londrina, June 2018.

Phenomenology and Linguistic Analysis¹

Guido Antônio de Almeida

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The present paper illustrates the phenomenological theory of intentional acts and particularly of those acts in which the understanding of linguistic expressions occurs. It's guided by the intent to outline an image of phenomenology that could be seen as something reasonable by phenomenologists in that it involves a rejection of the majority of the critiques raised against phenomenological philosophy that are based on a partial and preconceived interpretation of its fundamental concepts. The point, however, is not so much to produce an apology for the phenomenological doctrine but rather to prepare the basis for a more decisive confrontation by which the superiority of the so-called “linguistic” analysis over the “intentional” analysis could become clear.

1 The present article was firstly published almost thirty years ago in: R. Landim Filho, G. A. De Almeida (Eds.), *Filosofia da linguagem e lógica*, Loyola - PUC/RJ, São Paulo / Rio de Janeiro, 1980, pp. 5-46. By virtue of both its masterful profundity in treating the complexity of phenomenological conceptuality and the clearness of its explanations concerning fundamental topics such as “intentionality”, “meaning” and “linguistic expressions” in Husserl’s thought, it has been included, upon agreement with the author, in this volume as its first essay. Often enriched with critical and independent insights, this courageous enterprise of a confrontation between phenomenology and linguistic analysis furthermore has an historical value in relation to the (relatively recent) reception of Husserl’s phenomenology in Brazil. For the English translation some marginal notes and corrections made by the author on his own copy of the 1980 edition were taken into account. References and citations have been adjusted to the current standards. Translated by Anna Luiza Coli & Giovanni Jan Giubilato [T. N.].

I will assume the systematic critique that Ernst Tugendhat expresses against phenomenology from the perspective of linguistic analysis as guideline in my presentation.² If a personal aside can be added, I want to mention when I had still seen a reasonable conception of human understanding in phenomenology, the reading of this essay changed my opinions and the later acknowledgement of the superiority of analytic philosophy over phenomenology arose from the study Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Nevertheless, Tugendhat's critique follows the usual schema of the analytical critiques against the traditional theories of meaning and those schemata are clearly outlined by Wittgenstein's critical observations in his *Philosophical Investigations*. On that basis, I gained awareness of the “weak point” of phenomenological theory mostly by observing the *concrete practice* of the methodology of linguistic analysis and not by virtue of those “matters of principle” – such as the critiques of “mentalism”, “referentialism” and the hypothesis that ideal objects exist – to which philosophical theories of meaning generally succumb. In fact, the present paper was motivated by a reflection on the failed attempt to raise the same critical objections against phenomenology that are currently levelled at traditional theories of meaning. In order to show the flaws and errors of phenomenological theory it is first necessary to delineate its relative legitimacy. Only afterwards, can its illegitimacy be discussed. A renewed examination of the confrontation between phenomenology and linguistic analysis is thereby justified. Guided by Tugendhat's line of argument, I will explain to what extent the theory of intentional acts is able (or not able) to account for how we understand a linguistic expression. We will then see why the “intentional” analysis lost its previous power to convince to “linguistic” analysis.

My starting point will be Tugendhat's critical interpretation of phenomenology within an analytical perspective. This interpretation can be summarized as follows:

1. Husserl seeks to situate the understanding of meaning within the intentional relation to objects, because, according to him, the primary unity of consciousness – or, in other words, the fundamental way in which we open ourselves to the world – is the intentional “act” that “refers to” an object. It seems obvious to Tugendhat that the “intentional act” must be conceived

2 E. Tugendhat, *Phenomenology and Linguistic Analysis*, in: R. Bernet, D. Welton, G. Zavota (Ed.), *Edmund Husserl: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*. Vol. 4, Routledge, London / New York 2005.

starting from the subject-object relationship, i.e. as the *subjective activity* which consists in the *reference to* or *representation of* an object.

2. From an introspective and intuitive analysis, Husserl infers that intentionality, the intuitive reference towards an object, is the most fundamental phenomenon of consciousness. However, criticism of phenomenology should not be based on a preliminary refusal of the introspective method. This would put an end to the debate immediately. Suspending for a moment the problem of the legitimacy of the phenomenological method, Tugendhat proposes directing the analysis towards the difficulties that the intentional hypothesis implies for an explanation of the meaning of linguistic expressions.

3. Husserl's intentional theory prevents him from correctly encompassing what does not have the character of an object and that is precisely the case with "meaning".

4. This explains why, within the fundamental schema of act-object (or subject-object), the meaning is *ab initio* subjectively interpreted as a characteristic of intentional acts, which Husserl calls "act-species".

5. Becoming aware of the limitations of his subjective approach, Husserl corrects his theory by introducing a new feature of intentional acts: the so called *noematic* aspect. He thus moves to a conception of the meaning of linguistic expressions as a "mode of givenness" of the object. Nevertheless, this noematic reformulation of his theory of meaning has the following disadvantage: the loss of the universal character that, despite everything, the prior subjective theory had provided.

In this way, the polemical strategy becomes clear. The fundamental objection consists in saying that Husserl's intentional theory, with which he begins his explanation of the nature of meaning, is incapable of explaining everything that transcends the subject-object schema. It follows from this that phenomenological theory would oscillate between a subjectifying conception of meaning, in which it becomes the "species" of intentional acts referring to the same objects, and an objectifying theory, in which meaning becomes the object itself in the "noematic how" of its modes of givenness. By way of summary it can be said that phenomenological theory would end up by being reduced, firstly, to a mentalist theory and, secondly to a referential theory of meaning and, finally, it is totally exposed to analytical criticism. The relation between the theoretical difficulties derived from this fundamental objection and the necessity of sometimes subjectifying or objectifying meaning is obvious. Some insurmountable difficulties arise for phenomenological explication

with respect to both nominal expressions and incomplete sentences and expressions that only make sense within the context of a phrase. This originate from:

1. The need to insert meaning into a referential function;
2. The need to find evidence of this connection between meaning and reference within the introspection of intentional experiences and thanks to a “phenomenological sight”, capable of seeing their ideal essence.

This strategy mainly consists in the attempt to apply to phenomenology the polemic “topoi” of linguistic analysis by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* and then systematized by his followers. The success of our strategy clearly depends upon the possibility of interpreting the fundamental concepts of phenomenological theory as Tugendhat indicated. Therefore, the legitimacy of this interpretation must be examined.

1. The nature of the intentional act

As seen above, Tugendhat’s proposal is to conceive intentionality starting from the subject-object schema and as a representative activity of objects which unfolds in the interiority of a subject and where it is accessible to internal observation. I do not intend to demonstrate the viability of the introspection and the existence of consciousness’ internal occurrences here and which Tugendhat generously avoids calling into question. Instead, it is necessary to ask ourselves if we can accept the notion of intentionality as it has been described.

Let us begin by reconsidering phenomenology's starting point. Just as the traditional theories of knowledge, its purpose is to explain the objectivity of a speech that expresses some kind of knowledge, i.e. the objectivity of the discursive form in which a knowledge is expressed, as well as the possibility of the knowledge itself that is thus expressed. The first step is to relate both the objectivity of the speech and knowledge to *intentional acts*.³ As a matter of fact, we face here an initial and double theoretical decision. First of all, the elements of the speech (the expressions it is made of) and the logical-linguistic form they assume (such as names, predicates and propositions) are referred to *acts*, to personal operations. This means that the expressive force of the

3 The following explanation is an interpretation of some topics which have been developed by Husserl in the second chapter of the *Fifth Logical Investigation*.

speech (such as its meaning, its reference, its truth and its demonstrative strength) do not derive from the linguistic unities in which it can be dissected (such as words and sentences), but rather from the person who speaks in the speech, or more precisely, from the way in which the person understands it. The reference of the speech to *acts* of a subject therefore comes from the following insights: that words alone have no meaning unless someone gives them a meaning or understands them according to a pre-given meaning; that a noun in itself does not designate anything and that it can only do so because we employ it to designate something and finally that a sentence is true depending on how it is understood or employed. Secondly, phenomenology examines these acts which constitute the expressive force of a speech not because they are the data of the intuitive consciousness we have of them or single and contingent occurrences of an individual consciousness, but rather due to the fact that these acts of understanding, of reference, of assertion, etc. contain a meaning that essentially *defines* them – and that allows us to speak of an act’s repetition. Indeed, what matters for phenomenological reflection is not the singular act we are conscious of, but exclusively its objective meaning. The “acts” to which phenomenology refers speech are not characterized as the experiences of a conscious subject, but rather by the fact of having a meaning, of being oriented towards an invariable content which remains the same over the diverse executions of the same act (of the same kind). Precisely this *intentional* structure of all speech acts is supposed to explain the facts initially studied by the phenomenologist such as: 1. that words have a meaning; 2. that sentences enunciate what is true and what is false; 3. that conclusions are drawn from some premises, etc.

The second step consists in distinguishing the intentional content of the act from the objective correlate it may have (when it comes to designating or determining it in a proposition). This distinction is necessary because it is indifferent to the meaning of intentional acts whether the referred term exists or not, or whether to the referred object of the act corresponds an object or not. This point can be easily clarified by illustrating how we understand the meaning of linguistic expressions. We understand the meaning of linguistic expressions without any regard to the existence of its referred object, as can easily be seen by considering expressions such as “regular myriagon”, “Zeus”, etc., which do not designate an object. What we have in the intentional reference is the understanding of a “meaning” which eventually allows the identification of a given object (like that which we refer to when we understand the

meaning of a word) and nothing can prejudge either the possibility or the existence of this object. The possibility of such an object can only be established by a posterior “clarification” of the possibility concerning the intuitive realization of the referred meaning.⁴ Its reality depends on the effective intuitive realization of the meaning by virtue of the givenness of the object and according to the way it is understood in the intentional reference. For this reason, every intentional reference refers to what Husserl calls “intuitive fulfillment”, that is to say, the intuitive self-givenness of objects.

Moreover, the intuitive presentation or representation of objects refers back to the intentional reference. It is therefore generally possible to demonstrate that the *intentional* character of perceptive and cognitive acts depends on the presence of the object or its intuitive representation (in an image, in a memory, or in any other mental content). Every cognitive act is characterized by the fact that an object is presentially given or intuitively represented. But it is given precisely as something that can be referred to and identified through a previously understood meaning. The object of knowledge is exactly the object that can be referred to as a result of such an identification. Thus, even if we can speak of a relation between an act and a given or represented object, its possibility relies on something previous, namely the intentional reference prior to all presence and to all intuitive representation.

Both the possibility of intentionally referring to “inexistent objects”, i.e. the possibility of creating meanings that do not apprehend an object, and the possibility of identifying a given or represented object thereby reveal the essentially “projective” or anticipative character of an intentional act. This is by no means an intuitive representation of the object but only the anticipative turn to something that may eventually be given as an object. As anticipation, this “turn to something” encloses an intentional “content” which must not be confused with the object outside the intentional relation. This intentional content, immanent to the intentional act, cannot be identified with an *extra-mentem* object nor is a mental content of the subject or the act (i.e., an experience) since it is not something that appears or disappears with the realization of the act but is rather an objective meaning which allows the apprehension and identification of an object.

4 Concerning this “clarification” of a meaning’s possibility cf. E. Husserl, *Formale und Transzendente Logik*, Niemayer, Halle 1929, p.8. For the independence of the notions of intentionality and relation to an object cf. E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Vol. 2*, Niemayer, Tübingen 1968, first part, p. 372 ff. and p. 425.

We can thus say that the notion of intentionality does not designate what is ordinarily understood by a relation, i.e. a relation between two already-given terms which could be determined separately and **autonomously**. If we want to refer to the intentional act as a relation (as we do, for instance, when we refer to it as a “consciousness of”, as an “orientation towards”, etc.), it will then be necessary to admit that this “intentional relation” has the paradoxical property of preceding the related terms. As a matter of fact, as more than a relation (which is implied in the fact that a subject becomes aware of an object or turns himself to it), it is the primordial dimension in which an object – and also a subject, as we shall see below – can subsequently be constituted.

The third step in the determination of the intentional acts consists in the insight that their reference to a subject, i.e. their interpretation as subjective activity and as display of a subjective possibility (of representing objects), is just as irrelevant for the theory of intentionality. Furthermore, the examination of this point will lead to the same result already achieved in the consideration of the object of the intentional act.

Husserl’s reflections on this matter can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the reference of the multiplicity of evidences and intentional acts to an “ego” or a “subject” (distinct from them and therefore called “pure”) should be thought as the result of an apperceptive *founded* act, i.e. of a self-reflexive act which, shifting the focus to the multiplicity of mental processes and intentional acts, establishes among them a synthetic unity and considers them as pertaining to the very same ego. If the unity of the acts and the mental processes is supposed to exclusively depend on such an apperceptive act, this unity would not be previously given, but would rather be the result of a synthesis following the immediate implementation of intentional acts. To put it directly: the unity of the mental processes in the “pure ego” would be the unity of a constructed object and the act of self-apperception would have a *logical* and *reflexive* character instead of being a “directly lived” one. With his refusal of the “pure ego” (i.e. of a subjacent subject), Husserl wants show that the unity of the intentional consciousness is immediate and it is always already given in every intentional act: the unity of the temporal flow of experiences is realized by a “fusion” [*Verschmelzung*] of the experiences with each other, insofar as every single experience and every intentional act bears a vast horizon of anticipations and retentions.

Husserl never withdraws this immediate character that belongs to the unity of intentional consciousness, even when he reintroduces the notion of “pre-egoic” or “pre-subjective”. What is reintroduced with this “pure ego” is

not the objectifying self-apperception (that distinguishes reflection) but something else: the acknowledgement that intentional acts belong to some founding instance, as they show a semblance of truth and foundation. What Husserl discovers after the *Investigations* is that intentional consciousness is not only characterized by the immediate self-reference of the experiences in the unity of the same temporal horizon, but also by the self-responsibility of a consciousness that calls itself: it is forced by the same anticipative nature of the intentional reference to answer for the rationality or irrationality of its own claims, before all other consciousness. This recognition of the rationality of, together with the requirement for responsibility for, intentional acts, allows Husserl to see in the intentional consciousness an *ego* that, from now on, *has* experiences as its own experiences – not in the sense that it includes them in itself, but as an activity for which he must account. That is why Husserl claims that the *ego* is nothing besides or beyond the intentional acts in which he lives.⁵

By way of summary, in order to explain the unity of the intentional acts it is not necessary to relate them to a separated “ego” or “subject”: the unity of every intentional act is assured in the (temporal) execution of the act itself as a reference to something, as an anticipation of an object according to a determined “how” or “meaning”. Now, if the intentional act does not presume any previous and lower substrate, it cannot be thought of as an *activity*, or more precisely, as the *Betätigung* of a subject, i.e. as the exercise of a subjective possibility.⁶ However, if with the intentional reference no subject comes into action [*betätigt sich*], why should we speak of an intentional *act*?

The justification of the notion of an “intentional act” as well as the rejection of the notion of “pure ego” was brought about in the context of a long dispute with Paul Natorp.⁷ Natorp refuses to admit the existence of *acts* of consciousness that could establish a relation between the objects appearing to consciousness and consciousness itself. According to him, within the apparition, or phenomenon, of an object it is not legitimate to distinguish between the content that appears and the subjective mode of apprehension. The only possible distinction relates to the way in which we consider the phenomenon. From a subjective or psychological point of view, the phenomenon is considered in its being-for-a-consciousness. From an objective point of view (or the

5 Cf. E. Husserl, *Ideen I* (Husserliana III), Nijhoff, Den Haag 1950, p. 194 ff.

6 Cf. E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Vol. 2*, l.c., p. 379.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 389 ff.