Realism Sustained?
Interpreting Husserl’s Progression into Idealism
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It is generally believed among those familiar with Husserl’s philosophy that in his earlier career he adopted a realist theory of knowledge, represented by his Logical Investigations, and that he later modified that realist theory in such a way that it became an idealist theory. The idea widely accepted was that, for the later Husserl, “the real world is nothing but a constituted noematic unity existing for the pure transcendental Ego. The constitution of the world is reduced to the primary subjectivity of the Ego. The world becomes intentional correlates of sets of cognitive acts. Material things cease to be an autonomous sphere of being and are created as a system of object senses. Beyond that they are nothing.”

In attempting to make his position clear, Husserl denied holding anything like the Idealism famously accepted by George Berkeley and others, which made particular physical entities (“All the Choir of Heaven and the furniture of earth,” as Berkeley said. Treatise, Part I, § 3.) dependent for their existence upon particular acts of consciousness directed upon them, human or divine. But nevertheless, on the presumed later view, he in some sense seems to have held that the world of physical objects was dependent for its existence upon the existence and nature of “pure consciousness”—a realm of being somehow “left over” after placing the natural world (the world of ordinary sense perception and life) within the famous “bracket.”

In this lecture I would like to pay some attention to a line of thought (possibly the main line of thought) that might have led Husserl through such a revolutionary transformation. It was a transformation—real or alleged—that paved the way for a broader “phenomenological movement” headed in precisely the opposite direction from that of his earlier concerns. His earlier work developed an understanding of consciousness and knowledge allowing for cognitive apprehension of realities (including the physical world) as they are “in themselves,” and existentially independent of any relation to any type of consciousness, “pure” or otherwise. I should just say at this point that I have been unable to accept the view that Husserl ever became an idealist, in any but the rather peculiar sense of the word “ideal” which refers to universals and is employed in the title of his most well-known book, Ideas I. I have also never been able to agree that he became a Nominalist, as numerous of his interpreters have held.

The outset of the 20th Century was a time of great resistance to the idealism that was then dominant as a theory of consciousness and reality. In England and America, as well as in Austria and parts of Germany, victory over idealism was declared on the basis of novel analyses of consciousness. But positions then adopted as replacements of idealism were unable to sustain themselves in the face of further developments that called them in question. This was clearly the case in England and in America, where the “New Realism”—substantially indebted to Husserl—soon gave way to “Critical Realism,” which in turn proved to be only an unstable stepping-stone to Phenomenalism and “Logical Constructionism.” In his famous essay of 1903, G. E. Moore announced “The Refutation of Idealism.” Moore laid out a strong and widely convincing argument for distinguishing the act of consciousness from its object, and then for the separability of the object from the act. Thus, Moore stated that merely to have a sensation was already to be “outside the circle of ideas.” (p. 27) He announced that “all of the most striking results of philosophy—Sensationalism, Agnosticism and Idealism alike—have, for all that has hitherto been urged in their favour, no more

1 In ‘Selected Papers on The Early Phenomenology: Munich and Göttingen’, Quaestiones Disputatae, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 2012), 20 – 32.
2 From the publishers blurb on the back of Roman Ingarden’s, On the Motives which Led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism, trans. Anor Hannibalsson, (Den Haage: Nijhoff).
foundation than the supposition that a chimera lives in the moon.” (p. 5) Realism was taken by him to be secured by a few neat moves. But the details of consciousness of ordinary physical objects and their world (the ‘natural’ world) still had to be supplied, and Moore could not successfully work them out.5 “Sense data” forced their way forward as the primary objects of consciousness, and after some years of intense activity—by Bertrand Russell, Moore and other Critical Realists—they were located in the “private space” of individual fields of consciousness. From there “logical constructions” took over in some mysterious way to yield, supposedly, the ordinary types of objects in the public world of which we seem to be aware. (Russell, Goodman, Carnap, Ayer) But how that world of mind independent, intersubjective objects was to become accessible from private space into a public world was never successfully explained, and deliverance from “private space” was finally declared by Wittgenstein’s anti-private language argument, according to which we live within language games and life forms that are by definition public.

Of course by the 20th Century “constructionism” of one or another sort (Hume, Kant, Mach, Mill, Nietzsche) had been around for a long time, and the differences between its various forms were only matters of detail. What all its forms shared, however, was the claim that the world of ordinary objects was somehow produced by activities of consciousness (of some type) and could not survive their absence. You see the parallel to Husserl’s case. The ordinary objects did not exist “in themselves.” That it was now to be logical construction (Russell, Carnap) that delivers us from private space was not due to the inherent intelligibility of the “construction” involved, but to a new dignity accruing socially to the “logical” in virtue of impressive developments in that field. Exactly how this “logical construction” came about and the exact nature of its outcome remained unclarified.

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The regression back to idealism alleged in Husserl’s case shows some overall similarities to the regression just described, though in his case it was not mainly caused by problems with what to do about “sense data.” (Husserl located sensations or his hyletic data differently than did Moore and the Critical Realists.) But it was the details of how we come to grasp “mind independent” objects that (supposedly) defeated the realism of the Logical Investigations. Basic intentionality plus its developments in the progressions of “fulfillment” was thought by the earlier Husserl to solve the problem of transcendence to the “in itself” of the various types of objects: real, mental, and ideal (in his special sense). But now the details of “fulfillment” in the case of consciousness of physical objects were ultimately thought (at least by some) to demand that those objects not be mind independent; and there, it seems, is the idealism alleged for the later Husserl. I want to examine more closely how that transpired. It is not a simple matter, of course. Husserl does not, so far as I know, give explicitly stated, straightforward arguments for the form of idealism alleged. But he endlessly provides the analyses of perceptual consciousness from which it, supposedly, follows.

For Husserl, the perception of an ordinary physical object consists in an extremely complicated network of interdependent intentionalities, some few directed upon aspects of the respective object that are “themselves given,” but many also upon aspects of it which are not given (not “directly viewed”) at any one moment in perceiving the object. For example, when we see a table under ordinary circumstances, most of the properties and parts we see it as having are not “directly” seen. Perhaps the color and shape of the top surface are directly presented to us. But we don’t just see surfaces. Most of the table aspects not directly given to us at any particular moment are, nevertheless, somehow before our mind as we see the table. They are intended by means of empty sub-intentionalities that are parts of the whole act of seeing the table. These can in some measure, and in a definite order, be transformed into fulfilled intentionalities by varying our relationships to the table. (The underside is not seen now as the topside is, let us suppose, but I can, by varying my position, ‘look at’ it as I am now looking at the top. Etc., etc.) All of this is no doubt well known to readers of Husserl’s works, but here are some decisive statements from him:

“All perceiving and imagining is, on our view, a web of partial intentions, fused together in the unity of a single total intention. The correlate of this last intention is the thing, while the correlates of its partial intentions are the thing’s parts and aspects. Only in this way can we understand how consciousness reaches out

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beyond what it actually experiences <über das wahrhaft Erlebte>. It can so to say mean beyond itself, and its meaning can be fulfilled.”

Again:

“All intentions have corresponding possibilities of fulfillment (or of opposed frustration): these themselves are peculiar transitional experiences, characterizable as acts, which permit each act to ‘reach its goal’ in an act specially correlated with it.” (707)

And once more:

“We may therefore rightly see, in inadequate percepts and imaginations, interwoven masses of primitive intentions, among which, in addition to perceptual and imaginative elements, there are also intentions of a signitative kind. We may therefore maintain, in general, that all phenomenological differences in objectifying acts reduce to their constituent elementary intentions and fulfillments, the former bound to the latter through syntheses of fulfillment.” (717)

It must be emphasized, for our discussion here, that Husserl regarded every such perception as a perception of the object itself and as it is in itself. “It is a part so-to-say of a percept’s inherent sense to be the self-appearance of the object. Even if, for phenomenological purposes, ordinary perception is composed of countless intentions, some purely perceptual, some merely imaginative, and some even signitative, it yet, as a total act, grasps the object itself, even if only by way of an aspect…. This common relation to the object ‘in itself’, i.e. to the ideal of adequation, enters into the sense of all perception.” (713)

Now in my opinion Husserl never changed his view as expressed in this last statement. But he certainly did something that made many people, including some of his best students and closest associates, think he did change that view. His continuing investigations of consciousness of objects, and especially of physical objects in the ‘natural’ world, turned up additional features of perceptual consciousness, or developed features already acknowledged, in such a way, that occasion was given for idealist interpretations of his views. The main explicit and novel developments, beyond the position of the VIth Investigation, that seemed, to many, to point to the idealist interpretation were: introduction or elaboration of the noema, further development of the theory of constitution, and the employment of the phenomenological reduction. As Roman Ingarden points out in his piece “On the Motives which Led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism,” however, none of the further developments after LI, nor all of them together, logically entail idealism with reference to the natural world. If that were true it would seem we have to decide whether Husserl made a gigantic logical error or in fact never adopted idealism. I believe the latter is the case.

Now I cannot here take on the entire scope of the discussion relevant to Husserl’s alleged idealism, and this has been done in an excellent way by Ingarden himself, in any case. (Both in Controversy about the Existence of the World and in On the Motives which Led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism. See also Theodore DeBoer’s book, The Development of Husserl’s Thought, for a much more supportive exposition of Husserl’s alleged idealism.) Ingarden held (p. 8) that Husserl does not explicitly advance an argument in favor of Transcendental Idealism, and insists, as just noted, that the main lines of Husserl’s views sometimes urged as constituting such an argument are inadequate to support the conclusion. Here I shall concentrate upon a single line of argument for idealism that might arise from the fact, cited above, that physical objects in their nature are not and cannot be “fully given” to perceptual consciousness. Further, what is given or “directly viewed” is said to be not “in itself,” but to be only for a viewing consciousness at a time and a place. Even the qualities of the thing that seem to be given are, upon reflection, only present in various ways, or via certain “adumbrations” (Abshattungen), depending upon circumstances. E.g., a white sheet of paper at dusk “appears” grey, though what we see is a white sheet of paper and its ‘whiteness’. And from a certain angle a square tabletop “appears” to be rhomboidal, etc. The whiteness and the squareness, as well as the sheet of paper and the table—the “appearance” of physical things and of their qualities—are all that is fully present to us within pure consciousness. Or so the story goes. These then are the “noemata”—the manners of being given, the “senses” of the object—that come to play such a huge role in Husserl’s analyses of cognitive acts generally. There is no doubt about that. Of them, he comes to say, we have absolute knowledge. They are fully

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present to us (when they are present) and would be what they are regardless of whatever further experiences might occur, and regardless of whether or not the corresponding “external” things and their properties exist or are, in some or most respects, what we in perception take them to be. The “appearances” are therefore dependent upon the conscious act before which or within which they stand. They are relative to it. Their esse is percipi. (Ideas I, §98)8 “Idealism” or mind dependence with reference to them is obvious. If, then, material things are identical with some combinations of them, idealism with reference to them and the physical world is unavoidable. But can we really think that physical objects, as they are intended or come before the mind, are identical with some combination of noemata—given what those objects are presented as and how they are presented (through adumbrations)?

And here lies, to me, one of the strangest points in this whole discussion. What could lead anyone to think that a physical object could be a string of noemata, or that the perceptual consciousness directed upon a physical object could be perceptual consciousness of a string of noemata. Elementary phenomenological description would seem to rule that out, to make that impossible. It would seem that in the two cases we are dealing with radically different kinds of things, and that the perceptual consciousness in the two cases are of radically different kinds. The intentionalities are simply different in the two cases.

As Ingarden constructs the presumed line of thought from the nature of sense perception to the “mental” nature of physical objects, it goes something like this: Following out how physical objects are (and are not) explicitly given to sense perception, it is not possible to know what the thing perceived really is in all those respects not genuinely given in a perception of it. (E.g., the bottom side of the tabletop is not given when the table is viewed from above.) Knowledge gained from outer perception is, then, necessarily qualified by an uncertainty that cannot be removed by further perceptual examination of the same thing. We can never exclude the possibility that even the very “whatness” or nature of a perceived object is different from what we take it to be at the moment. The “what” of the perceived thing—a table, an animal—as we grasp it at any point in our experience may only be a phenomenon resulting from how we have organized a particular set of perceptual experiences, and therefore may be something that exists only “for us.” It is then nothing “in itself” and certainly nothing in “the thing itself.” Ingarden summarizes the point as follows:

A doubt can be raised whether the notion of such an ‘in itself’ with a nature of its own and qualification of the object founded in the thing itself, is not a principally erroneous thought which is to be replaced by the thought that every thing is ‘for the subject’ possessing certain perceptions and is nothing ‘in itself’. Thus we find ourselves again at the gates of idealism. (p. 19)

So any categorical assertion about the physical object is basically unjustified unless qualified by some such phrase as “according to experience thus far.” But then of course the object we are dealing with is not assigned “being in itself.” It is relativized to experiences of it, and the objects of sense perception are then only “intentional correlates” of perceptual experiences. Not only are they essentially such correlates, but also in some sense they are creations or products of perceptual experiences. They exist only for the pure transcendental ego which, one must suppose, is present with the corresponding perceptions; and it is, actually, very hard to see, then, how they would exist without individual egos. Thus we have the assertion Ingarden reports as repeatedly made by Husserl in the middle years of his teaching: “If we exclude pure consciousness then we exclude the world.” That certainly looks like idealism, without need of any additional elaboration or additions from Husserl’s developing views: such as the phenomenological reduction, the theory of constitution, issues in formal ontology—all critically discussed by Ingarden. But I shall not touch on these other points here, because I think the argument we have just looked at is really the heart of the matter. I want now to go back and reflect on it.

* Ingarden provides a number of brilliant criticisms of presumed lines of argument for idealism in Husserl, including the one just stated. He then states that “The arguments I have scrutinized are either

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unsatisfactory or quite wrong.” (Motives, p.70) That may be so, but it seems to me that the only thing which could turn Husserl into an idealist is the simple identification of the physical object, as given to consciousness of it, with something essentially involved in the consciousness of it. I want to emphasize a few points that, in my opinion, do not commonly receive sufficient attention in this discussion. I hope in this way to approach the question of whether it was possible for Husserl to have believed what he would have had to believe in order to become an idealist in the manner commonly attributed to him—not least by Ingarden himself.

First, I think there is a certain phenomenological falsification involved in the idea that the intention directed upon a physical object in perception of it could actually be an intention directed upon a noematic or “sense” complex. Even the characterization of thing perception quoted above could not be correct if that were so. This identification of the object in thing perception with an ordered group of Abstraktionen or senses of the object forces a reinterpretation of the intentionality of the usual perceptions of physical objects, which objects clearly are not intended (present to our minds) or mere intentional correlates of acts of perception. I think Husserl never questioned that. A related point is that the intentional correlates or noematic senses involved in thing perceptions are not themselves given in profiles or empty intentions, and in general their properties as intended (when they are intended) are not properties of physical objects (bricks, flowers) as they are intended. It seems to me that there indeed is a genuine phenomenon in the perception of physical objects that corresponds to the intentional correlates or noemata of which Husserl speaks, but that that phenomenon simply is not what the perception of a physical object is a perception of. It is phenomena of this noematic sort that establish the “sense of being”—i.e. what it would be for the object perceived to exist or be—but they are not what the act of perception involving them is of or about.

It seems to me that these “mere intentional correlates” are essential to the act’s being about what it is about. An act of perceiving a brick or flower essentially must be about its object in a certain “way,” a part of which would be the respective “senses” and “adumbrations” and “noemata.” But we in ordinary sense perception see the physical object and do not see how the object is given to us. To “see” those “ways” of being given—to bring them directly before consciousness—requires special acts of reflection that clearly are not perceptions of bricks, flowers, etc. In them we are not living in perceptions of physical objects. Moreover—and of utmost importance—in perceiving the physical object the noematic senses involved do not “come between” (or obstruct the view of) the perceptual consciousness and its object. The “appearances” play an essential role in directing the act of perception toward its proper object. That seems to me a matter of eidetic insight. There are rigorous conditions on what could be an appearance or noematic correlate of what. But the point I wish to insist upon here is that those correlates are a radically different kind of thing from physical objects, and any intentionality directed upon them must be of a radically different kind from an intentionality directed upon a physical object. Most obviously, intentionality directed upon them will not be perspectivevalized in the matter of intentions directed upon physical objects. This is a dramatic difference that Husserl certainly could not have overlooked if he were tending toward identification of bricks and flowers, on the one hand, and the noematic syntheses involved in their perception on the other.

Certainly Ingarden sees this point clearly. He states that “synthetic intentions” (noemata) cannot be “identically” the same as things or other kinds of objects appearing in these sense unities and <that to hold> that these <physical> things are, therefore, something “phenomenal” that exist only by ‘giving sense in correspondingly assorted acts of consciousness’ seems to be quite unjustified.” (p. 48c) That is to put the matter very mildly, I think. He goes on to point out that transcendent perceptions, directed on what is outside the mind, are “dubitable,” while those directed upon the “unities of sense” are not. They “are not and cannot be doubted as to their existence…. Perceptions are not dubitable in relation to them, nor could they exist or be otherwise than they seem to be.” (48-48) On the other hand, for Husserl’s analyses, “It is in principle doubtful exactly what the nature (‘what’) of the things we perceive is.” (p. 18c) Surely Ingarden is correct in pointing this out. Bricks and flowers are radically different from senses both in their properties and in the types of acts through which they are given to perception and consciousness. But is one to think that Husserl was unaware of this? I cannot imagine it. But if not unaware, how could he then have soberly maintained that physical or “real” things were really just synthesized “senses” or noemata? Irrele things? Ingarden and many others apparently thought he did. I disagree.
Attention to this radical difference of essence was something that received attention from the early Phenomenologists. In his 1914 lecture, “Concerning Phenomenology,” Adolf Reinach is commenting on contemporary confusions about the essence of the psychological. He remarks:

“Leaving the unreality of colors and tones undecided—let us assume that they are unreal—do they perchance thereby become something psychical? Can the distinction between essence and existence be so far misunderstood that the denial of existence is confused with a modification of essence, of the essential characteristics? Concretely expressed: does a gigantic house of five floors, which I suppose myself to be perceiving, by any chance become an experience when this perceiving turns out to be an hallucination?”

Much less would such an object always have the essence of the mind.

Of course there are various positions one might take about the physical world and its objects (about their make up, about whether they really exist, can be adequately known, and so forth), but to assert a literal identity between the “unities of sense” and physical objects (bricks and flowers) does not seem psychologically possible once one understands what that would mean. Perhaps an awareness of this is what prevented Husserl from explicitly advancing an argument for idealism in the sense here at issue, though he makes many statements that might seem to imply or at least suggest it.

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Another issue comes up with the idea of producing unities of sense. Given what these unities are, what would be involved in producing them? Creating them? Holding them in being? The creation or production of the “sense” will have to be something entirely within the domain of pure consciousness. The Phenomenological reduction would seem to secure that. But (Ideas, 64-65) Husserl holds there is a sort of transcendence within the act of consciousness, as the noematic sense (the irrelle) stands over against the reelle or noetic aspects of the act. The sense is not a part or property of the corresponding act or acts of consciousness. Now how can we speak of “production” across this inner transcendence, and how are we to understand it. Certainly not as something we do. We can, within limits, purposively bring about or “produce” certain acts of perception. I can look at my tire to see if it is flat, for example. In the resulting act of perception there will be noemata or senses, and I can indirectly influence them by modifying my posture or other properties and relations of my body as I view the tire. But in no clear sense do I, or the noetic aspects of the acts involved, produce or create the synthesized senses of the tire. They are somehow generated in the process of my looking at the tire, no doubt. They occur. One could perhaps achieve eidetic insight into their necessity for the perceptual presentation of the physical object. But what it would mean to produce or create them is surely unintelligible. Then to add on the identity of the synthesized senses with the object, the brick or the flower, makes the intelligibility of creating or producing them even more incomprehensible—unless, of course, the object has been successfully reduced to the senses involved in bringing it before the mind.

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Now the next logical step in my project of delivering Husserl from idealism would be to go systematically over the various assertions or uses of language in Husserl that seem to imply idealism, and to show why and how they do not actually do so. For example, we would have to look at what he means by the absolute being of pure consciousness and the essentially relative being of the spatio-temporal world (Ideas I, §§ 49, 55, etc.), at the sense in which he repeatedly and emphatically rejects “realism,” at what it means to say that “all real unities are ‘unities of sense’” (§ 55, etc.), and at the nature of the “constitution” of the various objectivities. Whether or not it is possible to succeed in smoothing all this out in favor of my reading of Husserl, or it is possible for me to do it, I cannot do it here. But I can comment on what I take to be the underlying issue or problem that seems to constantly overshadow efforts to understand the relationship between consciousness and its objects. It is a problem that I believe Husserl to have solved. This is the view that in bringing objects before consciousness they are modified from what they are “in themselves”—that is, from what they were ‘before’ consciousness came to bear upon them. This leads to the position that what they are is not, or at least may not be, what they seem to be, or even that they may not exist. I have elsewhere labeled this, for obvious reasons, the “Midas Touch Epistemology.”

In British and American writings this type of modification is most often thought to be the result of bringing objects “under concepts” or of “classification.” Donald Davidson characteristically comments: “Yet

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if the mind can grapple without distortion with the real, the mind itself must be without categories and concepts. This featureless self is familiar from theories in quite different parts of the philosophical landscape…. In each case, the mind is divorced from the traits that constitute it.”

Of course Davidson does not think that the mind is without its traits. Richard Rorty takes an even stronger position than Davidson, rejecting the very idea that different “conceptual schemes” grapple with the same “matter.” “The suggestion that our concepts shape neutral material no longer makes sense once there is nothing to serve as this material.” The whole idea of alternative conceptual frameworks and corresponding worlds loses its sense for Rorty. He, of course, simply rejects the idea of a world (“The World Well Lost,” as he says) and, taking a page from Nietzsche’s book, replaces that idea of a world being there with some type of constraint placed on beliefs and actions, and especially on new beliefs, by the “vast body of platitudes, unquestioned perceptual reports, and the like,” that are already in place. This “vast body” of course has no contactable “outside” any more than does Hume’s “mind and its perceptions.” Indeed, I often hear from people who are experts on Husserl that he adopts a version of the same view: that he too holds to some very elaborate version of the epistemically encapsulated mind. Perhaps I am mistaken—and many good people are sure I am—but I think this view of the encapsulated mind is precisely the one Husserl successfully overturned in the Logical Investigations and still presumes to be false in all his later works. A good way to appreciate Husserl’s contribution is to emphasize that he believed Hume could be shown wrong, given the analysis of consciousness which Husserl himself provides. A distinct and continued existence apart from consciousness is indeed possible for objects of consciousness of various types, especially the physical, since they do not owe their existence to any mind that contemplates them. Their “sense of being” does not include that. What it is for there to be a marble in the bag does not include its being the object of any consciousness, though of course it must be the kind of thing which can be an object of consciousness in specific ways.

Certainly the mind according to Husserl is not “without categories and concepts.” Far from it. Such a vacuous mind is precisely the ‘mind’ of the ‘realism’ that he regards as ridiculous. The mind of his view, on the other hand, is evermore fully loaded with structures of intentionalities and types of acts as his career progresses. But of course for him the substance of the mind, so far from standing between the mind and its objects, is precisely what makes objectivities of the various kinds available to us in knowledge, and in some cases as they really are “in themselves.”

In one of his better moments, in a little essay of 1939, J.–P. Sartre sharply pointed out that the illusion of Modern philosophy is: “to know is to eat…. We have all believed that the spidery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance…. The simplest and plainest among us vainly looked for something solid, something not just mental, but would encounter everywhere only a soft and very genteel mist: themselves.” Sartre goes on to insist that, “Against the digestive philosophy of empirico-criticism, of neo-Kantianism, against all ‘psychologism,’ Husserl persistently affirmed that one cannot dissolve things into consciousness…. To know is to ‘burst toward’, to tear oneself out of the most gastric intimacy, veering out there beyond oneself,….“

That there is an “outside” to consciousness, and that it is significantly available to us right alongside consciousness itself, is what intentionality properly elaborated permits us to understand. This allows us to know, within limits, how things are apart from any influences that consciousness or language or history may have upon us and them—and, indeed, even to know something about such of those influences as there may be. In general, consciousness does not ‘make’ what comes before it, though it does in a fashion make the relevant acts of consciousness in which what comes before it is known. But those acts do not enclose us. Rather they open us to the world and the world to us.

13 Sartre, 4.
The possibility of recovering authentic knowledge of the amazing richness of manifold fields of being, including the human self and its knowledge, and especially the inexhaustible ideal realms of essence, resulted in a powerful surge of philosophical interest and activity among Husserl's younger associates. Indeed, the possibility of knowledge is tied very directly to the possibility of philosophy itself—which of course has now been seriously in question among philosophers themselves for a century or so. If Husserl was right, there was hope. Something of significance could be done. (The glowingly optimistic Forward to the Jahrbuch, Vol. 1)\(^\text{14}\) Accomplishments, results, were possible. This hopeful outlook may have been what Jean Hering had in mind by speaking of a “phenomenological springtime.”\(^\text{15}\) That outlook accounts, I think, for the enthusiasm and even joy that seems to have characterized the work of the early phenomenological groups.

But in concluding, we turn away from Husserl and whether he was or was not an idealist, in one or another sense. In doing serious phenomenological and philosophical work he too must go “within the bracket.” What matters is surely the nature of our world and of our access to it, our life within it, along with ourselves and our knowledge. Realist phenomenology opens all of this up to us, and makes it clear that we have a fantastically vast, rich, dangerous, and beautiful world surrounding us in which our life is to be lived. It is all really there and was there and will be there when and if pure consciousness is no more.

\(^{14}\) Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung, ed. Edmund Husserl, et. al. (Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1913).

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