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# UNIT 1 PHENOMENOLOGY

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The main objective of this Unit is to present the story and method of phenomenology rather elaborately. It is done on purpose, since most of the continental philosophers of contemporary period basically follow Husserl's phenomenological method, although they have deviated considerably from him. Other prominent thinkers of the movement are Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95). In the problems they dealt with, as well as in the theoretical content of their philosophies, these thinkers differed from one another considerably. For Husserl phenomenology was primarily a means for the philosophical clarification of the formal *a priori* sciences (logic and formal mathematics). Heidegger saw in it the means to overcome the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy through a 'fundamental ontology;' Sartre saw there a window that opens to existentialism; for Maurice Merleau-Ponty it offered the means to lay bare the pre-scientific consciousness; and Emmanuel Levinas saw in it the promise of an ethics. Phenomenology is not confined to Husserl's philosophy, nor is it right to say that all of Husserl's philosophy is phenomenology. All the same, the central figure of and the initiator to *this* movement is none other than Husserl. Hence Husserlian phenomenology serves as the basis and foundation for the contemporary Western philosophy. It will enable the students to handle the other thinkers of contemporary period with facility.

After introducing phenomenology in a preliminary manner, we shall make this study in two parts: the first part will focus on the story of phenomenology as developed by Husserl, and the second part, on the phenomenological method. The first part is intended as the foundation for the second part which is more important, and it will focus on second stage of Husserl's thought during which the phenomenological method got developed.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCING PHENOMENOLOGY

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A general introduction on phenomenology cannot but be centred on Husserl, as he is the central figure in it. Before we launch ourselves into phenomenology, it is good to have a pre-view of phenomenological method. The term 'phenomenology' reminds us of Kant's distinction between phenomenon and *noumenon*. Husserl was opposed to this dualism of Kant. He agrees that only phenomenon is given, but in it is given the very essence of that which is. When one has described the phenomena, one has described all that can be described. The problem of reconciling reality and thought about reality is as old as philosophy itself. We meet consciousness as the consciousness of something, and something as the object of consciousness. The history of philosophy is a series of attempts at reconciliation of these two aspects: the subjective, and the objective. The difference in reconciling occurs due to the more or less emphasis on the subjective or the objective. Husserlian phenomenology is an attempt at reconciling them; but he too experienced in himself this difference of emphasis in his reconciling consciousness and reality.

Phenomenology is a return to the things themselves, as opposed to mental constructions, illusions etc. The 'thing' is the direct object of consciousness in its purified form; hence it is never merely arbitrary, being conditioned subjectively. The phenomenologist is convinced that an analysis of the things themselves can be made by a return to the pure consciousness. Phenomenology, thus, is the methodical attempt to reach the phenomenon through an investigation of the pure consciousness, the objective content of which is the phenomenon.

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## 1.2 THE STORY OF PHENOMENOLOGY

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It was as a programme of clarifying logic and mathematics through the descriptive-psychological analysis of the acts of consciousness which 'constitute' the entities that make up the subject-matter of these sciences, that phenomenology had its birth in Edmund Husserl. Many others too belong to this movement with their shared concern with consciousness—a concern that is born out of the belief that consciousness is essentially involved in knowledge, in ways that were not suspected in hitherto philosophies. Different phenomenologists would conceive of the contribution of consciousness in different ways, and would differ in the degree of that contribution. But all of them are convinced of the contribution of consciousness to the objects known. We are concerned here with Husserl's understanding of phenomenology.

Husserl wanted his philosophy to have the scientific rigour and philosophical radicalism.

For the modern humans scientific ideal is considered as the highest ideal. According to Husserl, Philosophy, being the greatest of the sciences, should employ the ideal of rigorous science. This does not mean that philosophy has to blindly imitate empirical sciences which deal with objects as facts that are measurable. Philosophy is not factual, but ideal or essential (*eidos*=essence). Philosophy can be rigorous science, since it is possible to reach truly scientific knowledge of ideal objects, or essences of things. When he speaks of scientific rigour, he had in mind the deductive sciences like *mathematics*. Science for him is a system of knowledge wherein each step is built upon its precedent

in a necessary sequence. Such a rigorous connection requires ultimate clarity in basic insights, and systematic order in building up further on them.

Although philosophy claims to be a rigorous science, it has never been so. It can become a radical science by means of critical reflection and profound methodological investigations. For this, it is necessary to have ultimate clarity and systematic order. Together with the scientific rigour, Husserl craves for philosophical radicalism. It necessitates a return to the roots or foundations of all knowledge. The ultimate foundation of all knowledge is to be found in the *things themselves*, the original phenomena to which all our ideas refer ultimately. Going deeper into the things, he was convinced that these roots must be sought in the very consciousness of the knowing subject, to whom the phenomena appear.

Historians of philosophy distinguish three periods in the development of Husserl's philosophy, and this distinction is based on the varying emphasis he placed on the subject or on the object: the pre-phenomenological, phenomenological and the period of pure phenomenology.

The Pre-Phenomenological Period belonged to his philosophical infancy, during which he came to a slightly greater emphasis on the 'objective'. This was occasioned by certain events and persons. A chance-listening to the lectures by Brentano aroused in Husserl interest in scientific psychology and philosophy. Following Brentano Husserl had given in his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* a psychological foundation to the concept of number. It developed the idea that the concept of number originated in consciousness as a result of the acts of connecting, collecting and abstracting the 'contents of consciousness.' Thus numbers are entirely of psychical nature. They have only an intentional being. Gottlob Frege, in his review of this book, criticized it, saying that it was a form of psychologism. Husserl took seriously the critique made by Frege. Hence in his *Logical Investigations part I*, Husserl refuted psychologism. 'Psychologism' is the view that the theoretical foundation of maths and logic is supplied by psychology, specially by psychology of knowledge. According to this theory, the laws of maths and logic have existence and validity only because they have occurred to some consciousness. In his *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl gives a still wider meaning to it, i.e., objects of any type are converted into psychological experiences.

Thus, realizing his mistake, Husserl came to the conclusion, i.e., the untenability of psychologism. In his critique he shows the absurdity of its consequences, and the prejudices on which it is based. The axioms and principles of maths and logic are true, not because the human thinks of them, but valid in themselves. Besides, if logical laws are dependent on the psychological characteristics of human thinkers, we make them relative to these thinkers. Psychologism is now seen as a form of skeptical relativism and anthropologism in philosophy. Relativism is self-contradictory, as it denies the possibility of all knowledge, while asserting its own truth. Mathematics is concerned with numbers, and not with the operation of counting them. Two plus two is four, even if I do not know or think about it. The mathematical and logical objects are ideal objects, and are beyond the limitations of time; whereas psychical acts are real and temporal in nature. Ideal objects are what they are independently of our knowledge about them. Thus during the pre-phenomenological period Husserl could not come to a clear philosophical stand; rather he was looking for a place to stand as a phenomenologist, which he was able to find during the phenomenological period.

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### 1.3 THE METHOD OF PHENOMENOLOGY

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In this section we come to the most important part of phenomenology, namely, the method, which got developed during the second stage of Husserl's thought. It is at this period that Husserl reached a philosophical maturity; and he achieved the reconciliation between the subjective and the objective—the act of consciousness and its objective correlate. He had to look for some reconciliation since the problem posed itself as to how the 'ideal' *objects* are given to *consciousness*. He takes up this task in Vol.11 of *Logical Investigations*. Some thought that it was a lapse into 'psychologism,' rejected in Vol. I. But by making use of the theory of 'intentionality, Husserl has worked out this reconciliation in such a way that it was not a choice of the one at the rejection of the other.

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### 1.4 INTENTIONALITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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In Vol.11 of *Logical Investigations* Husserl holds that a separation between logic and psychological phenomena is inadmissible and impossible. Ideal logical entities are given to us in experiences. The relationship between the 'ideal objects' of pure logic and the subjective experiences corresponding to them illustrates an insight which pervades whole of his philosophy, i.e., 'intentionality'. According to this, there is a parallelism between the subjective act and the objective correlate. This parallelism forms the basis for a correlative investigation under which both the aspects of any phenomenon are to be studied and described in conjunction. To study one without the other would be an artificial abstraction. In Husserl's terms this parallelism came to be known as that between the '*noetic*' (act) and '*noematic* (content). (*Noesis* is abstract noun, and *noema* is concrete noun). His aim has been a reconciliation of the objectivity of truth with the subjectivity of the act of knowledge.

The central insight in phenomenological analysis is the theory of intentionality. He owed to Brentano for this theory. According to Brentano, all psychical phenomena intentionally contain an object. Husserl objects to this conception of the immanence of the intentional object to consciousness. For him intentionality means the directedness of the act of consciousness to some object. This object is not immanent to the consciousness itself, but remains transcendent to it. For phenomenology it is not of importance whether or not the object of consciousness actually exists. The object is considered from a special point of view, namely as the objective correlate of an intentional act. Thus for Husserl, intentionality means this: consciousness is directedness to an object, as expressed in: conscious of..., joyful at..., desirous of..... etc. All '*cogito*' contains a '*cogitatum*'. Husserl's notion of intentionality can be clarified with the help of its four characteristics, as developed by one of his commentators, Herbert Spiegelberg.

First of all, *intentionality objectivates*. It presents the given data in such a way that the whole object is presented to our consciousness. The various acts of consciousness are referred to the same intentional object. The sameness of the object is compatible with the various ways of referring to it such as: love, doubt, thought, which are the qualities of 'intention' as opposed to the object. When one gives thought to one's mother, it is the person of one's mother that is the objective correlate. It is not the fragmentary aspects, like the kindness or generosity of the mother, but the mother as kind or generous is the objective correlate. Secondly, *intentionality identifies*. It allows us to assign a variety

of successive data to the same referent of meaning. Without an identifying function, there would be nothing but a stream of perceptions, similar but never identical. Intentionality supplies the synthetic function by which the various aspects, perspectives and stages of an object are all focused upon and integrated into the identical core. For instance, the various intentional experiences of one's mother do not take one to different referents, but to the identical referent: one's mother. Thirdly, *intentionality connects*. Each aspect of the identical object refers to the related aspects, which form its horizon; an object is apprehended only within the context, or horizon that consists of the possible apprehensions. The actual intentional experience of an object does not stand in isolation, but links itself to the other possible intentional experiences. To give an example from the realm of sense experience: the frontal aspect of the statue refers to the lateral, and the lateral to the rear. Because of this 'connecting' function are we able to perceive the 'statue.' Finally, *intentionality constitutes*. It constitutes the intentional object. The intentional object is not conceived as the pre-existent referent to which the intending act refers as something already given, but as something which originates or is constituted in the act. The snake as fearsome is constituted in the act of one's getting frightened.

Husserl, as a phenomenologist, is not interested in the object in itself, but in the intentional object, constituted in the act consciousness. According to him, the intentional object is not immanent to consciousness, as Brentano held, but as transcendent to it.

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## 1.5 THE MEANING OF ESSENCE

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The core of Husserl's philosophy is the notion of essence, since Husserlian phenomenology tries to attain the knowledge of 'essence' of reality. But the meaning of 'essence' in Husserl is different from what has been traditionally held as opposed to 'existence.' Natural science begins with experience and remains therein. They are sciences of *facts*. The world is not exhausted by 'facts,' having a spatio-temporal existence as something existing somewhere and sometime. Every individual being is contingent insofar as it is such and such, but essentially could be other than what it is. It belongs to the meaning of every contingent thing and event to have an essential being, an *eidōs*, that can be apprehended in all its purity.

In order to come to the knowledge of essences, Husserl proceeds step by step. He distinguishes between ordinary experience and transcendent experience or intuition. The first is the accurate apprehension of the individual fact. In the ordinary experience man finds himself as a unique person, the empirical ego. The phenomenologist is not interested in the ordinary, but in the transcendental experience, which is the essential intuition proper. In the transcendental experience, I bracket all reference to existence. For the phenomenological reduction of essences, Husserl proposes to use 'inductive generalization' and 'imaginative variation' that enable one to eliminate the inessential features in order to come to the essential. Inductive generalization is not anything typically phenomenological; it means nothing other than universalizing from the various particular experiences. 'Imaginative variation' can be understood only in the light of the Husserlian notion of 'horizon'. An object is actually experienced or apprehended only within a setting or horizon, which is the context of the possible apprehensions. The objective and essential extends beyond the limits of actual perception. It is by imaginative variation that one can move from the limitation

of the actual perception to the indeterminacy of what can be perceived. The horizon or the setting of the 'can be perceived' is the objective correlate of the 'can perceive' or the un-actualized capacity of the perceiver. Thus by a varied and systematic process, Husserlian phenomenology claims to attain a 'direct essential insight' or transcendental reduction into the pure eidetic sphere. The essence is the objective content of my transcendently reduced conscious experience. Looking at the object of consciousness, I reach the essence by a method of variation. I can vary the various view-points. The essence is what remains invariable, when I vary the various view-points.

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## 1.6 EIDETIC REDUCTION

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The act of grasping the essence has two aspects: one positive, and the other negative. Eidetic reduction is the positive aspect. It is the gradual penetration into the purified essential residue, gradually revealing the pure subjectivity as the exclusive source of all objectivity. Reduction to objectivity is one of the most difficult notions in Husserl, who has not clearly dealt with it in his published works. In his *Ideas*, he makes a distinction between two types of reductions that are complementary. They are *eidetic* reduction and *transcendental* reduction. Eidetic reduction refers to the distinction between 'fact' and 'essence': factual (particular, historical, existential) is converted into essential (ideal, universal and timeless). This is done by keeping away the 'this-ness' or 'suchness' from the particular object. The transcendental reduction refers to the distinction between the real and the non-real. Essences as the pure *noemata* of pure consciousness are *real*, whether or not it is reduced from an existent or non-existent object. Thus the intentional presence can be reduced from a situation of physical absence. Husserl speaks of several levels of reduction, on each of which we have a subject of greater purity. When the subject is at its purest form, we have the strict science of phenomenology. Only when the subjectivity is absolutely pure, can it be the universal a priori source of objectivity. To know the subjectivity that has the function of 'constitution' is to know one, which is transcendently related to the objects, i.e., intentionality.

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## 1.7 BRACKETING (*EPOCHÉ*)

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After the *Logical Investigations* the concepts of *epoché* (bracketing) and reduction began to occupy an important place in Husserl's reflections. It was in the two series of lectures which he delivered at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1906\07 and in the summer semester 1907 that Husserl for the first time explicitly introduced these concepts. It was further elaborated in the *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology* (1913). *Epoché* was conceived as something which the phenomenologist has to perform; the performance would lay bare before him the infinite field of his research. The performance consists in suspending or 'putting out of action' the 'thesis of the natural attitude.' The thesis of the natural attitude is the belief that the world and objectivities exist independently of and apart from being related to consciousness. Once this belief is suspended, Husserl claims, the world and the entire field of objectivities would appear before us as being correlated with consciousness. Further, we would reach transcendental consciousness which 'constitutes' the world.

Bracketing is the negative aspect in grasping the essence. It is the radical and universal elimination of any aspect of factual existence. The factual or the

exatential is kept in parenthesis or in bracket. Things under consideration may have existence, but it has no significance whatsoever with regard to the essence of things. Besides the elimination of 'existence', to describe the phenomena correctly, the phenomenologist too must be free from all cultural and philosophical bias. It requires an ascetic neutrality in one's attitude to the phenomenon of one's awareness. Phenomenology deals with the insight into the essences, without *regard* to the empirical conditions of their perceptibility, nor even their existence. It is not a question of making it appear in its factual reality or in its existence, but in its intentional presence as transcendent to consciousness. There is a similarity between Husserl's epoché and Descartes' methodological doubt. Descartes doubted everything; only the ego indubitably exists. In Husserl the world is not doubted, but the judgements about it are suspended. The epoche demands that the philosopher takes a distance from the various solutions, which in the course of history have been proposed for different philosophical problems. It aims at eliminating the factuality, the root of all 'contingency'.

Thus, during the 'phenomenological period' Husserl developed the phenomenological method, and succeeded in reaching reconciliation between the subjective and the objective. Although the method is presented step by step, the phenomenological intuition of the essences takes place in a single act of grasping. This is the reason why he uses the expression 'phenomenological reduction' rather than 'phenomenological deduction.'

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## 1.8 PERIOD OF PURE PHENOMENOLOGY

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After having come to a more or less satisfactory method of phenomenology, Husserl continued his philosophical thinking and reflection. This ended up in a transcendental (pure) phenomenology. It is called 'pure' in order to differentiate it from other pseudo phenomenologies. The distinction is based on the subject matter. The subject matter of pure phenomenology is pure phenomena. The pure phenomena are reached by means of the pure consciousness. Since the publication of *Ideas*, pure phenomenology goes by the name, 'transcendental phenomenology'. In *Ideas* 'transcendental' meant that the phenomenologist suspends all assertion about reality other than that of consciousness itself. Later on it meant, reaching back to the ultimate source of all knowledge, the subjectivity. Emphasis on the pure subjectivity as the source of all objectivity is the characteristic of this phase.

During the phase of pure phenomenology, Husserl speaks of a universal phenomenology, conceived as the ultimate foundation of all knowledge. His intention was to achieve phenomena in its pure and indubitable form; and for this he bracketed all accidental and incidental aspects, all judgments and interpretations of reality. Husserl started his career with a cry for 'scientific philosophy'. Phenomenology claims to fulfill the need of a scientific philosophy with ultimate clarity in basic insights and systematic order in building up on them. Such a philosophy must be the foundation of all sciences. Since these are found realized in Husserl's phenomenology, it claims to be the 'first philosophy'.

As Husserl moved more towards the subjective, his critics gave him the label of an 'idealist', which he hesitatingly accepted; but he insists that his 'idealism' must be distinguished from the subjective idealism of Berkeley, that makes all being dependent on the psychological consciousness. By contrast, Husserl ties up Being with the transcendently reduced consciousness. Being is nothing apart

from the 'meaning' which it receives in the bestowing act of consciousness. Husserl gives two arguments for his idealism: the self-contradictory nature of realism, and the direct phenomenological evidence, supplied by the analysis of transcendental constitution. According to him, being, by its very meaning, refers us back to acts which assign such being. In other words, being derives its meaning from consciousness. The idea of reality as unrelated to consciousness is self-contradictory. The next argument is related to the first, i.e., the doctrine of transcendental constitution. 'Constitution' does not refer to a static structure of an object, but the dynamic process by which it is built up as an object. It is the intentional consciousness that actively achieves this constitution. Objects exist for me only as objects of consciousness. In his *idealism*, reality is extra-mental, but the meaning of reality is in the mind. His philosophy is called 'idealism' also because it is a search into the *eidōs* (essence, meaning). It is transcendental idealism in the sense that the real world is reduced to its pure, transcendental significance.

Thus, in the final phase of his thought, especially in the *Crisis of the European Sciences* (posthumous, 1954), Husserl takes up pre-predicative consciousness or life-world for phenomenological analysis. It may have been influenced by Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has later continued this line of thought especially in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). It has also influenced Hans-Georg Gadamer in his development of philosophical hermeneutics. Together with 'life-world,' Husserl gradually wanted to develop a phenomenological philosophy by applying the method to some *sui-generis* realities.

Husserl developed the idea of a 'life-world'—the world of our immediate experience in our everyday life, a world of our concrete experience. The scientist conceals the world as *our* world. It is a vast domain of subjective phenomena, as they are immediately experienced in all colours and practical meaning. Sciences left out the subjective and the practical aspect of the world, and took only the *objective* aspect. A life-world is to be conceived as an oriented world, with an experiencing self at its centre, designated as such by personal pronouns. Thus the world becomes the one related to life and to the humans, with his human values and aspirations. He tried to make a phenomenological reflection on 'time' as well. The inner consciousness of time shows the following structure: a primal impression of a streaming present, surrounded by a horizon of immediate retention of the past (to be distinguished from active recollection) and of immediate protention (to be distinguished from active expectation). Describing retention, Husserl shows how the consciousness of the present sinks off steadily below the surface, and becomes sedimented in such a way that it is accessible only to acts of recollection. He has not given us any evidence of an active 'constitution' of time, but only of a passive synthetic genesis. Thirdly Husserl was forced to consider the 'Other', as he was criticized that phenomenology is a purely solipsistic explanation of the intentional constitution. For, when phenomenological reduction brackets, even the belief in the existence of the other subjects too is suspended. In his *Cartesian Meditations* he shows the difficulty of transcendental ego constituting other egos, as equal partners in an intersubjective community. If the other subjects are to be meaningful, they are to be constituted. But it is not possible, since if the constitution is subjective, it is a constitution of one's own self; if it is objective, others as subjects cannot be constituted. This problem remains unsolved in his published works. For a phenomenological



evidence for the knowledge of others, Husserl makes use of 'empathy' giving his own interpretation to it. It is a kind of intentional category, by which I experience another's experience. When we perceive a body other than our own, as there rather than here, we apperceive at as the body of an 'alter ego' by way of an assimilative analogy with our own ego. In this process, the analogizing ego and the analogized 'alter ego' are paired in a characteristic 'coupling'. While the other ego is not accessible as directly as his body, it can be understood as a modification of our own 'pure ego', by which we put ourselves into his, as if we were in his place. The other egos are thus constituted as transcendental, and these form a community, and thus communication is possible. Finally, he gives a thought about God in his phenomenological structure. When Husserl started his philosophical career, although he was a Jew, he kept the Bible away from him. For, he wanted to start a philosophy absolutely presuppositionless. He was not much concerned about bringing God into his philosophy, nor was there a place for God in his philosophy. His philosophy needed only intentional experience, subjectivity and objectivity. Remaining a bit away from his philosophical method, God is placed in between the ego and the world, who creatively constitutes the world, while my subjectivity meaningfully constitutes the world. Since God is the absolutely absolute, he cannot be comprehended within the focus of my ego.

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## 1.9 LET US SUM UP

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Husserl's mature thought begins with a concern for the foundations of mathematics, continues with the development of phenomenological method, and concludes with a kind of idealism that is associated with the doctrine of the transcendental ego. His merit consists in the fact that he introduced for the first time the phenomenological method that brought the subjective and the objective to their right place. Thus the greatest contribution of Husserl is the theory of intentionality, with the help of which the subject and object are brought closer to reconciliation. Many of the later philosophers who used the phenomenological method deviated from him, regarding the importance given to essence rather than existence. But in spite of this difference, contemporary continental philosophers greatly owe to Husserl's contribution to phenomenology. Since Husserl did not develop a philosophy with the application of phenomenological method, he could not see some of the weak-points in his method. All the same, we cannot but admire the unique contribution of his to the philosophical world.

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