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Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Method _An Appraisal

Dr. Sujatha. k

Teaching Faculty

Center for Yoga and Naturopathy

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam

&

Dr. C.R. Harilakshemeendra Kumar

Hon'ble Director, Centre for Yoga and Naturopathy

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam.

Abstract

Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Method cared 'Reduction' or 'bracketing' is a proper device to arrive at a real philosophical attitude also called a transcendental attitude by which pure consciousness or transcendental consciousness in its own Absolute Being is own. The development of phenomenological reduction marks a transformation of Husserl's thought from the early to the late phase. Different stages of reduction are recognized, the main ones being Phenomenological Reduction, Eidetic Reduction and Transcendental Reduction. Transcendental consciousness being the basis for apodictic evidence constitutes the world as Life-world which is intersubjective and phenomenology becomes a rigorous science. The Life-World, the experienced lived world is the Absolute realm of certainty. Phenomenological Reduction refusing rigorous persistent effort is a type of meditation, a radical transformation of the individual similar to a religious conversion. Phenomenological method and Life- World are two reframes in Husserl's Phenomenology, the first are the starting point, the second are the end point.

Key words- Bracketing, Phenomenological Reduction, Eidetic Reduction, Transcendental Reduction, Natural standpoint, Pure consciousness, Free imaginative Variation. Transcendental philosophy.

Introduction

To Husserl our first outlook is that of natural human beings ‘from the natural standpoint’¹. The world as we experience it in the different ways of sensory perception is there as a possible object of perception. The spatio-temporal fact-world is given as something that exist out there². It is present there whether the individual perceive it or not. Each ego-subject has a unique way of experiencing the world according to the way in which each ego-consciousness is affected by the world. There are differences in the ways of apprehending the world with differences in clearness. What is given from the natural standpoint is characterized by Husserl as the ‘general thesis of the natural standpoint. The general thesis states that the world is known by us as a fact-world, that has its being out there’³. A radical alternation of the natural standpoint is brought about by the method of phenomenology called ‘epoche’ ‘bracketing’ or reduction.

The unreflective posting of the world as something existing ‘out there’ is characterized by Husserl as the natural attitude. The natural attitude is presupposed by science and day to day life. In the natural attitude the thing of the world is accepted as belief. The natural attitude is overcome by phenomenological reduction which involves a process of bracketing or epoche, involving a neutralization of belief concentrating on the essence of conscious acts. The process of neutralization is called epoche, a term from Greek skepticism means refraining from judging until clarity is attained. Phenomenological reduction is the name for the philosophical method by which the correlational structure of subjectivity is investigated. The phenomenological attitude consisting of a stepping back from the natural attitude without denying it, for investigating the very experiences of the world. The phenomenological attitude is the genuine philosophical attitude and critical non-dogmatic open attitude. The phenomenological attitude is radical and comprehensive view involving a complete turning away from the natural attitude and focusing reflection on everything in the natural attitude including the world belief, so that the phenomenologist in the phenomenological attitude is real philosopher. The phenomenological attitude is that of a detached observer, a philosophical attitude arrived at by phenomenological attitude is reflecting upon the natural attitude and all the intentionality’s within it. The phenomenological attitude in which philosophical analysis takes place is also called the transcendental attitude characterized by phenomenological reduction.

With reference to the development of phenomenological reduction, the transformation of Husserl’s thought from the early phase to the late phase occurred between 1900 and 1913. The two volumes of Logical Investigations⁴ were published in 1900 and 1901, *The Idea of Phenomenology*⁵ was published in 1911 and *Ideas I* was published in 1913. It was in the article “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” his epistemological concern found expression as a critique of the natural sciences and psychology leading to a technique which later resulted in his ‘epoche’ or ‘reduction’ with the publication of *Ideas I*. The Idea of phenomenological reduction is introduced for the first time in *The Idea of Phenomenology*⁶. The systematic account of the method of bracketing is available in the *Ideas*.

1. Phenomenological Reduction

The term phenomenological reduction is used by Husserl in two senses. It means both the process of reduction and the beginning stage of reduction. The whole process is having the character of a graded reduction. Different thinkers ⁷ interpret the whole process involving different stages, differing themselves regarding the number and order of stages. These interpretations however do not contradict Husserl's own account, because Husserl himself is not consistent in his account. The phenomenological method or phenomenological reduction is an essential procedure to free from prejudices and to encounter things as they are themselves. The method is used as an enquiry of pure consciousness. The phenomenological reduction is a new analysis in which the natural attitude is transformed into the transcendental attitude in order to be explore the spatio - temporal world as it is given to pure consciousness.

Generally, three important stages are recognized in the whole process of reduction phenomenological, eidetic and transcendental. The first stage called phenomenological reduction consists in suspending all beliefs characteristic of the 'natural attitude' beliefs given by senses as well as science. What is transcendent excluded. Phenomenological reduction is suspension of judgement about the existence or non-existence of the external world, or suspension of the natural attitude in order to be focus on the phenomena. Judgements concerning the world given by the senses is held in suspension. Phenomenological reduction does not deny the existence of the objects of experience but only the beliefs characterizing the 'natural attitude'. They remain what they are in themselves like the bracketed in the bracket, like the disconnected outside the connectional system ⁸. The phenomenological reduction does not deny the world but restricts from using any judgement concerning spatio-temporal existence. In phenomenological reduction, the natural attitude is bracketed. It opens the gate to the phenomenological attitude.

2. Eidetic Reduction

The second stage is called Eidetic Reduction. Husserl distinguishes between real objects and ideal objects. A real object is that which is both temporal and spatial, an ideal object is that which is both non-spatial and a temporal. The aim of eidetic reduction is to reduce real objects into ideal objects or what are called essences. The essences have existence in the particulars. The particularity is already bracketed in the phenomenological reduction. With eidetic reduction, the realm of essences is uncovered. In eidetic reduction, the individual existence of the object is bracketed to arrive at the character in common or essence of the object by 'free imaginative variation', the process by means of which eidetic reduction is carried out. Eidetic reduction is analyzing essences by changing different elements of the object to know which characteristics are necessary. It is a process of generalizations in order to be uncover the essence. The process involves varying the objects of perception and noting the elements of the act of perceiving and entering the realm of pure possibility, the realm of essences. In the realm of essences, the awareness is of a new mode of experience characterized as eidetic intuition of essences. In eidetic intuition, the particular is to be perceived in its generality, a 'seeing' of general in the particular. Eidetic intuition is an insight into essence in which the essence is grasped. It is a special kind of

intentionality analyzed by phenomenology. Eidetic intuition is an identity synthesis involving three levels of intentional development⁹. In the first level similarities are experienced. In the second level, identity synthesis occurs, empirical universal is arrived at. In the third level eidetic universals are arrived at, a kind of philosophizing called eidetic intuition occurs. Imaginative variation is the process central to eidetic intuition by which deeper insight occurs. Eidetic intuition requires great effort of imagination, a very difficult process. In the process of eidetic intuition, the first stage focuses on similar things, the second stage focuses on empirical universals, the third stage focuses on eidetic universals, essences.

3. Transcendental Reduction

Isolating the transcendental ego by bracketing the ego is the fundamental aim of phenomenology which occurs in the final stage of reduction called transcendental reduction. Transcendental reduction is reduction to pure consciousness, intentionally purified of all psychological and all worldly interpretations and descriptions. Transcendental reduction is reduction makes possible the study of intentional constitution of things. In transcendental reduction, the isolation of the transcendental subjectivity is aimed at. The realm of pure consciousness is where the essential formations take place which is studied by phenomenology. To Husserl, the transcendental ego or pure ego is a necessary principle. The transcendental ego is the agent of truth, the cognitive owner of the world, not simply a part of the world. The two empirical ego and transcendental ego are not two entities, but one and the same being considered in different ways.

After the transcendental reduction, what remains as ‘phenomenological residuum’ is pure consciousness in its own Absolute Being¹⁰. Phenomenologically speaking, after the entire process of reduction nothing is lost but own the Absolute Being of consciousness within which all transcendences are being constituted. The basic fields of phenomenological enquiry is pure consciousness with its intentional structure¹¹.

The aim of Husserl’s philosophical method was certainty. Husserl was influenced by Descartes method of doubt for the ideal of certainty but he applied it in a different way, suspending the belief in the reality of the world. The method of reduction for the Husserl is a device for concentrating on the act of consciousness and on the correlated objects as they are experienced. The method of bracketing is not concerned with whether the object of experience is really existing or not.

4. Phenomenology as a Rigorous Science

Husserl is himself is not clear in distinguishing between the different stages of reduction. Husserl First introduced ‘Phenomenological Reduction’ in *The Idea of Phenomenology*. He speaks of epistemological reduction and also speaks of ‘psychological reduction’. He treated Phenomenological reduction in the plural in *Ideas I*. Often phenomenological and transcendental reductions are indifferently dealt with. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, he speaks of ‘Transcendental Phenomenological Reductions’. Different kinds of reductions have been dealt within the *Crisis*, as many as eight. Different models of reduction such as Cartesian way, way from intentionality, way through critique of the natural sciences, and through ontology or through searching for the given elements of the Life-World, has been listed by Iso Kern¹². In the *Crisis* the method of Reduction consists

in leading the ego to the original pregiven's of the world. Phenomenological Reduction and Transcendental Reduction are treated as two separate reductions or transcendental reduction as an elaboration of phenomenological reduction. In the *Crisis*, the two are referred to as "first level reflection and second level reflection". Sometimes the two are referred to as Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction. The acts of consciousness plays an important role in constituting the objects. The way in which the object is intended or meant is a contribution of the intending conscious act. Husserl's analysis of constitution is an investigation of the acts of consciousness making the possibility of intending the object in a particular way. The experienced lived world is the foundation for all meanings constituted.

Husserl's Reductions have been viewed as the real discovery of his phenomenological philosophy. He formulated the method of reduction as a necessary condition for discovering the essence of intentional consciousness and transcendental subjectivity. The subjective life of consciousness, the Life-World is revealed through the experience of reduction, according to Husserl, the subjective realm of transcendental consciousness is wide open through the method of reduction. The transcendental ego constitutes the world which is grasped through the possibility of reduction. The aim of phenomenological method is to understand the different ways in which the actual thing experienced by the person experiencing it is constituted. Phenomenology as a method of philosophy go against the reductionist prejudices and is a method of reflective attentiveness discovering 'lived experiences'¹³ phenomenology is a science of experience having a method rooted in intentionality.

In the *Logical Investigations* a psychological analysis of consciousness is available. But phenomenology as a rigorous science moves from facts to essences as an eidetic science of consciousness having the structure of intentionality, cogito cogitatum. The shift from phenomenological psychology to transcendental phenomenology is affected by reduction. The reflective attitude of philosophizing ego after reduction is a radical one not being interested or unparticipating in the general thesis of the natural standpoint. Phenomenological psychology after reduction reform itself into a science of transcendental subjectivity constitutes the world a fresh. Gaining access to the transcendental sphere of experience opens the way to transcendental intersubjectivity, a community of subjects constituting a common world. The way into phenomenology through psychology is made possible through reduction for founding the transcendental phenomenology as a scientific discipline. The world is constituted as Life-World which is the transcendental constitution. Transcendental consciousness is having intersubjective and genetic dimensions and transcendental phenomenology has a real understanding of the Life-World.

5. The Concept of Life-World

In the *Crisis* Husserl have established that the crisis in modern European Sciences and culture can be solved by a critique of positive sciences rendering the real understanding of the world as life - world and establishing phenomenology as a rigorous science. A universal ontology of the life - world is the main theme in the late Husserl. A full analysis of transcendental subjectivity reveals the world as the product of constitution, the

world as ultimately it is, a historic world of life. Reduction is the greatest discovery and the most difficult part of Husserl's philosophy leading to the transcendental ego as the basis for apodictic evidence for building sciences, and the life-world as the constitutive product of the transcendental subjectivity. Reduction yields transcendental intersubjectivity, transcendental life as such, the life - world so that the danger of solipsism is avoided.

Phenomenology is a new way of entering philosophy different from the older way of beginning within the natural attitude and distinguishing the philosophical from the natural. Phenomenology is a type of philosophical realism and ontology. The phenomenological movement provides valuable dates for an authentic philosophy. Phenomenological investigation is directed towards the immanent contents of consciousness, and the naturalistic concept of experience becomes the phenomenological concept of 'lived experience'. The Phenomenological reduction is a radical, rigorous, and transformative meditative technique. It is a self -meditation that has been radicalized. In self-meditation, Self-Realization of the spirit takes place scientific inquiry lacks philosophically rigorous foundation. What is needed is a careful examination of consciousness as it is itself, free from scientific framework and psychological assumptions. A reflective enquiry into consciousness in itself is to be called phenomenological reduction, an enquiry conducted by consciousness itself. Self-meditation is the procedure to be undertaken for maintaining rigor in the course of action in which the ego envisages a movement towards itself. The attainment of the new perspective through phenomenological reduction requires rigorous persistent effort, a type of meditation which brings about a radical transformation of the entire individual similar to a religious conversion.¹⁴ The technique of reduction is to be understood and performed as religious conversion, meditation and fundamental transformation requiring strenuous effort. Performing reduction implies experiencing religious transformation. Just as in the case of religious conversion, the phenomenological method prepares the philosopher to be phenomenologist.

The reduction requires training to realize the radical shift of consciousness, and may be compared to the Buddhist traditions of contemplation. Reduction is a process involving stages for the discovery of the constitution of the world leading to clear reflection required for the apprehension of the phenomena and meaning produced by consciousness. In the process, the empirical ego is replaced by the transcendental ego, in Buddhist term 'the builder' that constitutes the world.

6. Concept of Intentionality

Husserl's main objective was to provide scientific rigour to philosophy. For this an account of the constituting transcendental consciousness was needed. The concept of transcendental subjectivity as constituting consciousness with intersubjective horizon is developed. To Husserl, consciousness is intentional. The method of reduction purifies the structure of intentionality and uncovers transcendental subjectivity. Genetic phenomenology reveals the constituting transcendental subjectivity in its relation to intentional objects. The method of reduction is a technique that helps to change the sense of object as existing in the world to the object correlated to and constituted by consciousness. Natural objects are changed into phenomena given to

consciousness so that consciousness has an important role in constituting the sense of the object. Husserl's concept of intentionality evolves along with his method of reduction matures.

The method of reduction helps to describe phenomena with scientific rigour by concentrating on the manners of givenness of the phenomena and the guiding rules behind it. Husserl's genetic phenomenology is a deep search into the theory of constitution by giving a genetic dimension. In *Ideas I* constitution is explained in terms of matter-form schema. The constitution of objects by matter-form schema cannot explain the constitution of meaning. This limitation is overcome by genetic phenomenology. Genetic phenomenology involves both active and passive genesis, unifies all constitutional event into one whole inter-relation, constitutes horizons and there by the world. The theory of genetic constitution made possible the introduction of his new phenomenology in his last work.

Phenomenology is a constitutive analysis, objectivity constituted in consciousness. The basic theme of phenomenology is the constitution of the world as a 'phenomenon' which in the late Husserl. A full analysis of transcendental subjectivity reveals the world as the product of constitution, the world as ultimately it is, a historic world of life. Reduction is the greatest discovery and most difficult part of Husserl's philosophy leading to the transcendental ego as the basis for apodictic evidence for building sciences, and the life- world as the constitutive product of the transcendental subjectivity. Reduction yields transcendental intersubjectivity, transcendental life as such, the life- world so that the danger of solipsism is avoided. **Conclusion**

The phenomenological reduction is a radical, rigorous, and transformative meditative technique. It is a self-meditation that has been radicalized. In self-meditation, self-realization of the spirit takes place. Scientific inquiry lacks philosophically rigorous foundation. What is needed is a careful in his later years Husserl called the life- world. The life- world is the world of constitution with an enriched meaning. Thus, constitution and life-world are essentially related. In Husserl's philosophical journey, phenomenological method is the starting point and life- world is the end point.

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