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## Phenomenology

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## PHENOMENOLOGY

*Tamsin Lorraine*

Phenomenology as a philosophical movement was founded by Edmund Husserl. René Descartes, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel are important precursors to this movement that insists upon returning to ‘the things themselves’, or phenomena as they appear to us, in order to ground knowledge in the apodictic certainty of self-evident truth. Husserl instituted a method of ‘bracketing’ that suspends metaphysical questions about what is ‘out there’, and instead focuses on phenomenological descriptions of experience itself. Husserl took from Franz Brentano the notion that consciousness is intentional – that is, that it is always conscious *of* something. To investigate what lies outside of consciousness is fruitless. Instead, we should investigate the structure and contents of our conscious experiences. By suspending the ‘natural attitude’ (that is, the assumption that our experience is caused by something ‘out there’) with its reifying prejudices, we can discover and describe the ‘eidetic essences’ that structure consciousness. This, in turn, will reveal how our knowledge is constituted and will give us a new method for grounding knowledge in our ‘pre-predicative experience’ (that is, experience that has not yet been posited from the perspective of the natural attitude).

Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau Ponty were some of those inspired by Husserl to develop various responses to versions of phenomenology. But whereas Husserl thought of phenomenology as a rigorous science of consciousness, these philosophers emphasise the notion (created by Heidegger) of ‘being-in-the-world’ and direct their attention toward the lived experience of an embodied subject always already immersed in a world from which she cannot separate herself. Phenomenology’s insistence on describing phenomena as they appear thus opened up to philosophical reflection the realm of experience as it is experienced by ordinary individuals in everyday life prior to the theoretical attitude of ‘objective’ thought. It was embraced by many as a revitalising alternative to forms of philosophical thought such as positivism (another important philosophical movement prominent in the early twentieth century) that took the methods of natural science as their paradigm.

On Deleuze’s view, phenomenology’s emphasis on lived experience territorialises philosophy onto habitual forms of perception and conception (perception formed from the point of view of the self or thought in keeping with the form of the ‘I’). Deleuze sought to determine an

'impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field' that is the condition of any actual conscious experience (D 1990: 102). In *Foucault*, Deleuze lauds Michel Foucault for converting phenomenology into epistemology. There is a gap between what we perceive and what we say 'as though intentionality denied itself' (D 1988b: 109). There is no such thing as a pure or 'savage' experience prior to or underlying knowledge. The gap between what we say and what we feel and perceive (as well as the Bergsonian gap Deleuze characterises in his *Cinema* books that can open up between perception and action) indicates implicit tendencies or forces that insist in what we say and do. The conscious experiences of an individual are the emergent effects of virtual, as well as actually unfolding, forces of which the individual is, for the most part, unaware. The singularities or events defining these forces constitute a transcendental field of the virtual that may never be actualised in individual bodies. Events of sense (for example, the concepts of philosophy), as well as events of physical processes (for example, the capacity to fall, to run, to sweat) and their virtual relations 'insist' in concrete states of affairs, whether or not they actually unfold in specific speech-acts or physical states.

Philosophy as 'genuine thinking' does not attempt to represent or describe, but rather to make things happen by creating concepts in response to the problems of life that actualise the virtual relations of the transcendental field in novel ways. Phenomenology's invocation of the 'primordial lived' renders immanence in terms of what is immanent to a subject's experience rather than processes unfolding at levels below as well as above the threshold of consciousness, thus grounding its investigations in what are, in Deleuze and Guattari's view, opinions that are already clichés extracted from experience (D&G 1994: 150). The notion of a world 'teaming' with anonymous, nomadic, impersonal and pre individual singularities opens up the field of the transcendental and allows thinking of individuals in terms of the singularities that are their condition, rather than in terms of the synthetic and analytic unities of conscious experience (D 1990: 103).

## Connectives

Bergson  
Experience  
Foucault  
Singularity