

The Notion Of Consciousness: An Overview From Phenomenological Perspective With Special Reference To Edmund Husserl

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I. INTRODUCTION

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely known as the founder of modern phenomenology, a highly influential movement in 20th century western philosophy. Husserl was one of the prominent European thinkers of 20th century and the movement has inspired thinkers from different streams. Though we consider Husserl as the founder of phenomenology, the approach and method we call as phenomenological are not his exclusive invention. Many thinkers and philosophers like Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Mach have referred to the term phenomenology in their writings before Husserl used it in a more systematic way. But it was Husserl who developed it into a systematic philosophical approach and method with certain definite goals. All major contributions in this area are from Edmund Husserl in whose writings it appears as a philosophy and as a method. Husserl further conceived phenomenology as a foundational science and as a presuppositionless philosophy.

In the history of philosophy, the problem of mind or soul is regarded as one of the vital problems, which attracted philosophers a good deal. Man as an intellectual being; always tries to inquire into his own mind. It is a bare fact that we have a mind and it is accepted by every person. Although “mind” is an ambiguous term nobody would accept that he has no mind, but it does not mean that he knows the meaning of it or he is pointing out something to be his mind. The mind is perhaps the deepest mystery, the most profound paradox of all existence. Philosophers from the past up to this highly developed scientific era have also been talking about mind and a branch of philosophy has been formed in the name as “The Philosophy of Mind”. The crucial concept of the philosophy of mind is consciousness. The problem of consciousness is one of the fundamental problems of humanity. Consciousness reveals the nature of man and his inherent divine nature. As D. C. Dennet observes; “The most important feature of mind, the ‘phenomenon’ that seems more than any other to be essentially ‘mental’ and non-physical, is consciousness.”

The word “consciousness” is derived from the Latin word “conscire”. The word “conscire” means “to know things together”. William Me Dougall says that the word “consciousness” if it is to be used at all, should be used to mean “the act of knowing or thinking of things.” He also pleaded for using the word “conscire” which is better than consciousness for psychological purposes. But he was not followed by others for “consciousness” has wider sense than that of Me Dougall’s. Consciousness means something more than simply “to know something”.

Thus consciousness means the mental process with the help of which we can regard someone to be conscious. Consciousness means the state of mind. The etymological meaning of consciousness cannot include all those phenomena to which it is referred generally and philosophically. The philosophical meaning of the word “consciousness” must be referred to the essence of the mind, the thoughts, feelings, doubts, memories, actions etc. As for John Locke, consciousness is self knowledge acquired by virtue of the mind’s capacity to reflect upon itself in introspective acts analogous with perception. By “consciousness” Locke means “the perception of what passes in a man’s own mind.”

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY:

The main objective of this proposal is to analyze the notion of consciousness as discussed by Edmund Husserl. The paper is based on descriptive methods.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:

According to phenomenology, consciousness always essentially intentional. For establishing this point Edmund Husserl proposes methods that help us to overcome the natural attitude with consider

consciousness as a thing among many other things in the world. This method is known as phenomenological reduction. Moreover we can say that phenomenology aims at isolating the immanent data of consciousness.

Husserl conceived phenomenology in three important ways. Firstly, it was conceived as the science of sciences, which endeavoured to discover the basis of consciousness. Husserl says that consciousness in an intentional act and its essence is the intentionality. In the second view, phenomenology was conceived as a first philosophy and therefore, it is coextensive with philosophy, as traditionally it was the latter which had been enjoying the status of first philosophy. The third conception of phenomenology is the most important one, where it is conceived as a transcendental idealism. This view conceives the transcendental ego as the source of all meaning. As a philosophy, phenomenology initiates a break from many traditional concerns and inaugurates a new way of thinking. It was one of the most influential philosophical movements of 20th century western philosophy, as it inspired the emergence of many other movements in philosophy like Existentialism and Hermeneutics. Phenomenology was introduced at a time when philosophical thinking was facing a crisis and it has given a new life to German philosophy, which had lost its glory with the decline of the great idealistic tradition.

As the name indicates, the subject matter of phenomenology is the idea of phenomena, which according to Husserl, refers to ourselves, other people and the objects and events around us. It also includes the reflection of our own conscious experiences, as we experience them. According to Husserl, phenomena constitute the things *as* they are given to our consciousness, whether in perception or imagination or thought or volition. The fundamental objective of phenomenology is to study the phenomena, which is experienced in various acts of consciousness.

In this sense there are two types of phenomena; mental and physical. Mental phenomena constitute of what occur in the mind when we experience something. They also include the acts of consciousness, or its contents. On the other hand, physical phenomena include the objects of external perception starting with colors and shapes. Here the phenomenologist is involved in a search for certainty. In this sense by equating phenomenology with philosophy, the latter is conceived as a rigorous science dealing with ideal objects or essences of things originating in the consciousness.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the whole, it is seen that Husserl's phenomenology is not confined to a mere philosophical doctrine about the nature of consciousness and the essences that are directly given to it. Instead, it proposes a method to isolate this directly given essences. The central concern of phenomenology aims at isolating the essential aspects which constitute meanings. In other words, it seeks to isolate the essences. Everything perceived is bound up with the essence of perception which is different from the object that exists in nature.

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