

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HUSSERL'S AND MERLEAU-
PONTY'S CRITIQUES OF MODERN TRADITIONAL APPROACHES
TO EPISTEMOLOGY**

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Abstract

This work attempts a comparative analysis of Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's critiques of modern epistemological approaches, Husserl's point of view is significant because of the depth of his critique and richness of his own alternative to the received tradition in Epistemology. Its significance is heightened by the facts that he relates his critique to what he considered to be the crisis of modern western science which Merleau-ponty further educed pointing out the ontological weaknesses of modern Western Epistemology. They both saw the need to infuse Logic into epistemology to give it a proper foundation as a science which concerned with the origin, nature, scope and limits of human knowledge. They equally agreed on the significance of phenomenology in our knowledge formation. Husserl eventually introduced the concept of intentionality in his phenomenology which was further modified by Merleau-ponty.

Keywords: Intentionality, phenomenology, Representationalism, Ontology.

Introduction

This research was necessitated by the need to better appreciate the common grounds and peculiarities of some phenomenologists of the twentieth century because, most often when one reads the works of the Likes of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre to mention a few, one begins to wonder or rather ponder on the very nature and essence of the novel philosophical science of the 20th Century known as phenomenology which attempts to describe experiences (and “things in themselves”) without metaphysical and theoretical speculations, by bracketing or suspending the natural attitude to knowledge formation and foundation, so as

to better appreciate the objectivity, nature and essences of knowledge. Hence, the dominant critiques of Western Traditional Epistemologies by phenomenologist became a trend in the 20th century.

As such, the character of phenomenology as an epistemological science are said to be critical descriptive, reduction, essence and intentionality. With the hope of establishing the constitution of meaning in human experience without preconceived presuppositions inherent in empiricism and rationalism as epistemological sciences. Consequently, Husserl who is the founder of this school of thought, elaborately criticized historicism and psychologism in logic based on the analysis of intentionality. Merleau-Ponty who was greatly influenced by Husserl went further to advance Husserl's conception of intentionality by asserting that intentionality is not just "aboutness" but aboutness of something hence he remarked; there is no hard and fast separation between bodily conduct and intelligent conduct rather there's a unity of behavior that expresses the intentionality and hence the meaning of this conduct (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; see also Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Which is to say, inhabit the body adopts to the intended meaning, thus giving itself a form of embodied consciousness. It is on these grounds of close phenomenological affinities shared between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty that informed the need to compare and contrast their basic critiques of Western Traditional Epistemology.

Husserl's Critique of Western Epistemology

The central work of Edmund Husserl titled; *Logical Investigations*, provides a breakthrough in philosophical analysis. Through this work, he aims to provide a new foundation for pure logic and epistemology. Husserl introduced phenomenological analysis against this critical background. Husserl criticised the entire modern epistemological tradition as embodying natural attitude. In his critical analysis, his position of natural attitude is that "...We are psychological beings in the world who depend for knowledge on being affected by external objects; this is what Husserl calls the natural attitude, which is exploited in scientific naturalism or Physicalism" (Pietersma 2000, p. 51). The assumption that there is such a world, "out there" surrounding me, Husserl calls "the general thesis of the natural attitude" (Christensen et al., 2017). Husserl remarks that this natural attitude is correlated with our common sense notion of obviousness. Husserl's primary objection to natural attitude is that in the perspective of natural attitude consciousness is considered as another object in the world and philosophy/epistemology studies the

characteristics of consciousness or the characteristics of conscious experience as any object that physical science studies.

Husserl's Conception of Consciousness in Relation to Physical object

As such, Husserl's primary assertion is that consciousness has a primacy over the physical objects. For him, it is inadequate to view consciousness as mere object. Realm of conscious experience cannot be adequately analysed through the objectification of consciousness. His phenomenological analysis stems from the point that for conscious beings (for human being) conscious experience and experience of objects are two distinct kinds of experience. By employing his conception of phenomenology Husserl thoroughly criticizes the modern epistemological tradition (Christensen et al., 2017). According to him, modern epistemology is formulated within the structure of natural attitude. Natural attitude and its relation to knowledge are to be analysed in detail. Natural attitude is primarily viewing everything as objects or objects related properties. Then the question would be that "Can we have Knowledge about an internal state of human?" or "Can we have Knowledge about the mental state?" This question arises because mental states do not belong to the external world and natural attitude claims that Knowledge is about external world. But, according natural attitude, we can have Knowledge about the mental state too. But natural attitude may not say that mind / mental states are parts of physical world. However, it approaches mind as an object which exist in the world like any other object. This attitude of naturalism is called psychologism. Psychologism studies mental phenomena from a third person point of view. That means psychologism examines mental state not from the agent's perspective (from the perspective of one who holds the belief) but as an object which exist independently from agent/believer (Mitova 2015).

Husserl's Critique of Psychologism Vis-À-Vis representationalism

Subsequently, Husserl finds that psychologism fails to give an adequate explanation for our Knowledge claims. So, he criticizes psychologism (Mitova 2015). Husserl's criticism to psychologism is mainly based on the concerns of Epistemology. According to him, psychologism is incapable for accounting for the possibility of Knowledge. Possibility of Knowledge means specifying the conditions under which a belief would be Knowledge. That is specifying how Knowledge would be possible. Husserl's understanding of psychologism in

relation to Epistemology can be elucidated as follows:

Epistemology is concerned with the cognitive nature of perceiving, believing, judging, and knowing. All of these phenomena, however, are psychical phenomena, and it is therefore obvious that it must be up to psychology to investigate and explore their structure. This also holds true for our scientific and logical reasoning, and ultimately logic must therefore be regarded as a part of psychology and the laws of logic as psycho-logical regularities, whose nature and validity must be empirically investigated. Thus psychology provides the theoretical foundation for logic. (Zahavi2003, p. 8).

This is what psychologism amounts to. According to Husserl, psychologism, at best is only a description of factual nature of mind/consciousness (Wild 2013). It shows how a mental phenomenon/belief is formed as a part of interaction with other physical conditions / objects. But such an account cannot explain the validity of laws of logic. For the followers of psychologism concepts like certainty and non-empirical validity remains unexplainable. What psychologism basically explains is an act of mind. The fundamental mistake of psychologism is that it does not distinguish correctly between the act of knowing and the object of knowledge. As Husserl points out a statement like "Makurdi is the capital of Benue State x" can be repeated by many people at different time. The statement and meaning of it will be identical in all such cases though they are different acts of consciousness. "The very possibility of *repeating* the same meaning in numerically different acts is in itself a sufficient argument to refute psychologism as a confusion of ideality and reality.... Thus, Husserl can argue that psychologism entails a self-refuting skepticism. To attempt a naturalistic and empiricistic reduction of ideality to reality is to undermine the very possibility of any theory, including psychologism itself." (Zahavi2003, p. 9).

Consequently, Representationalism can be understood as a novel approach to overcome the difficulties of the psychologism while maintaining the fundamental attitude of psychologism that is natural attitude. The trouble with psychologism is that for psychologism all mental acts are of the same kind. Hence, they could not distinguish between knowledge and mere belief. Psychologism could only describe the acts. Representationalism came up with a distinction between belief and knowledge. That is, representationalism provides an account on the possibility of knowledge. It says that an act/belief which represents the reality is the knowledge. That is, representationalism provides an account on the possibility of knowledge. From naturalistic point of view what we have for knowledge is a certain mental phenomenon/act of

mind. Representationalism maintains that there is consciousness and reality. Analogically we can say if I look at a mirror the image in the mirror represents the object "I". In that way, the reality and our consciousness are related. If I say "Agbenu is fair", and in the outside world there is a fair Agbenu, then only Knowledge can be said to have been attained. So we can see the dualism in representationalism. But there is a mediator in this duality that is representation. What we can see is that there is an adequate correlation between an object and our consciousness. Whatever comes to our mind (sensations) is caused by an object in the external world, if not, our belief cannot be considered as Knowledge. The part of the claim is that reality cannot be grasped directly because it is available only through perceptions of reality, which are representation of it in the mind. That means, there is a real object outside the world, and through perception we are getting their replica or copy or representation of that particular object. Our discussion of Husserl's anti-psychologism clearly paves way for the discussion of his anti-representationalism which we consider in terms of its basic tenets. His position is that, representationalist epistemology provides a curious picture of perception, which is counter-intuitive. According to representationalism, object of perception is not the real object but the image of the real object. From this image we are getting the Knowledge of real object of the world. Husserl claims that we mistakenly believe that our sensation is caused by an object in the external world. The description that there are two different entities in perception must be rejected as being unfaithful to experience. "When I perceive a rose, then it is this rose, and nothing else which is the object of my perception. To claim that there is also an imminent rose, namely an intra mental picture or representation of the rose, is a pure postulate that does not explain anything" (Zahavi, Dan. 2003, p. 18). According to Husserl, what we perceive is not an image or representation of the external world but the real object itself. In Husserl's terminology, object of perception is intentional object. This intentional object / object of perception is not to be identified with some mental construction, but is simply the object of my intention. Husserl claims that in the case of perception we have a direct and unmediated acquaintance with the object in question. By making this claim, Husserl defends a form of direct perceptual realism and rejects representative theory of perception.

Equally, Husserl's main criticism of representational theory rests on the point that there is no basis for claiming that mental representation leads us to the object. The relation of representation which is distinct from object of external world can never relate it to subject/consciousness. That is, as long as we

maintain the gap between external world and subject, there would be gap between representation and object. It cannot be claimed legitimately that mental images/ideas are there presentation of external world. Failure of mental representation to be a true representation of reality is necessary consequence of subject-object dichotomy. And representational epistemology is structured within the frame work of subject- object dichotomy. But Husserl argues that such dichotomy vanishes in first person point of view. That's why he insisted on a first person point of view of experience/consciousness.

HUSSERL'S CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON REPRESENTATIONALISM

Also, in his criticism of modern epistemology, Husserl is not relying solely on the skeptical challenge that images/ideas need not be a representation of an external world. Husserl here makes the point that even if we accept that there is a relation of representation between object and consciousness, it is bound to be partial and incomplete. Once an object is treated as given by the external world instead of as given in experience or consciousness, the images/ideas, which is caused by the external object (as claimed by the representationalist) is bound to be a partial one. It is clear that if perception is considered in the way as representationalism articulated, the image or sense data of the object is partial as we are seeing the object only partially as an external object, e.g. the perception of cube. All sides of the cube do not appear to us in perception. When we see a person from the front side, the left, right, and back side of the person he is not available to our senses. This is the case for each and every perception, if perception is considered as sense data / idea collected/constructed through the senses. The situation is different when we treat the object as given to consciousness. But if we analyse visual perception in reflection, the perception of cube or a person who is standing in front of me is given in its totality.

Furthermore, Husserl's critique is that representationalism is founded on certain presuppositions which are unexamined. Our attempt in modern epistemology starts with the assumption that the subject, the knower, is ontologically distinct from the known, the world of objects (Akwaji & Nchua 2018). But there is neither a justification nor even an attempt to examine it in representationalist epistemology.

For Husserl, Representative reference is parasitic. According to representationalist theory of perception, the object of our perception is not the

real object but the representation of the object. That means perception presupposes representation. However, such an account says that representations formed are through sense perception. That is, representation is simultaneously considered as the object of perception (pre-condition) and the product of perception. Thus, representation cannot explain perception as it presupposes perception. For representationalism, which endorses the natural attitude, consciousness is also an object. Husserl asserts that representability, the characteristic of something is being represented, cannot be considered as a natural property of an object. Being red, being metallic, or being round is natural properties of an object. But being representable is not a natural property of an object. For example, usually we consider a photo of a person as representation of that person. But that representative nature of that photo is an attributed one, it is not natural property of the photo like photo's colour, photo's shape etc. Some may claim that similarity is the basis of the relation of representation. That is, a photo is similar to the person in certain respect and that is why a photo is considered as their presentation of the person. Similarity/resemblance cannot be the basis of representation. Similarity between things does not create representational relation between them. Two copies of the same book may look alike, but that does not make one a representation of the other. Moreover, similarity relation is reciprocal. That is if X (a photo) is similar to Y (the person) then person (Y) is also similar to photo (X). But, representational relation is not reciprocal. That is, when a photo represents the person, it is not the case that person represents the photo. The point is that similarity relation cannot be the basis of representation. Husserl's point is that representational relation is based on interpretation. "If X is to represent Y, X needs to be interpreted as being a representation of Y. It is exactly the interpretation... that confers X with its representative function" (Zahavi2003, p. 18). Thus, Husserl challenges the claim of the representational epistemology that representative relation is an objective one. That is, consideration of a mental image as representation of an external world is only an interpretation. If so, it is possible that one could take a different interpretation of a mental image representation of something else. That is, Knowledge of external world which is gained through the representation of the external world is not an objective one.

What is the Focus of Husserl's Theory of Knowledge?

Through his theory of knowledge, Husserl tries to establish how knowledge is possible for an agent or a subject. Husserl argues that "His task is not to

examine whether (and how) consciousness can attain knowledge of mind-independent reality. These very types of questions, as well as all questions as to whether or not there is an external reality, are rejected by Husserl as being metaphysical questions, which have no place in epistemology” (Zahavi2003, p. 8). First of all, we have to keep in mind that Husserl is not asking us to focus only on the mental content and exclude reality. But as the thesis of intentionality points out intentionality cannot be described without reference to the world. But he radically alters the concept of world or reality. For him, the reality (thing in itself) is not the one which is different from phenomena (thing as appears). If the distinction of reality/appearance is maintained in traditional way, he says that knowledge would never be possible. If the cognitive subject is a mind in possession only of representations of things, then the question of knowledge becomes that of how the mind can know something outside itself? As already noted, the problem can be dealt with only by setting it as idea or reformulating it. For Husserl, “The world is not something that simply exists. The world appears, and the structure of this appearance is conditioned and made possible by subjectivity. It is in this context that Husserl would say that it is absurd to speak of the existence of an absolute mind-independent world, that is, of a world that exists apart from any possible experiential and conceptual perspective. For Husserl, this notion is simply contradictory.” (Zahavi2003, p. 52). Husserl says that phenomenology solves or dissolves the riddle of knowledge by redefining the relation between “Inner” or “Immanent” subjectivity and “outer” or transcendent objectivity, such that one attends only to what is transcendent within-immanence. In saying this Husserl is very much influenced by Kantian philosophy, though he treats the concept of immanent and transcendent in a very different manner. It was necessary for Husserl to distance himself from Kant’s position because the Kantian framework is very much embedded in the modern epistemology whose gaps Kant attempts to bridge.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of Western Epistemology

He was the first philosopher who gave importance to our actions/experience and body for attaining knowledge (Manen,1990). According to modern epistemologists, all knowledge is mediational. Mediational knowledge is the knowledge of reality achieved through a certain media/medium, that is, the media/medium of representation within ourselves (Ihde & Selinger 2014). Descartes on wards epistemologists celebrated this meditational knowledge.

Merleau-Ponty argues that this meditational knowledge is a mystery. So he feels the need to unfold/unravel the mystery behind the meditational knowledge. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological pursuit is very radical in the history of epistemological tradition. He can be considered as the true adherent of Husserl regarding the purpose of phenomenology. However, he is highly critical of Husserl regarding the method or means of achieving the purpose of phenomenology. For him, the aim or purpose of phenomenology is to capture the essence of our consciousness/conscious experience. More clearly, the attempt is to capture the experience as it appears to our consciousness without any medium. Then only we can attain our undistorted experience of consciousness. For attaining this Merleau-Ponty tries to develop Husserl's theory of intentionality Merleau-Ponty tries to modify the thesis of intentionality. He notes that Husserl is right in emphasizing that all conscious experience is directed towards something. It is not directed towards some states or situations but to some object, which we call "intentional objects". Merleau-Ponty's point is that it is not merely that consciousness is directed towards some object. It is not merely that we perceive an object. Instead "we perceive objects or events as "hiding" others or "bringing them into view" as being "In front of" or "behind others things" or as "the beginning of" or "end of" some object or event" (Smith, 2002, p. 27). That is, our precepts or conscious acts refer to things that are not actual or present. For example, when I perceive a screen, it is not merely that I perceive a screen. I am not merely directed towards the screen but directed towards the screen as hiding something else. That is, the screen refers to something which is not present in the phenomenal field. That is, intentional objects refer to something that are not actual or not present. Merleau-Ponty's formulation is that "Whatever is an object of consciousness has significance. To say that consciousness is intentional is thus to say more about it than that it is directed towards some object, p. it implies a relation not just of mere aboutness, but aboutness "for" something. This interpretation of intentionality-we might call "Intentionality-as-significance..."(Smith, 2002, p. 27). Merleau-Ponty is formulating the structure of conscious acts, especially the structure of perceptual acts. Intentionality is the basic nature of perceptual acts. That is, in a perceptual act, we are directed towards something which refers to something else which is not present. For Merleau-Ponty, the other crucial component or structure of the perceptual act is the purpose of the perceiver. Suppose we perceive a map. If our purpose is to reach a place, then we consider it as one which provides directions. Otherwise it might be just colourful paper or an abstract drawing. That means "[A] phenomenonal object will appear, for

example, “as means to” or “In the way of” an end desired by perceiving subject. In this sense, perception is closely tied to the way in which perceivers are “at grips” with their environment. Perception is thus intimately connected with behavior” (Smith, 2002, p. 27). Perception is closely linked with how we have situated ourselves in an environment. For example, I can situate myself in a situation as a student or as a girl or as a friend. This affect show I am looking at an object. One who knows the swimming view the swimming pool/lake differs from one who does not know swimming. In one case, it could be associated with fear and in another case it might be associated with joy and freshness. “Merleau-Ponty’s intentionality thesis attempts to capture an essential structure of lived experience” (Smith, 2002, p. 27).

Merleau-Ponty's Critiques of Rationalism and Empiricism

He criticizes both rationalism and empiricism or their naïve account of perception. According to empiricism, sensations or qualia are the primitive building blocks of perceptual experience. Sensations are due, according to that view, to mind sensing a quality or property of an object. e.g. sensation of colour, sensation of shape, sensation of smell etc. So sensations are basically mental effects produced by each sense organ when they are affected by the properties of objects. When the eye is affected by a green coloured object, it produces a particular colour sensation and perceiving or experiencing is what we normally call “perception of the colour”. According to empiricism, when we perceive an object, we are having different and distinct sensations of colour, shape smell, softness/hardness etc. And from these different sensations we infer an object or construct it. Thus perceptual experience is basically about internal/ mental sensations. Merleau Ponty’s major criticism against the concept of sensation is a phenomenologic alone. In a phenomenological reflection (when I am conscious of conscious acts, i.e. when we reflect upon our experience as we experience perception) we are not able to find out anything called sensation. “We find that perceptual experience is not a collection of internal sensations. What we have in perception is not sensations but external things. Concepts of sensation correspond to nothing in our experience” (Carman, 2006, p. 52). That is, an account of perception provided by sensationalism or sense data theory appears to be counterintuitive. Any kind of reflection of our own perceptual experience does not reveal any kind of entities like sensations. In our reflection of our perceptual experience, perception comes as a single and unitary experience.

Nowhere in our perceptual awareness do we come across discrete qualitative bits of experience, fully abstracted from the external, perceptually coherent environment. Occasionally we might see an after image or hear a ringing in our ears, but typically we see objects and hear noises made by things and events. This is in part just to say that perceptual experience is intentional, that it is of something, whereas impressions, sensations, and sense data are supposed to be the non-intentional stuff from which the mind somehow extracts or constructs an experience of something... Perception is essentially interwoven with the world we perceive, and each feature of the perceptual field is interwoven with others (Carman, 2006, p. 52).

Merleau-Ponty's Objection of Atomistic Conception of Perception

Merleau-Ponty's another criticism is directed towards the atomistic conception of perception. According to which when we perceive an object we get sensations or sense data/impression of colour, shape, size and texture etc.,. Separately, and certain mental processes combine them together (Pompermaier2018). But an object is not mere bundle of sensations. Such an account fails to explain the unity of the object. But, Merleau-Ponty's main trouble with the atomistic picture is that it provides discrete character to perception. The perception of a rose is distinct from the perception of the rose plant. Such an alleged distinctness is provided by the supposedly discrete nature of the basic units of experience like sensations or impressions.

Empiricism assumes that the framework of perception is clearly distinct. That is, left and right side (as well as front and back side) boundaries of a perceptual field can be determined. However, Merleau-Ponty's position is that such a definite limit to perceptual field is incongruous. It might be right to say that an object has discrete and determinate boundaries. But perceptual field would not have. Though in our perceptual act, we are directed towards an object, we perceive the object against a background. Obviously, the background of an object which is perceived will not have definite limit. "The perceptual field is not rigidly framed like a tableau. It is bounded more in the manner of horizon, p. indeterminate, out of focus, shifting with the eye of viewer and never caught up by it" (Smith,2007, p. 28). In perception, the background of an object is a horizon, not a well-defined boundary.

For Merleau Ponty, objects in perceptual field do not play a passive role. It is not adequate to assume that objects are fully available to our consciousness or

fully present themselves. Even if we perceive a single rose a hundred times, we cannot claim that we have fully perceived the intended object. As object appears to us, always with attached meaning it is always open to perceptual exploration. "Each part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is therefore already charged with a *meaning*. . . The perceptual "something" is always in the middle of something else; it always forms part of a "field." . . . The pure impression is therefore not just undiscoverable, but imperceptible and thus inconceivable as a moment of perception" (Maurice & Colin 1962, pp. 9-10).

Also, Merleau Ponty's critique of rationalism mainly focuses on the rationalist theory of Kant. Certainly, the Kantian theory made some improvement in theorising conscious experience and perception over empiricism. For empiricism, concepts are products of perception and perception itself is concept-free and devoid of meaning. However, from the information or sensation which we receive from the outer world, mind generates concepts or meaning through certain mental processes. Kantian school rejects such claims and holds that perception itself is meaningful. It is not the case that after perception, through certain mental process, mind identifies an object as something. Instead, in perception itself we apprehend objects as something. Perceptual process employs our faculty of judgment "a view Kant expressed in the famous formula "Intuitions without concepts are blind" (Smith,2002, p. 29).

Equally, Merleau Ponty acknowledges that rationalism, and in particular its Kantian version, is a great advance on empiricism. He particularly empathizes with Kant's idea that the meaning of an object is traceable to our conceptualization of it. But Merleau Ponty considers this to be a half truth in the sense such a conceptualization cannot account for the fullness of the meaning. Merleau Ponty disagrees with Kantianism on the nature of the faculty of judgment. According to the Kantian theory our faculty of judgment is not something which is accompanied by perception; instead it is prior to perception. And perception possesses meaning because objects of perception are captured within the framework of *a priori* categories. That is, meaning lies in the logical connection between objects of perception. Consequently, judgments of perception are determinate and explicit. "According to this view, a perception has a sense in the same way a proposition does" (Smith, 2002, p. 29). Merleau-Ponty's basic objection against Kantianism is on the point of determinate and explicit meaning of perception. For Merleau Ponty "We often perceive without being able to put what we perceive into words" (Smith,2002,

p. 29) In other words, sense of perception is different from the sense of proposition. A description of perception cannot exhaust or account for the fullness of perception. "...The propositional model of perception like sense-data account fails to appreciate the richness of phenomenal field, a richness, and diversity that no finite series of statements can do justice to. There is always an excessor or remainder to the described content of perception." (Smith, 2002, p. 29)

For Merleau Ponty, the notion of background is the one which resists the possibility of an exhaustive and explicit description of perception. For Merleau Ponty, perception can be understood always against a background. But background is not a collection of objects or properties. In perception we may not be aware of each and every part or element of background in the way we are aware of objects of perception. That means the background of perception and objects of perception are different categories which play different roles. Therefore, the background cannot be so reduced to a set of objects or properties and as it cannot be reduced, it cannot be described too. The role of background is to highlight the object of perception in a particular fashion of course, without taking cognizance of the background we can have a description of perception, but not an exhaustive or complete one. This is because our description of perception is based on factors like background which are not fully describable or can be made explicit. Another related criticism of Merleau Ponty against Kantian theory is that it fails to account for the perspectival nature of perception. According to Merleau Ponty, perception not only provides information of what we perceive but also about how the subject is related to what is perceived. As Nicholas H Smith points out, "...it would seem that prior to any conceptualization of experience, prior to experience assuming the form of a judgment "that", perception gives us access to a world, a pre-predicative or pre-objective world" Kantian theory rules out the possibility of such an access to the world.

A Comparative Analysis of Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's Critiques of Modern Epistemology

Husserl Provides a foundation for pure logic and Epistemology, while Merleau-Ponty gave importance to actions/experience and body for attaining knowledge.

Husserl introduced phenomenological analysis into knowledge acquisition,

while Merleau-Ponty adopted and developed it.

Husserl established that consciousness is directed towards something or about something (Intentionality), while for Merleau-Ponty Intentionality is not mere just aboutness but aboutness for something (Intentionality-as-significance).

Husserl deduced that mental states do not belong to the external world, Merleau-Ponty rather saw the link between the perceiver and situated environment (i.e. the influence of a given environment on perception).

Husserl discovered the weakness of psychologism in knowledge analysis and was against representationalists' approaches to knowledge. Merleau-Ponty rather, criticized empiricism and rationalism as theories of knowledge, however, acknowledges Kant's efforts to use rationalism to strengthen empiricism in our knowledge formation.

They both see phenomenology as a philosophical scientific methodology. However; Husserl, is a phenomenological positivist who holds that phenomena should be studied from an objective point of view (unbiased) quantitatively. While Merleau-Ponty is a post-positivity phenomenologist who holds that phenomena should be studied objectively by recognizing the possible effects of biases emanating from both qualitative and quantitative paradigms.

Also, Husserl adopted Brentano's account of intentionality as the fundamental concept for understanding and classifying conscious acts and experiential mental practices (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality is the principle that every mental act is related to some object (Moran, 2000), and implies that all perceptions have meaning (Owen, 1996). All thinking i.e. "imagining, perceiving, remembering, etc" is always thinking about something (van Manen, 1990, p. 182). Intentionality therefore refers to the internal experience of being conscious of something (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's goals are strongly epistemological and he regarded experience the fundamental source of knowledge (Racher and Robinson, 2003). For Husserl, the aim of phenomenology is the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle et al., 1989). In order to hold subjective perspectives and theoretical constructs in abeyance and facilitate the essence of the phenomena to emerge, Husserl devised phenomenological reduction (Racher and Robinson, 2003).

Comparatively, epistemological strategy of phenomenology is the concept of phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction was proposed by Husserl and reinvented by Merleau-Ponty (Moran, 2000). Husserl (1970) argues

that the “lifeworld” (Lebenswelt) is understood as what individuals experience prereflectively, without resorting to interpretations. Lived experience involves the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life (Dilthey, 1985). Therefore, an attempt is made to understand the essential features of a phenomenon as free as possible from cultural context. Moran (2000) explains this as: “Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within” (p. 4). This point is key to understanding the phenomenology of Husserl. The focus is on the primeval form, what is immediate to our consciousness, “before we have applied ways of understanding or explaining it. It is experience as it is before we have thought about it” (Crotty, 1996, p. 95). Therefore, Husserl’s phenomenological view requires that descriptions of experience be gleaned before it has been reflected on (Caelli, 2000). Husserl uses the term “natural” to indicate what is original, naive, prior to critical or theoretical reflection (van Manen, 1990). In the natural attitude individuals hold knowledge judgementally but epoche requires a fresh way of looking at things (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgement or stay away from the everyday, common place way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994).

However, in order to bracket one’s preconceptions and presuppositions, one must firstly make them overt, and render them as clear as possible (Valle et al., 1989). The use of the term “reduction” quite literally means that the person “reduces the world as it is considered in the natural attitude to a world of pure phenomena or, more poetically, to a purely phenomenal realm” (Valle et al., 1989, p. 11). Spiegelberg (1982) identifies phenomenological intuiting as the heart of phenomenological reduction. This is an eidetic understanding of what is meant in the description of the phenomenon under investigation (Scheubert and Carpenter, 2003). This is described by Parse (2001) as “the process of coming to know the phenomenon as it shows itself as described by the participants” (p. 79). This involves the phenomenologist attempting to meet the phenomenon as free and as unprejudiced as possible in order that the phenomenon present itself as free and as unprejudiced way as possible so that it can be precisely described and understood.

Consequently, Merleau-Ponty built on the writings of Husserl in his work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, the goal of phenomenology proposed is to rediscover first experience, which he terms as the “primacy of perception” (Racher and Robinson, 2003). Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty advocates phenomenological reduction in order to reach an original awareness (Racher and Robinson, 2003). The goal of Merleau-Ponty’s “phenomenology of origins” is to

help us view our experience in a new light, not relying on the categories of our reflective experience; a pre-reflective experience (Moran, 2000). The usefulness of Merleau-Ponty's writings for contemporary researchers is evident in the utilisation of the four existentials considered to belong to the fundamental structure of the lifeworld; lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality), are productive for the process of phenomenological questioning, reflecting and writing (van Manen, 1990).

Conclusion

In all, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty were against modern traditional approaches to knowledge especially that which springs from our 'natural attitudes' and representationalism as theory of knowledge, but, it supports phenomenological ontological approaches to knowledge formation and foundation. Both saw the relevance of an unbiased formation and foundations of Knowledge Via 'epoche'. They both advanced and modified the concept of intentionality developed by Saint Anselm, advanced by Franz Brentano, popularized by Husserl and modified by Merleau-Ponty.

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