CHAPTER III

PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS EXPOUNDED

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Husserl designates his philosophy, "Phenomenology" - a Rigorous Science, as it investigates the most radical, fundamental primitive, original evidences of conscious experiences. For him, in our experiences what is most primary and fundamental can be reached by a philosophical analysis which has to proceed without any presupposition.

Thus Husserl establishes a new kind of philosophy which is other than traditional empiricism and idealism. Phenomenology, according to Husserl is a descriptive science of essences. The method he adopts is a descriptive method. The proper task of philosophy is not to explain or construct a theory but to describe. It cannot be called pure and simple empiricism because traditional empiricism from Locke to Russell has been vitiated by metaphysical presuppositions, which cannot be clarified. Phenomenology is the science of experience, it does not deal with the subject or object of experience but with the point where the being and consciousness meet.

The analysis of consciousness as given by Husserl is not the psychological analysis as there is an attempt to solve the epistemological problems of the absolute foundation of logic
and science. Both phenomenology and psychology deal with consciousness in general as well as with the specific acts like perception, memory, reasoning etc., though they are different in their very point of view. From the psychological point of view acts of consciousness appear as mundane events which occur in the real world. Phenomenology as developed by Husserl deals with the fundamental or basic problems of knowledge, knowledge which is scientific and also common sense knowledge with which we are acquainted in our everyday life. Phenomenology also has its questions regarding the existence of objects and also meaning of their existence.

Husserl's phenomenological theory first expounded in his work "Ideas" which appeared in 1913, where he emphatically expresses the affirmation of consciousness. The germ of such thought lay embedded in the cartesian maxim "cogito-ergo-sum". In phenomenology, unlike in Cartesianism doubt does not necessarily lead to a system of indubitable metaphysical truths. Husserl does not subscribe to the complete negation or denial of the existential reality of the objects. Rather such reality is sought to be disconnected, or, as Husserl puts it, 'bracketed'. Husserl asserts that consciousness has in itself being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature remains unaffected by any phenomenological
disconnection. Adopting the phenomenological method, that is, after bracketing the entire world including ourselves what actually remains, to Husserl is nothing other than pure and transcendental consciousness. In his language, "... Consciousness in itself has a being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature remains unaffected by the phenomenological disconnexion".  

Now, if we analyse Husserl's idea of consciousness the following essential features are revealed to us. While Descartes accepts the independent existence of consciousness, Husserl holds that consciousness cannot exist by itself. Consciousness according to Husserl is interwoven in the natural world in two ways. At first it is somebody's consciousness. As we know phenomenological philosophy never concerns itself with bare consciousness or consciousness as such. It must be the case of being consciousness of something - be it a percept, or a concept or a desired object and so on. Again it is always consciousness of the world. Here, in this sense consciousness is always attached to the real world.

The most important feature of consciousness according to Husserl is its self-intentionality.  

2. This conception was first introduced by Brentano, the teacher of Husserl.
consciousness must be consciousness of something. The intentionality of consciousness is considered to be the central insight in Husserl's phenomenological analysis. Husserl does not claim that intentionality is the necessary and sufficient characteristic of all psychical phenomena. But his only concern is the investigation of a class of phenomena called 'acts'. These acts are the directedness of consciousness towards objects. This sense of directedness to an object is implied in the term, 'consciousness of', 'perception of' etc. In this connection we may point out four additional characteristics of Husserl's intentionality. 3

1. Intention objectivates. In perception of an actual object we perceive the different perspectives or sense-data. These perspectives are organised in our consciousness. Consciousness refers this perspectives to the real object which is in the external world. This is the objectifying character of intentionality. It is the function of intention to relate these data to an object which is itself not the part of the act, but transcendent to it. Thus what Husserl observes is that in intentional inference a complex structure in which data are used as raw-materials and integrated into the total object is revealed.

2. Intention identifies. Here we may have different experiences of the same object. We may see, hear and touch the same thing. The experiences occur one after another. Intention supplies the synthetic function by which various aspects are all integrated into an identical whole.

3. Intention connects. Each aspect of an identical object refers to related aspects which form its horizon. When we see a part of an object we are referred to the other parts. By intentionality we are able to connect different parts of an object.

4. Intention constitutes. Intentional object is no longer conceived as the pre-existent referent, but as something which originates in the act. In his phenomenological investigations Husserl introduced the bracketing of natural world. He states that belief in the natural world creates a prejudice and prevents the attainment of true knowledge. He suggests that we should pay our attention to the given phenomena. When these phenomena are synthesised we have the idea of the object. Thus phenomena become organised in our consciousness which constitute the object. The intentional object thus becomes the achievement of intentional act.

In this connection the last characteristic of intentionality of Husserl is similar to Kant's idea of the construction
of the world - and analysis of experience. According to Kant the raw-materials come from the external world on which our understanding imposes its categories. The world is made by a synthesis of the raw-materials, as interpreted by the categories. In the analysis of experience, intellect, with the help of its categories synthesises the sense-data supplied by the perception and thus constitutes identical objects within the flux of our sensation. Here we should remember the differences of opinions between Kant and Husserl. Husserl does not believe in the categories and the idea of apriori forms of material objects. Again he does not involve himself in Kantian dualism of appearance and the thing-in-itself, or phenomena and noumena.

Without consciousness, according to Husserl, we cannot have any knowledge. Again, mere consciousness also does not give us knowledge. There is a relation between consciousness and of what we are conscious. This is what is called intentionality by Husserl. Here we have only the directedness of consciousness towards an object and this does not require that consciousness should go out to reach the object.

Every act of consciousness has a directedness of its own. This directedness itself is not an act. An act of consciousness is to be distinguished from its object. Again consciousness is different from its object on the point that while the former is an object of immanent perception, the latter is an object of transcendental perception. Immanent and transcendental perception
are the two fundamentally different ways of appearing in experience. Immanent perception refers to the direct evidencing of experience as belonging to the same sphere as the experiencer itself. In case of immanent perception perception and the perceived essentially constitute a homogeneous unity. Again transcendentally directed experiences are those which refer to the experience of other persons and to things and events outside the region of experience. Consequently what follows is that transcendent perception is fallible and that the immanent perception is self-evident. Husserl regards consciousness as having immanent being and all other objects as having transcendent being. 4

Consciousness and object also differ in the mode of way in which they are presented before us. According to Husserl consciousness can never be the object of another consciousness. We perceive it by reflections while all other objects are objects of consciousness. In this connection Husserl's view corresponds to the Vedantic view, according to which consciousness can never be the object of knowledge, rather it is self-revealing.

Further the peculiar nature of consciousness is that it is not in space yet it is related to external objects. This relation of consciousness and objects, as Husserl says, can neither be logical, nor causal. If so, then what it is? In this respect

Husserl rejects two extreme theories of idealism and realism and takes the middle position. According to idealism, consciousness is the only reality and according to realism consciousness is an object like other objects and it does not possess any privileged position in the scheme of things. Accepting neither of them he says that there exist both consciousness and objects but consciousness has more importance than objects. Consciousness is such that even if we perceive it by reflection we find that we were already aware of it. This means that consciousness can never remain unperceived. As it has been already pointed out that consciousness has its privileged realm, prior to worldly objects and for the existence of them they must refer to consciousness. Thus it is the basis of all other experience and objects cannot exist apart from it. Husserl's main point is that the world has reality only as intended by consciousness, on the other hand, the world exists for consciousness. He actually does not reject the external world, but what he does, is that, he simply disconnects the external world and thus reaches Absolute Consciousness which is the aim of phenomenological reduction.

Hence it is evident that phenomenological philosophy poses an approach which can be characterised neither as empirical nor as metaphysical. The best way to characterise the outlook of phenomenological philosophy is to call it 'transcendental'. The clue to the concept of transcendental is to
be traced to the philosophy of Kant. The transcendental is that which is not given to experience, rather it is presupposed by experience. The orientation towards transcendental philosophy may in a sense be interpreted as a turn to subjectivity. The key to such notion of subjectivity again could be found in the Kantian notion of 'transcendental self' or the 'transcendental unity of apperception', as the source of subjective function. Kantian idea of philosophy as a transcendental science seems to be developed by Husserl when he proposes to call phenomenology as the science of pure consciousness. Husserl defines transcendental as a quality of consciousness. The ultimate point of reference which recurs in transcendental reduction is the pure-ego: or transcendental consciousness as the fundamental principle in all explanation of knowledge and experience.

It is to be pointed out that Husserl advocates an ego logical conception of consciousness. By ego Husserl understands some sort of identical and continuous consciousness like a stream. The physiological organism cannot be called ego in the sense Husserl understands the word, for the ego is not just the body. Consciousness of the moment or present time is what is generally known as psychological self. There was a time when Husserl understood by the ego the aggregate of mental states of different moments. His view of self, at that time was not much different from that of Hume. But in a later period
Husserl came to believe in a consciousness which runs through different aspects of experience, which has a past, which is in the present and which is moving towards the future. This identical yet continuous consciousness is the transcendental consciousness or ego, which is not a substance as understood by Descartes. As Aron Gurwitsch observes, "The whole of conscious life, all synthesis, all modalizations etc. are centralised in the ego, or, as Husserl prefers to say, ego-pole, as the identical performer of all operations and production. It is the identical ego-pole who passes from one phase to the next of his conscious life, retains past experience, and connects them with the present ones, anticipates such further experiences as will fit into a progressively growing coherent system".\(^5\) On this point Husserlian position is sharply criticised by Sartre.\(^6\) He offers instead a non-ego logical interpretation of consciousness, that is, transcendental consciousness as not belonging to a person. Such non-ego logical conception of consciousness has also been put forward by such phenomenologists as Aron Gurwitsch.\(^7\)


It may be pointed out that consciousness receives a new turn in phenomenology where the essence of mind is shown to be intentional. In consciously perceiving, judging, imagining, there is always something upon which the conscious processes are directed. There is no phase of consciousness which can be looked upon as what W. James described as a 'booming, buzzing, confusion'.

Certain difficulties can be pointed out in Husserl's phenomenology. As to the fact of intentionality of consciousness it may be said that experience is not always connected with the intentionality of consciousness. Objects are revealed to us through sense-data and these sense-data may not be connected with the intentionality of consciousness. Again admitting the intentional nature of consciousness Husserl at the same time upholds the method of 'phenomenological bracketing' when nothing is left which consciousness can refer to.

At the very beginning of his procedure he holds that phenomenology must be free from prejudice and bias. But we find that while recognising the existence of both objects and consciousness Husserl gives a superior position to consciousness as compared to objects. Here emphasising the role of consciousness he himself shows an idealistic bias. In this sense Husserl's phenomenology is more akin to idealism than to realism.