

## A RECONSIDERATION OF HUSSERL'S IDEA OF INTENTIONALITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

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### Abstract

*This study re-examined Edmund Husserl's concept of intentionality, which refers to the ability of mental states to be directed towards objects, events, or states of affairs in the world. Husserl's phenomenology aimed to uncover the underlying structures and mechanisms that enable this connection between the internal, mental realm and the external, physical realm. This study reconsidered the concept of intentionality in Edmund Husserl's philosophy to see if it has contemporary relevance. Qualitative research tools were used for this study while drawing data from books and journal articles. The historical, expository as well as the analytical methods were adopted for this study. The historical method traced the evolutionary development of the concept of Intentionality, the expository method examined in detail Husserl's concept of Intentionality while the analytical method critically appraised his thoughts in order to establish its contemporary relevance. The study found out that modern culture oversimplifies the human experience while ignoring the intricate connection between mental processes and the outside environment. This impedes progress in areas such as cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and human-computer interaction. Although, Husserl's work shed light on intentional consciousness, there are still disagreements on whether he addressed the issue of intentionality in its entirety. Above all, his concept of intentionality remains crucial in understanding the complex relationship between the mind and the world, and further development and integration of his ideas can provide valuable insights into conscious experience and human-technology interactions, with applications in fields like artificial intelligence, cognitive science, and human-computer interaction.*

**Keywords:** Intentionality, Consciousness, Mental State, Phenomenology, Noesis/Noema

### Introduction

It is a fact that human mental states, such as thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, connect to external objects and events. This act is known as intentionality. The concept of intentionality, introduced by Husserl, still remains a crucial area of study in understanding human experience and especially in fast developing society as ours. However, several challenges need to be addressed. One key issue is leveraging intentionality to gain deeper insights into human perception, information processing, and environmental interaction. This knowledge can enhance our comprehension of human consciousness and experience. Another challenge is applying intentionality to the development of more sophisticated

artificial intelligence systems. By integrating intentionality into AI development, researchers can create systems that simulate human-like understanding and interaction with their environment. This requires a profound understanding of intentionality's role in human cognition and experience.

Edmund Husserl's concept of intentionality remains a cornerstone of philosophical inquiry, shaping our understanding of consciousness, perception, and the human experience. Introduced in his seminal work, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, intentionality refers to the fundamental property of consciousness to be directed towards objects or aspects of reality. This concept has far-reaching implications, influencing various fields, including philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and phenomenology.

Of course, a reconsideration of Husserl's idea of intentionality is particularly relevant in contemporary thought, as it provides a far-reaching understanding of the complex relationships between consciousness, perception, and the world. In an era marked by interdisciplinary research and rapidly evolving understandings of human cognition, Husserl's phenomenology offers a rich framework for exploring the intricacies of human experience. Thus, can intentionality unlock new insights into human experience and drive advancements in human endeavour especially in the area of growing technology? By revisiting and reevaluating Husserl's concept of intentionality, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the intersections between philosophy, cognitive science, and other fields, ultimately shedding new light on the human condition and our place within the world. It is in the light of the above that this study examines same to see his ideas serves a significant milestone in shaping contemporary thought.

### Conceptual Clarifications

**Phenomenology:** The Greek stems *Phainomenon* (to appear), and '*logia*' (discourse)<sup>93</sup> were first combined in 1764 into the German word *Phanomenologie* by J. H. Lambert (1728-1777) to refer to his "theory of illusion or appearance".<sup>94</sup> Kant, Hegel, Whewell, Hamilton, Mach, Brentano, and later on Husserl, appropriated the term to describe categories of their own.<sup>95</sup>

**Intentionality:** Intentionality refers to the fundamental property of consciousness that allows mental states to be directed towards objects, thoughts, or aspects of

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<sup>93</sup> Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2000).1

<sup>94</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 3, *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 487-98.

<sup>95</sup> André Dartigues, *Qu'est-ce que la phenomenologie?* (Paris: Privat, 1972). 3

reality.<sup>96</sup> In simpler terms, it is the ability of the mind to think about or focus on something specific, whether it is perceiving, imagining, or judging.<sup>97</sup>

**Consciousness:** Consciousness encompasses our subjective experiences, including perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.<sup>98</sup> Husserl views consciousness as not just a passive receiver of information but an active process that shapes our understanding of reality through its intentional structure.<sup>99</sup>

**Noesis/Noema:** In Husserl's phenomenology, *noesis* and *noema* are two interrelated concepts that describe the structure of conscious experience<sup>100</sup>. *Noesis* refers to the act of consciousness itself, such as perceiving, thinking, or imagining.<sup>101</sup> It is the subjective, mental process that enables us to engage with objects or aspects of reality. *Noema* on the other hand represents the content or object of the conscious act.<sup>102</sup> It is what the mental process is directed towards, including the object's properties, meanings, or significance as experienced by the individual.

### Historicising the Concept of Intentionality

This section unearths the phenomenon of Intentionality from a historical perspective. It has been observed that the concept of intentionality has been defined and developed throughout the history of philosophy in a variety of ways. The term originates from the scholastic notion of *intentio*, which was commonly used in medieval philosophy and theology. The concept of intentionality has been explored by philosophers across various periods. In ancient times, Aristotle discussed intentionality in his work, *De Anima* (On the Soul), where he examined the relationship between perception and cognition. Although, the term 'intentionality' was not directly used, Aristotle's ideas laid the groundwork for

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<sup>96</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1913), 23.

<sup>97</sup> John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12.

<sup>98</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 45

<sup>99</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 67

<sup>100</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 123

<sup>101</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 125

<sup>102</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 130

later philosophers. He wrote, “The soul is in a way all existing things”<sup>103</sup>, highlighting the complex relationship between the mind and reality.

In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas touched on intentionality in his works, particularly in *Summa Theologica* and *De Ente et Essentia*. He discussed the concept of “esse intentionale”, which refers to the intentional or spiritual being of things in the mind. This concept is crucial in understanding how humans perceive and understand the world around them. Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) also explored the relationship between the mind and reality, laying the groundwork for later discussions of intentionality. Although, Kant did not directly address intentionality, his transcendental idealism influenced subsequent philosophers. Kant wrote, “the mind does not derive its concepts from experience, but rather, experience is organized by the mind’s concepts”.<sup>104</sup> This idea highlights the active role of the mind in shaping our understanding of reality.

In contemporary philosophy, John Searle’s *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (1983) is a seminal work on the topic. Searle defines intentionality as ‘the crucial mental phenomenon’ and analyzes its relationship to perception, action, causation, meaning, and reference. He writes, “Intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world”.<sup>105</sup> This definition highlights the fundamental role of intentionality in understanding human experience and behaviour. Other notable philosophers who discussed intentionality include Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, and Wilfrid Sellars. Brentano’s work, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) explores the idea of intentional inexistence, while Husserl’s *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913) examines intentionality in depth. Sellars theory of intentionality is discussed in his book, *Science, Perception, and Reality* (1963), where he develops a transcendental account of intentionality.

### **Husserl and his Idea of Intentionality**

Edmund Husserl was a German philosopher born on April 8, 1859, in Proßnitz, Moravia, Austrian Empire (now Prostějov, Czech Republic).<sup>106</sup> He studied

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<sup>103</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (Penguin Books, 1986), 431b21.

<sup>104</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Penguin Books, 1990), A51/B75.

<sup>105</sup> Searle. *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, 12

<sup>106</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, I xiii



mathematics, physics, and philosophy at the University of Leipzig and later at the University of Berlin. Husserl's early work was influenced by Franz Brentano, who introduced him to the concept of intentionality.<sup>107</sup> This concept would become central to Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, which aimed to understand conscious experience and the structure of consciousness.

Husserl's most influential works include *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913) and *Cartesian Meditations* (1931). In these works, he developed his phenomenological method, which involves suspending judgment about the existence of the external world (*epoché*) to gain a deeper understanding of conscious experience.<sup>108</sup> Husserl's phenomenology has had a significant impact on various fields, including philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science. His ideas have influenced prominent thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others.

Throughout his life, Husserl was committed to developing a rigorous and systematic approach to understanding conscious experience. His work continues to be studied and applied in various fields, including philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence.<sup>109</sup> Husserl passed away on April 27, 1938, in Freiburg, Germany, leaving behind a legacy of philosophical thought that continues to shape our understanding of human experience and consciousness.

Husserl's concept of intentionality revolves around the idea that consciousness is always directed towards something, whether an object, another person, or an experience. This directedness is fundamental to understanding consciousness and thought. According to Husserl, every mental event involves an intentional act, intentional object, and intentional content. The intentional act refers to the type of mental event, such as perceiving, imagining, or judging.<sup>110</sup> For instance, in the statement "Jack intended the bird as a blue jay, Jack's mental state is directed towards the bird, and the intentional content is the way he thinks about or presents the bird to himself.

The intentional content plays a crucial role in Husserl's philosophy, as it determines how an object is presented to consciousness. Husserl maintained that

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<sup>107</sup> Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. Oskar Kraus (Routledge, 1995), 75.

<sup>108</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, I 23

<sup>109</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, "The Current Relevance of Husserl's Phenomenology," in Husserl: *Intentionality and Cognitive Science*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus (MIT Press, 1982), 12.

<sup>110</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 586

intentional content is not essentially linguistic, and the most basic kinds of intentionality, including perceptual intentionality, are not necessarily tied to language.<sup>111</sup> In his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl analyzes intentionality in terms of act-quality, act-matter, and act-character. Act-quality refers to the type of mental event, act-matter is the intentional content or way an object is thought about, and act-character includes aspects like whether the act is positing or non-positing and the degree of evidence supporting the intention.<sup>112</sup>

Husserl further develops his ideas on intentionality in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, introducing the concepts of *noesis* (intentional acts) and *noema* (intentional content). He identifies three central features of the *noema*: a descriptive sense or content, a central core representing the object's identity, and a horizon of possible further determinations.<sup>113</sup> This framework allows Husserl to explain how consciousness experiences objects as unified and multifaceted, with each experience building upon previous ones and pointing towards future possible experiences. By examining intentionality in this way, Husserl provides a deeper understanding of how consciousness structures our experience of reality.

Husserl's concept of intentionality is largely derived from the empirical psychology of his teacher, Franz Brentano. From Brentano, Husserl inherits his two central contrasts between consciousness and physical objects namely that, consciousness consists not in passive reception of sensory data (as we find in the British empiricists for example), but of acts of consciousness, and that, consciousness is intentional. This latter thesis, in a phrase tells us that consciousness always takes an object. Brentano argued that "everything, although not in the same way, contains something as object in itself, in the idea something is ideated, in judgement something is acknowledged or denied, in love loved in hate hated, in desire desired etc".<sup>114</sup>

For Husserl, Consciousness processes are also called intentional; to be conscious of something; as a cogito to bear within itself its cogitatum.<sup>115</sup> In phenomenology,

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<sup>111</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, 589

<sup>112</sup> Husserl. *Logical Investigations* (Halle, 1900-1901), 586-587

<sup>113</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, 314

<sup>114</sup> F. Brentano. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, 196

<sup>115</sup> E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 33

consciousness is manifested in intentionality.<sup>116</sup> The principle of intentionality asserts that consciousness is always consciousness about something. This *aboutness* of consciousness points to something outside the mind, which is conscious of the object. Intentionality signifies the fact that consciousness is directional that is given in experience as an outward-moving vector.<sup>117</sup>

An act of consciousness is always towards something. When we love, we love something; when we are afraid, we are afraid of something; when we desire, we desire something; when we perceive, we perceive something. It is important to state that, this object of an act of consciousness need not be an existent or real object. I can be afraid of demons, although there are no demons; I can imagine a ten-finger human hand, although there is no such thing; I can hallucinate a golden mountain ahead of us on the highway, although there is no golden mountain present. This peculiar act of object, which is an object for or of consciousness but need not be a real object, is most evident in certain sorts of mental acts, of belief, assertion, and the like.<sup>118</sup>

For example, we might say 'Husserl believed that essences could be intuited', or 'Frege asserted that Kerry (Geach and Black) was confused'. What is the object of belief or assertion in these sentences? It is not essences or Kerry. Rather, what is believed or asserted is whatever the object of belief is (namely that, essences could be intuited, or that Kerry was confused). These objects hold a special place of great importance in philosophy, for their nature has long been a source of puzzlement.<sup>119</sup>

The essence of consciousness is to act towards (intentional) objects, which as mentioned earlier, may themselves not be real objects.<sup>120</sup> The intentionality principle underlines the fact that our everyday experiences are directed towards objects, properties and states of affairs. At the same time objects are revealed from definite perspective. There seems to be a contradiction between the definite directedness of consciousness and the perspectivism of experiences. Husserl argues that, though experience reveals its object from a perspective, we are

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<sup>116</sup> J. Unah (ed.). *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy* (Ibadan: Hope Publications Nigeria, 1996), 220

<sup>117</sup> J. Unah (ed.). *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy*, 220

<sup>118</sup> Solomon, quoted in Sirajudeen Owosho, "An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl's Concept of Intentionality", *An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Concerned African Philosophers* Vol. 12 No. 2 (n.d.): 167

<sup>119</sup> Solomon, quoted in Sirajudeen Owosho, "An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl's Concept of Intentionality", 167

<sup>120</sup> Solomon, quoted in Sirajudeen Owosho, "An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl's Concept of Intentionality", 167

intentionally directed toward a three-dimensional object. The different modes of consciousness we may have when we love, hate, desire, present, wonder etc, are all about something. Hence all object of experience are presented to consciousness as transcending. They are presented as going beyond the experience we have of them.

Though, all our experiences are perspectival, they also present their objects to us as transcending the perspective. For instance, when we see a tree, we do not see a mere image of the tree or a packet of sense data, but we see the tree itself. Of course, the tree is seen from a definite perspective and only those parts of the tree that are visible from our perspective are seen by us. But Husserl asserts that, the whole tree is given to the consciousness as an intentional object.<sup>121</sup> Hence, phenomenology goes beyond mere empiricism. That is, it goes beyond the image theory proposed by empiricism. Husserl argues that perception enables us to go beyond the image, which is present to us. We relate ourselves to the object itself as an image to a certain extra conscious object. Husserl claims that in intentional experiences, we do not get raw uninterrupted images in consciousness. Instead, we get the data that are already interpreted as images of some objects or other.

Franz Brentano, while introducing the notion of intentionality had asserted that consciousness was essentially intentional and argued that every mental phenomenon was characterised by the intentional inexistence of an object. It is directed towards an object or immanent objectivity. According to Brentano, every mental phenomenon contains something as an object within itself, although not everyone does so in the same way. This object, argues Brentano, is the reference to a content. To him, "...by what the scholastics of the Middle Ages referred to as the intentional (also the mental) inexistence of the object, and what we...would call relation to a content, direction upon and object (which is not here to be understood as a reality) or immanent objectivity".<sup>122</sup>

Brentano's intentionality principle thus aims at distinguishing the psychical from the physical. Brentano thus initiates a study on the nature of consciousness and also on the phenomena as they are directly given to consciousness; he argues that every mental state contains its object completely within itself as an intentional object is immanent to the mental state. Husserl, while adopting the principle of intentionality as a central doctrine in his phenomenology, proposed some crucial changes in its conceptualization. According to him, experiences are directed toward entities, which are both mental and non-mental. He argues that in the

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<sup>121</sup> E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 69

<sup>122</sup> F. Brentano. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, 108

experience of colour, we see coloured things and not mere colour sensations. He maintains that entities like physical objects, persons, numbers, which are not spacio-temporal, particulars like the patch of blue, universals like blueness, states of affairs, mental entities like thoughts, images and feelings etc, can become an intentional object. In this sense, Husserl takes phenomenology and the principle of intentionality beyond what Brentano intended it to be.<sup>123</sup>

### **A Critique of Husserl's Intentionality**

Husserl's concept of intentionality, a central idea in his phenomenology, has been subject to various criticisms. While his work laid the foundation for subsequent philosophical debates, certain weaknesses in his thought have been identified. One major critique is that Husserl's notion of intentionality relies heavily on a subjective, first-person perspective, potentially neglecting the role of external factors and social contexts in shaping conscious experience.

Critics argue that Husserl's emphasis on the individual's intentional structure leads to a solipsistic view, where the external world is merely a product of the individual's consciousness. This overlooks the possibility of intersubjective experience and the influence of cultural and historical contexts on conscious experience. Additionally, Husserl's phenomenological reduction, a method aimed at suspending judgment and biases, has been criticized for being overly idealistic and difficult to achieve in practice.

One of the famous critics of Husserl's concept of intentionality is David Bell. For David Bell, Husserl's intentionality which is centered on the idea that it is not a coherent, *sortal* notion, but rather a "ragbag concept" that encompasses various elements that condition or produce the meaningfulness of the *noetic* act.<sup>124</sup> According to Bell, Husserl's notion of intentionality is flawed because it assumes the existence of a single entity, the *noema*, which is responsible for making intentional acts meaningful. Bell argues that this assumption is a misunderstanding, as it oversimplifies the complex nature of intentionality.

Furthermore, Bell critiques Husserl's notion of a determinable X at the center of the *noema*, suggesting that it is a circular assumption.<sup>125</sup> By positing a determinable X, Husserl is essentially assuming the very thing he is trying to explain, namely

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<sup>123</sup> Sirajudeen Owosho, "An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl's Concept of Intentionality". *An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Concerned African Philosophers*, Vol. 12 No. 2. 100.

<sup>124</sup> B. David. *Hussell* (London: Routledge, 1991), 175

<sup>125</sup> B. David. *Hussell* (London: Routledge, 1991), 175

how the intentional act achieves relevance. This, according to Bell, is a fundamental flaw in Husserl's theory, as it fails to provide a clear explanation of how intentional acts are meaningful.

The debates surrounding Husserl's concept of intentionality highlight the complexities of phenomenological theory. Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, later critiqued Husserl's concept of intentionality, leading to the development of fundamental ontology.<sup>126</sup> Heidegger's ideas on intentionality and phenomenology have had a significant impact on the development of existential philosophy and hermeneutics.<sup>127</sup>

Smith also advanced some drawback of Husserl's notion of intentionality, arguing that it is too narrow and restrictive.<sup>128</sup> According to Smith, Husserl's intentional content is limited to the *noema*, which is a static, abstract entity that does not capture the dynamic and complex nature of conscious experience. Smith argues that intentional content should be understood in a multifaceted way, taking into account the various aspects of conscious experience, including perception, imagination, and emotion.

Ronald McIntyre's critique of Husserl's intentionality focuses on the relationship between intentional content and meaning. According to McIntyre, Husserl's theory of intentionality relies too heavily on the concept of *noema*, which is a abstract, Platonic entity that mediates between the mind and the world.<sup>129</sup> McIntyre argues that this approach leads to a form of dualism, where the mind is seen as separate from the world, and intentionality is reduced to a mere abstraction. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserl's intentionality is rooted in his phenomenological approach, which seeks to understand the nature of conscious experience and the relationship between the subject and the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's theory of intentionality is flawed because it relies too heavily on the concept of consciousness and the subject-object dichotomy.<sup>130</sup> Merleau-Ponty argues that Husserl's approach neglects the fundamental role of embodiment and perception in shaping our experiences and understanding of the world.

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<sup>126</sup> M. Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1927), 45

<sup>127</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 1960), 123

<sup>128</sup> David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl* (London: Routledge, 2007), 130

<sup>129</sup> Ronald McIntyre, "Husserl and the Representational Theory of Mind," *Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 10 (1982), 45

<sup>130</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1945), 45

Jean-Paul Sartre's critique of Husserl's intentionality is rooted in his existentialist philosophy, which emphasizes the freedom and responsibility of human existence. According to Sartre, Husserl's theory of intentionality is flawed because it relies too heavily on the concept of consciousness and the subject-object dichotomy.<sup>131</sup> Sartre argues that Husserl's approach neglects the fundamental role of human freedom and responsibility in shaping our experiences and understanding of the world. Emmanuel Levinas' critique of Husserl's intentionality is rooted in his philosophical emphasis on ethics and the Other. According to Levinas, Husserl's theory of intentionality is flawed because it relies too heavily on the concept of consciousness and the subject-object dichotomy.<sup>132</sup> Levinas argues that Husserl's approach neglects the fundamental importance of ethics and the Other in shaping our experiences and understanding of the world.

More so, Derrida critiques Husserl's notion of intentionality as being too focused on the individual subject, neglecting the social and intersubjective aspects of language and meaning.<sup>133</sup> According to Derrida, Husserl's theory of intentionality fails to account for the way in which social and cultural factors shape our understanding of language and meaning. Derrida argues that a more comprehensive understanding of intentionality is needed, one that takes into account the social and intersubjective aspects of language and meaning.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Husserl's Thoughts**

As a matter of fact, Husserl's concept of intentionality is a complex and multifaceted idea that has both strengths and weaknesses. While his emphasis on the subjective, intentional structure of conscious experience has been criticized for its potential solipsism and neglect of external factors, his phenomenology provides a rigorous method for examining conscious experience and highlights the fundamental relationship between the individual and the world. Ultimately, a subtle appraisal of Husserl's concept of intentionality recognizes both its limitations and its enduring influence on philosophical debates. One of the values of Husserl's concept of intentionality is that, it enables the phenomenologist to deal with the immanent-transcendent problem, that is, the relation between what is within consciousness and what extends beyond it - in a manner different from that, which were employed by many philosophers who have claimed that an experienced, represented, and remembered object (example, a tree) is inside

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<sup>131</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943), 12

<sup>132</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1961), 12

<sup>133</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 30

consciousness (immanent), whereas the real object itself is outside the mind (transcendent).<sup>134</sup>

The concept of intentionality has been defined and developed throughout the history of philosophy in a variety of ways. The term originates from the scholastic notion of *intentio*, which was commonly used in medieval philosophy and theology. In modern philosophy the term regained philosophical importance through the works of Edmund Husserl. In a broad sense, intentionality can be defined as the “aboutness” or “directedness” of one's mental states or acts. It is the referential character of these states or acts insofar as they intend or refer to something. That is, if mental states or acts are to have content, they must be about something. For instance, whenever one thinks, one always thinks about something.<sup>135</sup>

Likewise, whenever one hopes, believes, or denies, one always hopes, believes, or denies something, that is, in reference to some objective thing or content. Thus, one can hope that it will rain today or one can believe that it will not rain today; in both cases one's thoughts have a certain content. Even when the content is not necessarily “real,” it remains to a certain extent, objective. For instance, when one thinks of heavenly paradise, one is thinking of or referring to something, irrespective of whether that something is real or not real. The concept of intentionality, then, concerns itself with this question of reference. Or, to put it as some theories do, intentionality concerns the relation between the content or object of thought (what it is about) and the act or subjectivity of thinking. The problem of intentionality, then, is primarily a problem concerning a relation. The phenomenological account of experience asserts two things. Firstly, it claims that everyday experiences are intentional. Secondly, it affirms that experiences always reveal their objects from a perspective. Hence, the phenomenological account of intentionality reconciles the objectivism of intentionality with perspectivism of empiricism.<sup>136</sup>

Other areas are as follows:

### **The Impact of Technology on Intentionality**

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<sup>134</sup> Solomon, quoted in Sirajudeen Owosho, “An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl’s Concept of Intentionality”, 105-106

<sup>135</sup> Solomon, quoted in Sirajudeen Owosho, “An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl’s Concept of Intentionality”, 97

<sup>136</sup> Solomon, quoted in Sirajudeen Owosho, “An Interpretative Analysis of Edmund Husserl’s Concept of Intentionality”, 97-98



The widespread use of technology and social media has led to a proliferation of intentionalities, where individuals are constantly directed towards various objects, ideas, and experiences<sup>137</sup>. This has resulted in a fragmentation of attention, where individuals are no longer focused on a single task or experience, but rather are constantly switching between multiple stimuli. For example, a person may be simultaneously browsing social media, watching a video, and texting a friend. This fragmentation of attention can lead to a sense of disconnection and disorientation, as individuals struggle to make sense of the multiple intentionalities that are competing for their attention.

### **The Role of Intentionality in Social Justice Movements**

Husserl's concept of intentionality can also be applied to social justice movements, where individuals are directed towards specific causes or issues<sup>138</sup>. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement is an example of a collective intentionality, where individuals are directed towards the cause of racial justice and equality. This collective intentionality can lead to a sense of solidarity and community, as individuals work together towards a common goal. However, it can also lead to conflicts and divisions, as different groups may have competing intentionalities and perspectives.

### **The Influence of Intentionality on Consumer Culture**

The concept of intentionality can also be applied to consumer culture, where individuals are directed towards specific products or experiences.<sup>139</sup> For example, the advertising industry uses intentionality to direct consumers towards specific products or brands, often by creating a sense of desire or need. This can lead to a sense of disconnection and dissatisfaction, as individuals realize that the products or experiences they have purchased do not necessarily bring them the happiness or fulfillment they were seeking.

### **The Importance of Intentionality in Education**

Husserl's concept of intentionality can also be applied to education, where students are directed towards specific subjects or topics.<sup>140</sup> For instance, a student may be directed towards a particular subject, such as mathematics or science, and may develop a sense of intentionality around that subject. This can lead to a sense of focus and motivation, as students work towards specific goals and objectives.

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<sup>137</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen* (1913), translated as *Ideas* (London, 1931), 45

<sup>138</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen*, 50

<sup>139</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen*, 55.

<sup>140</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen*, 60

However, it can also lead to a sense of narrowness and limitation, as students may feel constrained by the intentionalities of their educational environment.

### **The Relationship Between Intentionality and Mental Health**

Above all, Husserl's concept of intentionality can also be applied to mental health, where individuals may experience difficulties with intentionality, such as anxiety or depression.<sup>141</sup> For instance, an individual may experience a sense of disconnection or disorientation, where they are no longer directed towards specific goals or experiences. This can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair, as individuals struggle to make sense of their experiences and find meaning in their lives. Husserl's concept of intentionality has significant implications for contemporary society, from the impact of technology on intentionality to the role of intentionality in social justice movements. By understanding intentionality, we can gain a deeper insight into the complexities of human experience and the ways in which we interact with the world around us.

Husserl's concept of intentionality remains remarkably relevant in contemporary society, particularly in the development of artificial intelligence (AI) systems and cognitive science. By understanding how intentionality shapes human perception and information processing, researchers can gain valuable insights into how humans experience and interpret their environment.<sup>142</sup> This knowledge can inform the design of more sophisticated AI systems that can simulate human-like understanding and interaction, ultimately enabling more effective human-AI collaboration.<sup>143</sup> For instance, integrating intentionality into AI development can help create virtual assistants that better comprehend the nuances of human language and behavior, allowing for more efficient and personalized interactions.<sup>144</sup>

The implications of intentionality extend beyond AI development, influencing fields such as human-computer interaction, education, and cognitive science. In human-computer interaction, understanding intentionality can improve the design of user interfaces that are more intuitive and user-friendly.<sup>145</sup> By examining

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<sup>141</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen*, 65

<sup>142</sup> Husserl. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, 23

<sup>143</sup> Dreyfus, Hubert L. "The Current Relevance of Husserl's Phenomenology." Husserl: Intentionality and Cognitive Science, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus, MIT Press, 1982, 12)

<sup>144</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, 23

<sup>145</sup> Shaun Gallagher, "Phenomenology and Embodied Cognition," in *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*, ed. Lawrence Shapiro (Routledge, 2014), 56.

how humans intentionally direct their attention and focus, researchers can design interfaces that minimize cognitive load and maximize user engagement, leading to significant advancements in areas such as user experience (UX) design and usability testing. In education, understanding intentionality can inform the design of more effective instructional strategies and materials that promote deeper learning and understanding.<sup>146</sup> For example, adaptive learning systems that adjust to individual learners' needs and abilities can be developed by understanding how learners intentionally direct their attention and engage with learning materials.

Furthermore, Husserl's concept of intentionality has practical implications for cognitive science and interdisciplinary research. By examining the intentional structure of consciousness, researchers can gain valuable insights into how humans process information, make decisions, and behave in complex environments.<sup>147</sup> This can lead to significant advancements in areas such as cognitive modeling, decision-making, and behavioral prediction. Additionally, understanding intentionality can shed light on the nature of consciousness and subjective experience, areas of ongoing debate in philosophy of mind.<sup>148</sup> Interdisciplinary research can also benefit from insights into intentionality, particularly in fields such as psychology, neuroscience, and anthropology, where understanding human experience and behavior is crucial.<sup>149</sup>

Above all, Husserl's concept of intentionality remains a vital area of study, offering practical insights and applications in fields such as AI development, human-computer interaction, education, and cognitive science. By understanding and applying intentionality, researchers and practitioners can design more effective systems, interfaces, and instructional strategies that promote human flourishing and well-being. As technology continues to shape human experience, prioritizing intentionality in technology development can lead to more human-centered technologies that support human needs and values.<sup>150</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Husserl's concept of intentionality represents a groundbreaking and influential philosophical framework for understanding the fundamental structure of conscious experience. Through his concept of intentionality, Husserl aimed to establish a rigorous, phenomenological method for examining conscious

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<sup>146</sup> Lucy A. Suchman, *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23.

<sup>147</sup> John R. Searle, "The Construction of Social Reality," *The Philosophical Review* 105, no. 3 (1996): 34.

<sup>148</sup> John R. Searle, "The Construction of Social Reality," 34.

<sup>149</sup> Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, 89.

<sup>150</sup> Suchman, Lucy A. *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*, 23

experience and understanding the complex relationships between the individual, the world, and meaning. Although, Husserl's work shed light on intentional consciousness, there are still disagreements on whether he addressed the issue of intentionality in its entirety. His idea needs to be developed further and integrated with various viewpoints in order to stay relevant.

Husserl's concept of intentionality remains crucial in understanding the complex relationship between the mind and the world, and further development and integration of his ideas can provide valuable insights into conscious experience and human-technology interactions, with applications in fields like artificial intelligence, cognitive science, and human-computer interaction.

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