

Consciousness

(for the *Blackwell Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*)

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Introduction

Consciousness figures as a central—sometimes dominant—theme in the phenomenological tradition initiated by Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl. This article describes key elements of Brentano's and Husserl's seminal discussions of consciousness. It then briefly notes some ways in which these views were received by some of the best known ("existential") phenomenologists who followed: Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Writings in phenomenology reasonably seen as about consciousness (in some widely recognizable, if initially loose sense) tend to take as basic some notion of *appearance* or *experience*—or a notion of *consciousness of objects*—for which perceptual appearances and imaginings, but also episodes of conceptual thought, furnish paradigms. Working then from some initial, broad understanding of consciousness, experience, or appearance, philosophers in the phenomenological tradition try to characterize the forms it takes, and how they are related—especially in terms of their *intentionality*—in terms, that is, of how they are "directed at" or "refer" to things. This characterization comes from a critical reflection on these forms, one that relies on the sort of understanding of them available through occupying (or adopting in imagination) the point of view of someone who is conscious of things (or has experiences, or to whom things appear) in the manner characterized. Phenomenological accounts are not aimed at providing either a causal or reductive explanation of consciousness. The aim is rather to give a highly general descriptive account that employs distinctions one can understand by being someone to whom the account applies. The value of such an enterprise may be taken to lie in the understanding it provides of the subject-matter of psychology and related fields, and of the sources of knowledge and symbolic meaning. It may be taken as bearing on the character of aesthetic evaluation and ethical choice. And it can form the basis for reflection on the human condition.

Such statements may help situate the treatment of consciousness in phenomenology roughly within a wider sphere. But given the difficulty of generalizing about phenomenologists as a group, it would be best at this point to discuss their views individually.

Brentano

Brentano sought to establish the framework for a scientific study of the mind. He saw his project as distinct from but required for a successful causal explanatory (in his terms, “genetic”) psychology, and as providing foundations to logic, ethics, and aesthetics. Its immediate aims are: to delimit the subject matter of psychology; to lay out the principle distinctions applicable to it; and (partly by means of this) to clarify the manner in which it can be studied. Brentano variously calls this endeavor “descriptive psychology,” “psychognosy,” and “phenomenology.” His account of consciousness needs to be understood in the light of this project and the primary notions he develops in connection with it.

Central to the execution of Brentano’s program is his famous claim that intentionality is the mark of the mental. Mental phenomena are distinguished by (as he variously puts this) “the intentional inexistence of an object...reference to a content, direction to an object.” Thus: “[e]very mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself.” (1972: 88) Brentano proposes that these phenomena are to be analyzed in terms of three fundamental classifications: “presentations”; “judgments”; and emotional/volitional phenomena (such as loving and hating). And he holds not only that all these are marked by intentionality; they are also universally possessed of a specially *self-reflexive* form of intentionality—a kind of perception—whereby mental acts are directed at or refer to themselves. For a mental phenomenon to be *conscious* is for it to contain such a perception of itself: consciousness is “*inner perception*.” Thus according to Brentano, all mental phenomena are conscious. Inner perception (unlike “outer perception”) is infallible, and provides the basis for psychological knowledge generally, including the taxonomical variety sought in phenomenology.

One might classify Brentano’s view among “inner sense” theories of consciousness. However, this can be misleading, since these can vary widely with different conceptions of “sensing” (or perception). In Brentano, perception of any kind essentially includes *presentation*—and presentation is fundamental to the mind. Presentations (or presentings) cover whatever might be described as an *appearing*—including not only sensory appearances (of, e.g., colors, shapes, sounds, odors, flavors), but also “conceptual” appearances such are found in non-sensory thought (intellectual or “noetic” consciousness, in Brentano’s terms). (1972: 81, 198) Presentings are necessary but insufficient for judgments—and a perception consists in a judgment that *accepts* something presented. It is important to recognize that a theoretically primitive notion of presentation or appearance is built into Brentano’s account of consciousness as inner perception in two ways: an inner perception is a presentation of a mental phenomenon—and also, the mental phenomenon perceived/presented is itself a presentation (or based on a presentation).

Brentano's is a bold view about consciousness, its scope, and its role in self-knowledge. But its content can be properly understood only by seeing how he develops and defends it through addressing a number of interesting problems.

(1) There is a concern (derived from Comte's criticism of introspection) that perception requires some sort of split between perceiver and perceived. *Inner* perception then, since it would require these to *coincide*, not only is not (as Brentano claims) *ubiquitous*; it is not even *possible*. (1972: 32-3)

(2) One may object that Brentano's theory leads to an infinite regress: if all mental phenomena are conscious, this includes all inner perceptions. And if each inner perception is conscious then each needs to be the object of a further inner perception. But this is unacceptable. (1972: 105, 121-2)

(3) One might argue, against Brentano, that there is, in any case, more to the mind than consciousness, for the postulation of unconscious mental phenomena is justified in virtue of its explanatory power. (1972: 105-112)

(4) One may worry that, since knowledge of mental phenomena from inner perception would be based on data from a single subject, it would not be sufficiently general to provide the basis for a scientific study. (1972: 37)

Brentano answers these challenges as follows.

In response to (1): though he does not consider the criticism, as it stands, to be particularly cogent, Brentano thinks Comte is on to something—for there is a sense in which inner *observation* is not possible. However, inner *perception* is possible. For Brentano, the difference between the two lies in the fact that observation (but not perception) essentially involves the discovery of what is already there through increased *attention* to an object observed. While we can learn about visible objects by observing them—looking at them *more closely*—we cannot learn about our own mental phenomena by similarly directing our attention to them. An attempt to attend in this way to one's current mental state alters its very character, instead of just revealing how it already was. However, in granting this we do not preclude *perceiving* our own mental phenomena in Brentano's (presentation plus judgment) sense, and using this, together with memory, to characterize them knowledgeably. (1972: 29-30, 34-5, 43, 124-8)

Brentano proposes a way of dealing with (2), the regress problem, without retreating on his claim that all mental phenomena are conscious. Rather than blocking such a regress by postulating unconscious inner perceptions, he maintains that the inner perception of a given presentation (such as hearing a tone) is conscious, not because there is a yet further perception trained on it, but because it is part of the very mental act of which it is the perception. For the inner perception to be conscious, it is enough that it is part of the hearing of which it is

the perception. Brentano also tries to forestall objections here by emphasizing that, when we perceive a color or tone, we only “incidentally,” “implicitly,” and “secondarily” perceive our own perceiving as well. For Brentano *implicit* perception and *unconscious* perception are not the same. (1972: 122-7, 129, 275ff)

In answer to (3) Brentano argues, on a case-by-case basis, and with reference to views of his contemporaries (pre-Freudian proponents of the unconscious) that equally or better warranted forms of explanation are available that do not appeal to unconscious mental processes. (1972: 113-7)

In response to (4), Brentano says we can avoid the danger that reliance on inner perception will yield only idiosyncratic features of the perceiver’s own mind, if we focus on basic types of mental phenomena that we can confirm are widely or universally shared (such as perception, attention, judgment, memory, and so on), and if descriptive psychology is carried on in critical dialogue with others. (1972: 37-8)

These and other aspects of Brentano’s account of consciousness, interesting in their own right, form a background essential to appreciating the discussions of later phenomenologists, because of his considerable influence on Husserl’s philosophy.

Husserl

Much of Husserl’s early philosophy arises from his attempt to apply what he took from the descriptive psychology of his teacher Brentano to epistemological issues. Husserl’s abiding conviction is that philosophy should attempt to account for various types of *evidence* by tracing them to their characteristic *sources in experience* —and to do so in a rigorous, critical, and systematic manner. This interest in constructing a systematic framework for understanding experience adequate to clarify its evidentiary role appears to have been a major motive for Husserl’s preoccupation with questions of consciousness and perception. In any case, what grows out of Husserl’s encounter with Brentano is a complex, challenging and original view of the nature of consciousness and its place in knowledge.

In *Logical Investigation V* Husserl explicitly addresses himself to the project of disambiguating ‘consciousness’ to the extent needed for his foundational philosophical concerns. This leads him to distinguish three senses or concepts of consciousness (2001 Vol. 2: V §1):

- (a) What is conscious is whatever is a part of someone’s occurrent experience—what belongs to someone’s “stream of consciousness.”

(b) What is conscious is whatever is the object of “inner awareness” (i.e., inner perception).

(c) What is conscious is any mental act or intentional experience.

Senses (b) and (c) are to be found in Brentano; ultimately it is sense (a) that Husserl favors. His initial account of consciousness (a) relies heavily on examples. He says, in effect, that consciousness in this sense is what is shared by *occurrences* such as “percepts, imaginative and pictorial presentations, acts of conceptual thinking, surmises and doubts, joys and griefs, hopes and fears, wishes and acts of will” that are *unified* in the way these are when they belong to a particular person—an “ego.” (2001, vol.2: V § 2. p. 82) Husserl argues that we can (and should) make sense of (a), independently of adopting either Brentanian usage (b) or (c), on the following grounds.

(1) If we suppose all that is conscious in sense (a) is conscious in “inner awareness” sense (b), we are beset by “grave difficulties”—in particular, the threat of infinite regress. (2001, vol.2: V §5, p. 85)

(2) Brentano’s attempted resolution of that difficulty assumes the “unbroken activity of inner perception”—but this cannot be demonstrated phenomenologically. (*ibid.*)

(3) Talk of ‘inner perception’ is plagued by a certain ambiguity that makes it unsuitable for epistemological purposes. We might take it narrowly, so that something conscious in sense (a) is “perceived” only if it is an object of “adequate perception”—where an *adequate* perception attributes to its object no more than what is strictly “given” or “apprehended” in that very perception of it. While the narrow sense is philosophically preferable to a broader one, it is also to be distinguished from consciousness (a): not everything conscious in that sense is the object of adequate perception. (2001, Vol.2: 87; 335ff)

(4) What is conscious in sense (a) includes but is not limited to intentional (directed, referential) acts. We can recognize that certain sensory contents (e.g., color sensations) form a part of conscious perceptual experience that is distinct from the “interpretation” these “data” are given in the experience. Thus senses (a) and (c) need to be distinguished. (2001, Vol.2: V § 2, pp. 83-4; § 15b)

Early on Husserl also tries to distinguish the class of what is conscious in his preferred sense (a) by reference to Descartes’ method of doubt: what is conscious is roughly what it is about oneself that would be untouched by Cartesian doubt. This way of interpreting ‘consciousness’ is revised and elaborated through Husserl’s theory of perception, and his closely associated notion of a “phenomenological reduction,” both of which are central to his

philosophy as a whole. To understand his views on consciousness, it is essential to have some understanding of these.

Important aspects of Husserl's theory of perception appear in the *Logical Investigations* (2001: Vol. 2 V §14, VI §§ 4-6, 10, 14, 40). But it is in full-bloom by the time of the first book of his *Ideas*, published in 1913. Centrally, his account concerns what it is to experience a natural thing—or more particularly, what it is for something to appear in space. Husserl notes that when we experience some object in space (say, a cube lying on a surface) we experience the object only partially, “one-sidedly,” perspectively, via an “adumbration” or “profile” of it. We can distinguish changes in these adumbrational appearances from apparent changes in the object itself, which we recognize as appearing *constant* in, e.g., color or shape, through a “flux of experience.” Now we experience in this manner not only an object, but also—less attentively and “*determinately*”—its close surroundings. And the way we experience what we do cannot be properly understood apart from a sense—a kind of “*anticipation*” or “*predelineation*”—of how things could *potentially* be *more* determinately given to us than currently, were we to direct attention appropriately. This anticipation, Husserl thinks, extends to what is not “authentically or genuinely given” (what does not *appear* to us) at all, even indeterminately—for example, the side of a cube facing away from the viewer. The cube looks to one—as it does—*cubical* from a given angle, only insofar as one “anticipates” other “adumbrations”: how it would look from other angles, were one to do what is needed to see its hidden aspects. (1982: §§ 35, 41, 42, 44; 1960: §§19, 20; 2001: §§ 1-3)

This account, in which actual appearances are linked to potential further appearances “anticipated,” is an account of the intentionality of perception. For only in virtue of a relation between current actual spatial experience and potential experience that would *fulfill* (in some sense confirm or corroborate) it, can one identify an object to which the experience refers or is directed. Without that relation between the experience, and what is anticipated—its “horizon”—a sensory experience would be without directedness to an object altogether, without intentionality.

Husserl's novel, holistic view about the intentionality of spatial experience raises many questions it is impossible to explore here. But it is only against its background that we can understand his way of interpreting consciousness (a). A few more steps will make this clear.

Because spatial perception is essentially perspectival in the way described, Husserl says we can never (in the sense earlier indicated) fully *adequately perceive* anything spatially (and so we cannot have “adequate evidence” regarding any such object of experience). (1982: §§ 42, 138) For current experience is of an object at all only insofar as it “points” beyond what is authentically given in it to merely potential experience that would fulfill it. But the possibility can never be ruled out that the future course of experience will be

such as to frustrate a fulfillment that would allow one to conclude one had identified stable persisting objects in space. Ultimately, Husserl holds, appreciation of this truth about experience shows that it is possible to have experience that never reveals *any* actual spatial objects that transcend the experience. As Husserl puts it, "...the possibility of the non-being of the world is never excluded." (1982: §46)

Now, in recognizing that spatial experience in this way fails to guarantee the existence of things outside itself, in space, we are able also to recognize the possibility that one may form judgments about one's experience that do not commit one to the actual existence of spatial objects. To restrict one's judgments to ones of this sort, is to do what is required for the suspense of judgment involved in Husserl's famous "phenomenological reduction," crucial to his official philosophical method. This cognitive feat of reduction, Husserl thinks, was foreshadowed by the method of doubt in Descartes' philosophy. But here it is finally made possible, not by contemplation of some deviant causal hypothesis involving an evil demon (or, we might add, a mad scientist and a brain in a vat), nor by inducing any *doubt* (hyperbolic or otherwise). Rather this reduction of judgment is made possible through insight into the essence of spatial experience.

This has important consequences for Husserl's conception of consciousness. For he concludes that consciousness (a) is none other than the "phenomenological residuum"—the "residue" of the phenomenological reduction—which residue nonetheless retains its intentionality as an object of study. (1982: §§ 33, 34, 49, 50) (See the paragraph interpolated into the Second Edition of the *Logical Investigations* (2001 V, §2, p.82).) So, in Husserl, what is conscious becomes not whatever is the object of Brentanian inner perception, but whatever belongs to a "stream" of consciousness. And *that* is ultimately interpreted to mean: whatever concrete events are left to consider, once one has suspended judgment about the natural world—the world of objects in space and time, partly—as one can—by means of the just-rehearsed Husserlian reflections about the essence of spatial experience. Husserl's conception of consciousness is thus made dependent on his methodological reduction—easily among the most controversial aspects of his philosophy, even for those who consider themselves phenomenologists.

If this conveys something of how Husserl understood his "stream" sense of consciousness ((a) above) without appeal to Brentanian consciousness-as-inner-perception, it still leaves unclear the extent of his disagreement with Brentano about self-consciousness. To get clearer about this, we must go again to Husserl's theory of perception. For he wishes to emphasize that we are *not* given our own experience as we are given spatial objects to judge about, through partial appearances and anticipation of further, different, confirming ones that allow us to identify constant objects of reference. (1982: §44) Nonetheless, Husserl thought one's own experience is—in some *other* way—"intuitively given" to one to form (reflective) judgments about. This mode of being given, whatever it

is, Husserl sometimes speaks of as “perception,” though it is crucially unlike the way things are given to us spatially, in this respect: *this* manner of givenness will not admit the possibility that there is in fact nothing there given in that manner for one to judge about. “It would be a countersense to believe it possible that a mental process *given in that manner* does *not* in truth exist.” (1982: § 46, p.100) Since this way of being given something to form judgments about *guarantees* that there is something about which to judge, our judgments about experience can possess especially strong evidentiary status; we can have (in Husserl’s sense) “adequate evidence” for such judgments, as we can never have regarding what appears to us in space. (1982: §§ 46, 137, 138, 144)

But just what *is* this special way in which one’s own experience is “given”? We have here, in his view, a sort of intentionality—a species of consciousness of something—but one which can be had without yet “*positing*” what one is conscious of “*as an object*.” The *general* difference between *positing* and *non-positing* consciousness is, at least initially, to be understood against the background of Brentano’s distinction between judgment and “mere” presentation. One may be merely presented with something, it may appear to one—in imagination, say—in such a way that this presenting is directed at or refers to what is presented, though one neither *affirms* nor *rejects* the existence of what is presented; one does not (in Husserl’s terms) “posit” its existence or non-existence (as in judgment). (2001, Vol 2, V §§ 23, 38) Husserl would also offer, as examples of such non-positing consciousness, our indeterminate experience of what lies in the unattended (but still apparent) surroundings of what we are looking at. (1982: §113) And here he draws an important analogy. What appears to us inattentively in spatial perception is not an object of perceptual judgment. But by appearing to us in such inattentive fashion, it is such that we *can*, though attending to it, *form* such judgments about it. Somewhat similarly, by having a non-positing (but intentional) consciousness of one’s own experience, the experience is always *available* for one to form a reflective judgment about, through a direction of attention. (1982: §45)

Husserl’s view of “the consciousness of internal time” also plays an important part in his attempt to flesh out his notion of the “self-givenness” of experience. On his view, when we experience something current—such as the note of a melody we hear—we also are “retentively” conscious of the past experience, in a way that makes it possible for us to hear the melody as a whole. This *retention*, however, is to be distinguished from a *recollection* that certain notes have been experienced. To focus on the simple case of hearing a single tone: hearing the tone for a time, one “retains” one’s *just having heard* the tone as one *continues* to hear it, even when one does not “posit” that the tone was just heard (as in recollection). And this retention “points back” to the tone’s having been heard, though the preceding experience is not an *object* of the retention. Thus it seems the retention is not only *non-positing* (like imagination), it is also (evidently *unlike* imagination) “*non-objectivating*.” It is, in Husserl’s view, an inescapable part of this view of the consciousness of internal time that there will

be such a non-objectivating consciousness, not simply of experience just past (retention), but of experience *as it is occurring*. (1982: 113; 1991: §§12-14, 39; Appendices VII-IX)

We might gloss Husserl's view by saying that while we do not have a *reflective self-consciousness* wherever we have conscious experience (there is no unbroken activity of Brentanian inner perceptual judgment), we do always have a *non-positing self-consciousness*: for one's every conscious experience is *itself* something of which one is thus conscious. But this leaves unclear just how Husserl thinks self-consciousness, in the sense of consciousness of a *self* or *ego*, figures in all this. Among the relevant materials to consider are these. In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl evidently holds that experience conscious in sense (a) is necessarily *someone's*. For the unity of a given "stream" is none other than the unity belonging to experiences that are all (e.g.) *mine*. Experience conscious in sense (a) is, after all, described as the "phenomenological being of the ego." (2001, Vol.2: V §§ 1, 2) Further, he thinks one can, in conceiving of a Cartesian style doubt, retain a reflective self-consciousness even while excluding any conception of one's bodily self (the "body-ego"). But he does not (any more than does Brentano) think this affords one the right to think of oneself as an immaterial substance or Cartesian ego. Rather, the conception of one's self then at play—the "mind-ego"—is just that of a certain unity of experience. And finally, Husserl recognizes that this sort of self-concept is specially expressible using the first-person singular pronoun or other essentially "occasional" (i.e., demonstrative or indexical) words, which are resistant to any rephrasal in other, general terms. (2001, Vol.1: I § 26; 2001, Vol.2: VI § 5)

But an additional wrinkle in Husserl's (post-*Investigations*) view of self-consciousness must be mentioned. In the second edition of the *Investigations*, Husserl claims to have discovered, since the time of the first, what he did not previously recognize: a "pure" or "transcendental" ego. (2001, Vol 2, V, §8) Husserl thinks that the *full* reduction excludes more than we explicitly noted above: it comprises a "transcendental" reduction that not only excludes judgment that particular objects exist in space and time. It also "puts out of action" the affirmation that any particular occurrences (including one's own experiences) are happening or have happened at certain times, even though it somehow still allows one to consider these experiences—albeit purely with respect to their essence. So one comes to consider "pure consciousness," the proper concern of phenomenology as Husserl ultimately understands it. Indeed the "phenomenological residuum" earlier alluded to is for Husserl *pure* consciousness. But in this reduction to pure consciousness one also attains, as distinct from the forms of more ordinary empirical self-consciousness, a consciousness of the *transcendental ego*. Even where one has taken the reduction so far as to exclude affirmation of the existence of a particular "empirical" self with a certain history, existing at a particular time, the essence of experience one is then still free to consider is seen to require it to have the form of being *someone's*—someone, moreover, regarded as the *source* of mental

activity. In phenomenological reflection, one is aware not just of the unity of consciousness, but of a *unifier*. Thus the idea of the pure ego involves that of *agency*. (1982: §122)

Heidegger

Two general conceptions of consciousness have emerged from our discussion. One, associated most with Brentano, joins consciousness closely to presentation—*appearance* in a broad sense—and to a form of self-consciousness supposedly bound up with it. To be conscious is to be a presentation that contains a perception of itself. The other, associated with Husserl, has us consider consciousness as that concrete “region of being” left for judgment even when we are not judging that particular spatio-temporal objects exist—the *phenomenological residuum*.

While the originality of Brentano’s and Husserl’s views should not to be minimized, we can say that both broad conceptions of consciousness just highlighted have recognizable roots in the Cartesian philosophical tradition. Heidegger, though strongly marked by his study of both Brentano and Husserl, strove to make a radical break with this tradition. Prior to the publication of his central work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger explicitly criticizes Husserl’s reduction-derived conception of consciousness on the grounds that it neglects the “question of the being of consciousness” (and neglects the question of the “sense of being” altogether). (1985: §§ 10-13) Whatever the force of these criticisms, one might have expected them to lead Heidegger to suggest an improved way of thinking about consciousness that does *not* neglect these questions. However, what we find is that talk of consciousness (and intentionality) drops away, and Heideggerian phenomenology in *Being and Time* is oriented towards a general account of our “ways of being”—that is, the ways of being specific to “Dasein.”

This abandonment of consciousness-talk seems to have been an attempt to make a fresh start, by refusing to use terms heavily laden with assumptions Heidegger wants to question or reject. Specifically, Heidegger hears in talk of consciousness a tendency, derived from Descartes, to oppose the “inner” realm of consciousness or mind to the “external world,” and to accept an associated “problem of knowledge,” which demands we explain how we can know anything “outside of” what is “in” consciousness. Heidegger regards this “problem” as illusory. The illusion arises from a failure to appreciate that our way of being is not primarily a “knowing,” but involves a practical encounter with entities in our environment, in which they show themselves as “equipment” for our use. This way of being is properly understood by our *engaging* in it, and is deeply *misunderstood*, if we interpret ourselves in terms of Descartes’ model of consciousness, or its contemporary descendants. (1985: §§ 20-24; 1962: Division One, II §13)

Could Heidegger be said to discuss consciousness in *any* sense that would allow us to see him as sharing a common topic of discourse with Brentano and Husserl? One might consider a possible affirmative answer. Heidegger does want to account broadly for the ways in which things *show* themselves to us (that is, to beings such as ourselves with Dasein's way of being). And this account of "ways of showing" is such as is available from the perspective of one to whom things are thus "shown," just in virtue of being shown that way. (1962: Intro., II § 7) We might then propose that these *showings* would include what Brentano would have described as a "presenting" or a phenomenon based on a presenting, as well as those occurrences Husserl would point to as paradigm cases of consciousness (a). On this view, Heidegger would not be ignoring consciousness, or denying its importance; he would just be rejecting the "inner perception" and "phenomenological residue" conceptions of it, and proposing a rather different framework for describing its forms—one in which beings showing themselves (or being "disclosed") as "ready-to-hand" equipment, or "present-at-hand" occurrent entities in the world) would constitute fundamental classifications. (1962: Division One, III §§14-16) Perhaps we could even see, in Heidegger's talk of Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of its own being (1962: Intro., I § 4), some thematic continuity with Brentanian "implicit self-perception" and Husserlian "non-positional self-consciousness." Assessing the feasibility of this way of looking at Heidegger would take us much farther into his philosophy than we can go here. However, it should be acknowledged he would likely see it as liable to taint his philosophy with the traditional ontology he is struggling to escape.

Sartre

Sartre—although certainly not shy in embracing radical positions, and heavily influenced by his reading of Heidegger—is considerably happier than Heidegger to adopt traditional terminology and philosophical apparatus—particularly that involving 'consciousness.' Indeed, in many respects he adopts as his own Husserl's view of reflection, and a ("non-reflective") non-positing consciousness. For Sartre every (positing) consciousness of an object includes a (non-positing) consciousness of itself. To suppose otherwise would, he maintains, commit one to the absurdity of an "unconscious consciousness"—a "consciousness ignorant of itself." This non-positional consciousness of consciousness is evident, Sartre argues, in our inarticulate awareness of what we are doing as consciousness is directed this way or that—e.g., as one is counting cigarettes. (1956: Intro., III; 1957: 40-41)

However, this just-offered gloss, though perhaps useful as a first approximation, is unfaithful to Sartre's view in a crucial respect. As part of a deliberate break with Husserl, Sartre denies that one is non-positionally conscious of *oneself* being conscious of something. No conscious self, no "ego" is included within this primitive *non-positional* consciousness of consciousness. To be sure, Sartre thinks, when one *reflects* on consciousness, one attributes the

consciousness reflected-on to an ego (to oneself). But, he holds, one does so falsely. For what consciousness is, is a direction to an object that transcends it, and consciousness is thus essentially negative: it is what it is not, in Sartre's teasingly paradoxical formulation. From this Sartre argues that consciousness brings with it a radical freedom, the recognition of which is incompatible with attributing consciousness to an enduring self possessed of stable psychological character. (1956: 56-112; 1957: 93-106) Thus by rejecting the necessity that consciousness be *someone's*—Sartre ultimately rejects even Husserl's pre-reduction conception of consciousness (a). And, by interpreting its intentionality so as to allow consciousness only such negative character as comes from the way it contrasts, in its spontaneous activity, with its objects, (and filtering all this through Heideggerian themes of anxiety and authenticity), Sartre arrives at a dramatic conception of consciousness as the source of an intolerably vertiginous freedom.

Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty responds to Husserl's legacy in a notably different way than his classmate Sartre. His response also differs from that of Heidegger, partly in that, while Merleau-Ponty no more than Heidegger accepts the notion of consciousness as a region of being, in essence detachable from the world, he is (at least in *Phenomenology of Perception*) content to use the term 'consciousness,' and sees himself as appropriating and developing Husserlian insights regarding perception. Thus with Merleau-Ponty we are on somewhat safer ground, if we say he offers up a philosophy of consciousness.

It does seem, however, that Merleau-Ponty (unlike Brentano, Husserl and Sartre) was not much exercised by the question of what all that is conscious in sense (a) has in common. He seems rather more interested in trying to draw attention to certain (elusive, if pervasive) *forms* of consciousness. He is particularly taken with the idea—for which he partially credits Husserl—that in ordinary spatial perception we have a kind of “pre-predicative,” “pre-objective” and “non-positing” consciousness of our surroundings and our own bodies. (2003: 116-129) One way this idea shows up is in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the Husserlian notion that to perceive space is in part to “anticipate” how it will appear to us if we direct attention appropriately. In Merleau-Ponty, it seems, this anticipation of further, different or more determinate spatial experience, consists in the exploratory *motor activity* we engage in, or are prepared to engage in, as we perceive—for example, what we know how to *do*, to get a better *look* at something. We perceive by moving in the right ways, and how we move anticipates further experience of a kind that would confirm the experience we have had. Such anticipatory movement is not the product of a separate internal representation of space; it *is* a way of being conscious—“non-positionally” (hence non-representationally) conscious—of space. (2003: 77-88; 158-170; 348-354) The subject of this “motor intentional” consciousness is conceived of in neither Cartesian nor Husserlian terms, but as a *body-subject*. *Contra* Sartre, to attribute

consciousness to such a self is not to flee from freedom in bad faith, but to recognize the background of sensorimotor dispositions and skills that make intelligible the situations in which personal choice—human freedom—can arise. (2003: 510-515; 523-7)

Although Merleau-Ponty does not try to say what consciousness in general is, he does have some notable things to say that indicate an unwillingness to accept either Brentanian or Husserlian ways of doing this. To take the latter first: Merleau-Ponty agrees with Husserl that nothing about spatial experience of a particular thing guarantees that one's further experience will link up harmoniously with it, and not disconfirm it or cast it into doubt. But he denies it follows that one might be in continual sensory error, or that one can render it truly intelligible to oneself that one is subject to global hallucination. (2003: 344-7; 394-402) Thus while Merleau-Ponty retains the language of consciousness, he evidently rejects Husserl's conception of consciousness as "phenomenological residuum."

Merleau-Ponty's discussion of doubt and certainty reveals that he would also reject a Brentanian conception of consciousness as the realm of what is infallibly perceived. He goes at this issue piecemeal, discussing: (1) sensory consciousness (2003: 435-8); (2) emotive and volitional consciousness (2003: 439-442); and (3) intellectual consciousness (2003: 444-459). He argues that in judgments about each of these we are vulnerable to error and capable of entertaining doubts. Regarding (1): he says that, in normal circumstances, a faithful description of how one experiences would (in the case of vision) commit one to the existence of an object seen. Visual consciousness (of an ashtray or a hand, say) is either to be described as *seeing* an ashtray or hand, in a sense of 'seeing' that requires there be a thing seen, or else it is to be described in such a way that implies it *resembles* cases of genuine seeing in this sense. Thus one cannot rationally suppose one is in error about whether there really are any things one sees or has seen, while making no error about one's sensory consciousness. In connection with (2), Merleau-Ponty points out that we recognize in such cases a distinction between what is authentic and what is not, and he argues that to be mistaken (as one may be) about whether one authentically feels something (whether one is, for example, genuinely in love) is to be mistaken about what one's feelings are, the very character of one's consciousness. Finally, in case (3), Merleau-Ponty says that such judgment renders itself intelligible in words, and our grasp of what we mean by our words, even in our most abstract thought, relies on a perceptual and cultural background we can never make fully explicit. This makes our understanding of our words susceptible to indefinitely further reconsideration and revision, with the result that, even here—in our apprehension of what we are thinking or judging—rational doubt is possible. So once again consciousness is not a sphere in which we are invulnerable to error and incapable of doubt, and Husserl was mistaken in supposing we ever have truly "adequate perception."

Still, Merleau-Ponty thinks, this does not leave one engulfed in endless doubt. In doing what we do—including what we do perceptually and cognitively—we have a kind of tacit understanding of what we are doing that warrants what we are inclined to say about this, absent any special reasons to doubt it. Any rational doubt about the way in which one is conscious, or about what one is conscious of in a particular case, can arise only against the background of understanding how one is conscious or what one is conscious of in another case, where one's engagement in conscious activity precludes one's being able to entertain a doubt about it (2003: 461-475).

In these remarks about the reception of the Brentano/Husserl legacy by Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty we have, inevitably, only scratched the surface, and we have neglected the views of many interesting philosophers reasonably labeled phenomenologists, as well as many topics associated with phenomenological discussions of consciousness. But it is hoped that this summary conveys something of the richness and originality of discussion relating to consciousness in phenomenology, and will encourage its use as a resource for further investigation.

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