

The “See” and “Motivation” Concepts in Husserl’s Phenomenology

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Introduction

In Chapter 5 of *Downcast Eyes*,¹⁾ Martin Jay refers to Edmund Husserl, the renowned German philosopher. Jay also discusses the French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty as well as their critical approaches toward the traditional ocularcentric (vision-centered) thoughts. However, the main inspiration of their generation is based on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. At first glance, Husserl does not appear to be a critic of ocularcentrism. Yet, his concepts of “intentionality” and “life word” are a means of getting over the ocularcentric thoughts of earlier Western history, as Jay claims.

Thus, Husserl considers the concept of vision as extremely important. However, the problem is not as simple as it appears. Therefore, this paper examines this particular aspect in more detail. More specifically, it first confirms that Husserl places significant importance on the “see” (*sehen*) concept, and then explores its meaning in terms of his notion of “motivation.” Finally, it discusses the “see” concept by comparing it with the art of pantomime.

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1. “See”

As mentioned in *Downcast Eyes*, Husserl believes that the ultimate basis for every rational affirmation is the “see” concept.²⁾ In *Ideen I*, Husserl wrote the following:

If one speaks simply of objects, one normally means actual, truly existing objects belonging to the particular category of being. No matter what one says about such objects, that which is meant and stated must — if one speaks rationally — be something which can be “grounded,” “shown,” directly “seen” or *immediately “seen intellectually.”* In the logical sphere, in the sphere of statement, “*being truly*” or “*actually*” and “*being something which can be shown rationally*” are necessarily correlated. (Hua III/1, 314) ³⁾

Thus, Husserl emphasizes the importance of the “see” concept; that is, if one can state that something actually exists, then it must be “seen.” Conversely, if something is not “seen,” then one cannot state that it actually exists.

However, strictly speaking, Husserl uses the word “see” in the widest sense. In other words, its meaning is not only confined to seeing with the eyes, but it is also found in the perception of every object that actually exists. Nevertheless, it is evident that Husserl values the sense of sight above all of the other senses, as long as he allows the “see” concept to represent the functions of various perceptions.

At this point, let us further consider the meaning behind the “see” concept. In the Appendix of *Ideen I* (Hua III/2, 618), Husserl states that “see” (“see intellectually” (*Einsehen*)) includes two meanings:

- (1) *What motivates* the rational characteristic of a position, i.e., the “legitimizing basis” of a legitimate position.
- (2) The rational characteristic itself.

In this case, “position” refers to the action of consciousness in which an object is regarded as being in any mode, while “rational characteristic” means the characteristic given to the position of an object when it is regarded as *actually* being. Thus, Husserl states that “see” is what “motivates” an object to *actually* exist. Here, the concepts of “see” and “motivation” are closely related.

2. Motivation as a Demand to Complement

According to the descriptions in *Ideen II* (IV, 211–275),⁴⁾ “motivation” is a fundamental law of the spiritual world, and it differs from the causality of the material world.

Husserl also divides motivation into “motivation of reason” (or “ego-motivation”), which motivates the ego to voluntarily posit the existence of an object, and “association as motivation” (or “associative motivation”), which motivates the emergence of any mind process that occurs independently of the ego, e.g., sensations (IV, 220ff.).⁵⁾ The former is “what motivates the characteristic of the position” in question.

In both cases, “motivation” refers to the demand to complement a portion of the current situation with previous similar situations. Husserl describes associative motivation as follows: “Once a connection is formed in a stream of consciousness, there then exists in this stream the tendency for a newly emerging connection, similar to a portion of the earlier one, to continue in the

direction of the similarity and to strive to complete itself in a total nexus similar to the previous total nexus" (IV, 223).⁶⁾ On the other hand, rational motivation includes the "law of motivation," which concerns "existential positings." Moreover, "The existence of a similar part demands the existence of a similar part complementing it" (ibid.).⁷⁾

Therefore, by considering its tendency to complement, "motivation" not only refers to the inner process of an individual (which is usually understood by the word itself), but everything that is motivated to complement the current situation. In sum, different aspects that belong to similar situations (either subjective or objective) can complement one another.

3. Appearing "In Person"

In regard to "what motivates the rational characteristic of a position," Husserl, in *Ideen I*, explicitly states that "appearing 'in person'" (*Leibhaft-Erscheinen*) motivates a rational position (Hua III/1, 316).⁸⁾ In this case, *leibhaft* refers to an object that *directly* appears ("in person") in one's consciousness.

It should be noted that "appearing 'in person'" does not belong to the objective physical world, but to the subjective consciousness that is aware of it. Here Husserl mainly deals with sensations (which occur within it) and the action of consciousness in which the sensations are unified and interpreted. When various sensory contents appear directly, they are interpreted in unity (*Auffassung*) ; that is, a physical object is constituted beyond the consciousness as its correlate. Here, sensations inside are interpreted as those of an object outside. Hence, Husserl always takes both the inside and the outside into consideration. In other words, there is an inseparable relationship

between the consciousness and the things beyond it, including intentionality.

However, even if sensations are somehow interpreted as those of a physical object, and the consciousness is intentionally aware of it, it is still insufficient to regard the object as *actually* being. Moreover, the rational position must be carried out, while the rational characteristic must be given. Husserl believes that what motivates such a position is “appearing ‘in person,’” i.e., “seeing.” Yet, how is the rational position motivated?

3. An Example of the Panoptikum

One example that reveals the motivation in the rational position can be seen in the following excerpt about waxwork figures at a wax museum (in this case, the Panoptikum Museum) :

Wandering about in the Panoptikum Waxworks we meet on the stairs a charming lady whom we do not know and who seems to know us, and who is in fact the well-known joke of the place: we have for a moment been tricked by a waxwork figure. As long as we *are* tricked, we experience a perfectly good percept: we see a lady and not a waxwork figure. When the illusion vanishes, we see exactly the opposite, a waxwork figure that only *represents* a lady.⁹⁾

At the Panoptikum Museum, it is possible to doubt whether the objects/figures are actually human or simply wax figures. Then, while it seems that the sensation-contents are similar, the plural distinct interpretations and positions are motivated. In other words, the same sense-data of colors and forms that one receives can be interpreted as either those *of* a human or as those *of* a wax

figure. As a result, it is impossible to decide which one actually exists.

In this case, Husserl states that the forces that motivate both interpretations compete with one another and result in a stalemate: “Neither one of them is crossed out during the period of doubt; they stand here in a mutual struggle; each one has, so to speak, its own force, each one is motivated, demanded, as it were, by the previous perceptual situation and its intentional content” (XI, 34).¹⁰⁾

However, when the sensation to strengthen one of them emerges, the situation ends. For instance, if one comes closer to the object, and the sensations occur (which can be interpreted as those of wax, not of flesh and blood), then it can be concluded that it is a wax figure, instead of a human.

Therefore, as long as there are plural, powerful, contradictory interpretations, it is impossible to posit an actual object. However, if one of them overwhelms the others, then it is possible to believe that the actual object exists.

4. Pantomime

Another example that shows the overlapping of plural motivations is pantomime, although Husserl does not discuss this particular art form.¹¹⁾ In this speechless art form, the actor’s body language and actions express something as if it is present, despite its absence. For example, when the actor expresses a “wall” in pantomime, the viewers imagine or “see” a wall, even though they are sure that there is nothing in reality. In this case, they simply enjoy the overlapping of motivations, although the existence of a wall is fictional. However, it is difficult to distinguish between an elaborate pantomime performance and actual perception. For instance, if a skilled

pantomime actor disguises himself as a wax figure in a wax museum, then it is possible that most of us will be deceived.

It can also be said that pantomime is form of expression that makes the best use of complementary motivation. In other words, if the nexus of the “if A, then B” experience has been repeated many times in the past, and A (its element) appears in the current situation, then the demand to complement the total nexus occurs. Not only pantomime, but also every art form makes use of complementary motivation. In this regard, a wax figure that “represents” a woman superficially mimes only a part of the “if there is a human, then it appears” experience. Then, the motivation to complement the rest occurs.

However, the experience of an actual object also makes use of complementary motivation. While we experience sensations, the object always appears from one perspective, and it is never perceived in its entirety. In other words, what we experience is only a portion of the object, and the rest forms its “horizon.” For Husserl, it is certain that something must be “seen” in order to actually exist. However, if it is only partly “seen,” then the actual existence of its other “unseen” parts are demanded, just like in a pantomime performance.

Conclusion

This paper considered the “see” and “motivation” concepts in Husserl’s phenomenology. The results showed the function of the pantomime-like complementary motivation of existence. Moreover, if it is possible to claim that “motivation” in Husserl’s phenomenology is the demand to complement a certain part with previous similar situations, then everything that belongs to various spheres is motivated to complement the current situation. This not

only involves the visual aspect, but also everything else. From the viewpoint of complementary motivation, such demands are apparent.

Notes

- 1) Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 263-268.
- 2) Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 266.
- 3) Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten, Nijhoff, 1982, p. 326. When quoting Husserl, the page number of the *Husserliana* edition is given (*Husserliana: Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke*, Nijhoff/Kluwer/Springer), along with the volume number in Roman numerals.
- 4) Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989, pp. 223-288.
- 5) Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*, p. 234.
- 6) *Ibid.*, pp. 231ff.
- 7) *Ibid.*, pp. 234f.
- 8) Husserl, *Ideas, First Book*, p. 328.
- 9) Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Vol. 2, trans. J. N. Findlay, Routledge, 2001, pp. 137f.
- 10) Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. A. J. Steinbock, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001, p. 73.
- 11) Dieter Lohmer considers pantomime as non-verbal communication from the phenomenological viewpoint, although it is not directly related to the context of this paper. Dieter Lohmar, *Denken ohne Sprache: Phänomenologie des nicht-sprachlichen Denkens bei Menschen und Tier im Licht der Evolutionsforschung, Primatologie und Neurologie*, Springer, 2016, S. 136-138.