

THE PROBLEM OF TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS: KANT AND HUSSERL

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The relation between time and consciousness experience gives rise to various philosophical issues involving understanding the nature of free will and responsibility as well as of personal identity. Again, metaphysical and epistemological theories, which have their root experience, have to face problems as to how the experience of temporally extended events and changes in those events are possible.

At least three issues are involved in understanding the relationship between time and conscious experience.¹

- How are we able to perceive or conceive of time and temporal entities?
- Does time exist independently of conscious experience?
- Does the conscious experiencer exist in time in the same way that ordinary natural objects are thought to exist in time.

These issues of time consciousness, temporal realism, and the special temporal nature of the experiencer are fundamentally interconnected. These three issues have different basic problems. This paper is devoted to explore the basic problem of time-consciousness, and its solutions from the continental philosophical point of view. The problem is how it is possible to perceive or to conceive temporal extension and temporal passage.

Perception is the most elementary and fundamental source of knowledge. To the ordinary mind, it is so simple and reliable that it presents no problem at all. We generally believe that our judgment based on perception must be true. Even some logicians and philosophers uphold the common sense view that the perception is the ultimate ground of all knowledge and there is no room for doubting perceptual judgment. Though there are several problems of perception or the evidence of perception. Generally the idea of perception involves the idea of a subject as perceiver and the idea of an object that is

¹ McInerney, P. K., *Time and Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 3.

perceived. The perception of an object takes place in certain space and time. But when we consider the perception of time, several problems may arise and one of the most important problems is that, how we can perceive the time or temporal extension and temporal passage.

According to Kant, issues involving time and time consciousness are central issues of metaphysics, theory of knowledge and philosophy of mind. “Time is a necessary representation that underlies all intuitions. We cannot, in respect of appearances in general, remove time itself, though we can quite well think time as void of appearances. Time is, therefore given a priori”.² Kant was not a phenomenologist in the technical sense in that he does not follow the specific procedures codified by Husserl for phenomenological investigation. But the deep influence of Kant’s thought concerning the synthesis underlying consciousness, how objects and objectivity are thought, and how there can be consciousness of temporally extended occurrences, is obvious in the work of Husserl and his followers.

Kant maintains that perception is an essential condition for knowing consciousness in that perception is the basis for knowledge of specific facts and specific laws. In perception we make knowledge claims about the world and what we perceive provides the basic evidence for empirical knowledge claims. According to P.K. McInerney, Kant’s theory of time-consciousness has to incorporate this fact that knowing consciousness itself occurs in time because knowing consciousness changes its claims. Since he thinks that the ultimate subject of consciousness is non-temporal, a distinction has to be introduced between ordinary knowing consciousness (OKC) and the ultimate knowing consciousness or transcendental ego (TE).³ The transcendental ego does not exist in time and does not change its views about the world and the ordinary knowing consciousness within time. That is why ordinary knowing consciousness may change its own opinion about the world.

² Smith N.K., trans. *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of pure reason* (The Macmillan press Ltd., 1982). A31.p-74-5.

³ McInerney P. K., *Time and Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 65.

Throughout the Transcendental aesthetic, Kant considers “time is not a discursive, or what is called a general concept, but a pure form of sensible intuition. Different times are but parts of one and the same time; and the representation which can be given only through a single object is intuition.”⁴ Things-in-themselves are not temporal. Time exist only an essential structure of human sensibility. Our reception of intuitional data requires a form or framework of time within which intuitional data appear. He also claims that the intuitional data and temporal relations will undergo conceptualization, but the basic form of the perception of temporal extension and temporal order is intuitional.

As a form of intuition, time is a structure that is essential to our (receptive) sensibility. There have been two interpretation of the ‘reception’ of the intuitional data. According to the first interpretation, a thing-in-itself causally produces intuitional data which are distinct entities within the mind. According to P.F. Strawson, ‘all our outer perceptions are caused by things which exist independently of our perceptions and which affect us to produce those perceptions’.⁵ The second interpretation is, intuitional data are the direct appearing of things-in-themselves to the mind. ‘According to Kant, the relation between the appearance and the thing-in-itself is causal. The thing-in-itself is the mysterious cause of what we see. But we ourselves can only experience it through our kind of consciousness. Heidegger uses the analogy of an illness to describe the same causal understanding of appearance’.⁶ According to both interpretations, the framework of time is only a feature of the mind itself. The framework of time consists of temporal location at which intuitional data could occur. The consciousness of the temporal feature of states of substances might be explained entirely in terms of the grasping of the intuitional framework of time.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁵ Strawson, P.F., *The Bounds of Sense*, (Methuen @ co., London, 1966), P.250.

⁶ Large, William, *Heidegger’s Being and Time*, (Edinburgh Univ.Press,Edinberg,2008), p.13-4

According to Kant, in the empirical intuition things are perceived coexistent and their perception can follow upon one another reciprocally. Coexistence is the existence of the manifold in one and the same time. But time itself cannot be perceived.

“Things are coexistent so far as they exist in one and same time. But how do we know that they are in one and the same time? We do so when the order in the synthesis of apprehension of the manifold is a matter of indifference, that is, whether it be from A through B,C,D to E, or reversewise from E to A. for if they were in succession to one another in time, in the order, say, which begins with A and ends in E, it is impossible that we should begin the apprehension in the perception of E and proceed backwards to A, since A belongs to past time and can no longer be an object of apprehension.”⁷

This account of time-consciousness in terms of an intuitional framework explains how we represent simultaneity and earlier-later relation between states of substances i) past, present, and future ii) the intuitional framework would have to be enriched by adding a central or focal temporal location. The temporal location that ‘stands out’ is the present, whatever is earlier than this location is past, and whatever is later is future. The non-temporal transcendental ego represents an earlier-later framework of time, within which states of OKC and intuitional data occur.⁸ The transcendental ego representing of this form of intuition does not occur in time or have any temporal properties. The synthetic activities that are necessary for OKC’s time consciousness are also characteristics of the transcendental ego. The synthetic activities must also be non-temporal, since there is no mind-independent time within which they could occur.

Here a serious problem may arise concerning OKC’s experience of intuitional data as it happen in time. As OKC exist only as represented by the transcendental ego that is why OKC cannot receive intuitional data through affection. Only transcendental ego can receive such data. So, how can this data

⁷ Smith, N.K., trans. *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of pure reason* (The Macmillan press Ltd., 1982). B258, .p-234.

⁸ McInerney, P. K., *Time and Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p.85.

be experienced by OKC as data that it can seek out or not seek out through further perceptual experiences?

If we accept the OKC, the question may arise that what is the relation between OKC and Transcendental ego? If we accept that OKC is the representation of transcendental ego, we have to accept that both are the same. H.J. Patton raises a question, that is, how can there be one and the same self or subject if we distinguish the I which thinks (apperception) from the I which intuitively itself (inner self). According to him, if I am an intelligent and thinking subject, how can I know myself as a thought object, so far as I am given to myself in intuition? And how can such knowledge be knowledge of myself only as I appear in intuition and not as I really am in myself for understanding?⁹ Now we will see the position of Husserl regarding time and consciousness.

Husserl's phenomenological method is a special type of reflection upon our being conscious.¹⁰ All reflection upon consciousness reveals both a variety of conscious orientation (mental act) and that toward which consciousness is oriented (intended object). Husserl maintains that phenomenological reflections provides direct access both to the mental act side and to the intended object side of the intentional relation. Since features and components of these sides are always coordinated with each other. Husserl concerned with one of the traditional problems of time-consciousness, that is, how perception of temporally extended external objects is possible?

The temporal features with which Husserl was concerned were these that are commonsensically attributed to things in time. Husserl attributes to perceived entities all the six standard features. Such as:

⁹ Patton, H.J., *Kant's Metaphysics of Experience* Vol.-II, (New York: London, The Humanities Press, 1965), 398-9

¹⁰ McInerney, P. K., *Time and Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 94.

- 1) “*Temporal location*- that any non-conscious worldly entity exists at some definite location in one temporal coordinate system in which all other worldly entities exist.
- *Temporal extension* or duration- that any non-conscious worldly entity occupies some point or set of contiguous points of this temporal coordinate system (particularly if the temporal coordinate system is understood as a dense continuum of points).
- *Length of duration*- that there is a definite size to the temporal extension of an entity, that its size can be expressed as a multiple or fraction of any arbitrarily selected temporal extension.
- *Temporal divisibility* - that any non-conscious worldly entity’s duration that occupies more than a single point can be divided into equally real temporal parts without any change in its non-temporal properties.
- *Earlier-later relations*-that the temporal parts of an entity are temporally related as earlier as or later than each other, and that the temporal parts of any two entities are temporally related as earlier, later, or simultaneous with each other.
- *Past-present-future features*-that if there is a date at which a temporal part of an entity is present, there is an earlier date at which it is future and a later date at which it is past, and that it passes from being future to being present to being past.”¹¹

The problem of external time-consciousness has traditionally been posed in terms of perception. One important question may arise as to how it is possible to perceive temporally extended entities and their temporal passage.

Husserl contends that any perceptual act- phase intuitively apprehends an object that has duration, that is, a temporally extended portion of the world.¹² At any time, t_n , one feature of the perceptual act-phase perceives what is ‘now’, that is the object-phase that occurs at t_n . According to him “for every now that has

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50

¹² *Ibid.*, 99

been newly linked on to its predecessor. The actual now is necessarily something punctual and remains so, a form that persists through continuous change of content.”¹³ The retentional feature reaches through time to contact just- past phases that themselves have a now-consciousness feature that perceives an object-phase giving as now (at t_{n-1} , t_{n-2} , etc.). Retention is actual at one time, its intentional object is at an earlier time. Retention reaches to earlier moments in time and directly intuits earlier moments as earlier. It is the direct givenness of the past as past. Husserl even goes so far as to claim that retention is absolutely certain. Retention is just past act phase. Husserl has very little to say about protention. In several places he portrays it as like retention except that it concerns the just future rather than the just past. As such it would directly intuit later phases of mental life as just-future. Presumably his thought is that we have a direct intuition of the continuation of our mental life into the just-future.

Husserl’s theory provides particularly insightful account of how perceptual act-phases are unified into one perceptual act that perceives the temporal passage of worldly entities.¹⁴ The now conscious feature of a mental states consists of all those components that intend what is temporally focal or now as contrasted with the temporal background in both portraying a previous now-consciousness feature as just-past and look it to its intentional correlate that is experienced as now for the now-consciousness feature, retention is able to experience a worldly entity-phase as just having been perceived as now. Similarly, protention can experience a worldly entity-phase as just about to be perceived as now.

My observation in this paper is that the problem which occurs in Kant’s theory of time consciousness is that whether OKC and transcendental ego are same or not. If we accept that these are same, the question arises: what

¹³ Boyce Gibson, W.R., trans. *Edmund Husserl IDEAS* (New York, Macmillan co.,1952) p.237.

¹⁴ McInerney, P. K., *Time and Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), P.100.

is the necessity to distinguish between phenomena and noumena? Again, if we accept that they are different, another question arises: what is the relation between OKC and transcendental ego? If we accept that the activity of OKC occurs in time and it is changeable, the transcendental ego cannot be non-temporal. This problem would not arise in Husserl's framework in respect of the perception of time consciousness. Because the essence and the object both are present to the perceiver directly and there is no other criterion by which we perceive the essence of the object. The order of consciousness that belongs to the essence of consciousness as the essence of all consciousness and complexes of experience as well as temporal order belongs to the experiences as objective. According to Husserl,¹⁵ the temporal form is not a phaniscological form in the ultimate sense, not a form of absolute being, but only a form of appearances. So the consciousness of time is an objectivating consciousness. Consequently, without identification and differentiation, without the positing of the present, the past, the future etc. there would be no enduring, no resting and changing, no being in succession, and so on.

¹⁵ B. John Barnett, trans. *Edmund Husserl on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (Kluwer, 1991) p.306.