

INTENTIONALITY AS A CENTRAL PART OF CONSCIOUSNESS: HUSSERL AND MOHANTY*

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Philosophers since time immemorial have struggled to comprehend the nature of consciousness and pin down its essential properties. If we look back, we found that the English word ‘conscious’ originates from the Latin word ‘consciūs’. Here, the term ‘consciūs’ derives from two Latin words ‘con’ and ‘scio’, ‘con’ means ‘together’ and ‘scio’ means ‘to know’, in other words, it means having joint or common knowledge with another. Basically, consciousness is a kind of quality of self-awareness, or of being aware of an external object or something with oneself. If we try to analyze consciousness, we find that, it is a kind of awareness or subjectivity. It is possible to know about consciousness through our experience and feelings. The mind is directed towards it, or we may say that, it is the control system of mind. It can be understood in many ways. Max Velmans and Susan Schneider comments in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* : “Anything that we are aware of at a given moment forms part of our consciousness, making conscious experience at one the most familiar and most mysterious aspect of our lives”¹.

Husserl’s concept of intentionality of consciousness:

There are many philosophers, who are engaged in trying to search about the nature of consciousness. In recent times, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who is a pioneer in this field of consciousness, engaged himself to reveal the structure of consciousness. It is the best known and most significant matter in his phenomenological method. Husserl’s interest mainly is to search the fundamental structure of consciousness. The nature of consciousness is such that it is always directed towards an object. This is known as the principle of intentionality. He wants to describe the structure of it through the process of bracketing. The reduction of the actual existence helps us to reach that. In his earlier writings, he already mentioned that his actual motive is to establish phenomenology as a presuppositionless science. He maintains that phenomenology is not just a subjective act of worldly object, rather it has some objective acts also. Consciousness is always about something that possesses object directedness. When I am thinking about golden mountains, I am not thinking

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about nothing, but about something. Intentionality of consciousness reveals all of our fantasies and hallucinations, and he concludes that they are also intentional. It means we are thinking about something that does not exist in this world, though we may think about them. Intentionality is all about the relationship between consciousness and its object. This idea is borrowed by him from Franz Brentano. In this context, 'intentional' has nothing to do with 'on purpose'. Brentano wanted to establish psychology as a science, like any other sciences. He talked of an inner perception which would indicate our psychological phenomena, our desire, our sadness or rage with an immediate awareness. He actually tries to distinguish the psychological from physical phenomena with the help of the concept of intentionality. He thought that every psychical act directs something. This peculiar sort of the intentional existence belongs to psychical phenomena. Husserl received the concept of intentionality, which is beneficial to use for philosophical purpose. There is a difference between Husserl and Brentano's thought regarding this concept.² It is a technical term which is unique in our mental acts: they extend beyond themselves towards an 'other'. Intentionality of consciousness is the central part of Husserl's *Philosophical Investigations*. He maintains that the consciousness is always intentional. As he pointed out that it is a kind of 'openness to' or relation to'. According to him, the characteristics of intention is that it refers to something objective. For him, the main structure of consciousness is the relation. When we are thinking about something, that something refers to an object. So, thinking act and the thinking object are very important. Here, Husserl pointed out that, object of our consciousness is sometimes immanent; sometimes the objectivity is not real. But, we can think about them. Here he distinguished between physical phenomena and psychical phenomena. The physical phenomenon is something which relates to the world, whereas a psychical phenomenon is something which belongs not to this world, though we can think about that. This is the reason for his commenting that to reach to the transcendental subjectivity we must ignore the actual existence of the intentional object.

Husserl understands intentionality as consisting of three major ideas i.e., intentional act, intentional object and intentional content. In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl first introduced these ideas. There he maintained that these three ideas are

correlative elements in the structure of thought and consciousness. Now, let's find out what does these three elements means:

Intentional act: Intentional act follows when it is possible to perceive, believe, evaluate, and remember something. The intentional act can be distinguished from its object, which is the topic, or state of affairs that the act is about. While seeing a table, it can be analyzed in terms of its intentional act, that visually perceives, and in terms of its intentional object of table, that is the intentional state of seeing. But, there is some distinction between intentional act and intentional object. When we perceive Taj Mahal for the first time and when we perceive that same object next time, the object is same but the intentional act is different from each other. Because, when we perceive it next time, we are remembering something that is the Taj Mahal. Here, two acts are different but at the same time these two notions are correlative.

Intentional content: One of the major elements of intentionality is the intentional content. Intentional content of an intentional act is subject who thinks about something. After reduction of the actual existence of the worldly object, what remains is the content. Some thinkers says that, when one can perceive the moon, he or she actually does not just perceive the moon, one perceives is “as bright”, “as half full” or “as particularly close to the horizon. For that matter, one perceives it “as the moon” rather than as some heavenly body. Intentional content can be thought of along the lines of a descriptions or set of information that the subject takes to characterize or be applicable to the intentional subjects of his or her thought.

Difference between intentional object and intentional content: Husserl himself makes a difference between object and content in his phenomenological method. Object is something that must exist in the actual world or corresponding to it there must be something that has an objective reality. In contrast, content is something, it is actual existence under the bracketing. Content does not corresponding to the actual existence of the worldly object. We may say that, content of an intentional act does not bother about its actual existence. We all know that intentional act is something when it is possible to believe, perceive, evaluate or imagine something. Here, imaginary things are not existent in the objective world, though we can think about them. In this way, one can think about golden mountains, and this act must be an intention act.³

Mohanty's view on Consciousness:

Mohanty's view on consciousness is very much similar with Husserl's concept of intentionality. Mohanty claims that phenomenology and Indian Buddhist philosophy bear the same view like Vedanta which assigns a place of prominence to consciousness. Mohanty, thereby seeks to overturn a certain prejudice that has been dominating Western philosophy namely, the belief that the term 'consciousness' is essentially Western concept. But he believes that this is one sided view. For example, Heidegger claims that the concept of consciousness has its historical roots in Western metaphysics. Mohanty maintained that, there is a kind of assimilation of both traditions. There is no doubt, when we used the Sanskrit term 'cit', it refers to consciousness. Both the traditions believe that one cannot naturalise consciousness. It is not possible to think the absence of consciousness, as thinking is the nature of consciousness. 'To doubt or deny that consciousness does not exist is analogous to doubting or denying that I am'. This claim may sound essentially Cartesian though Mohanty maintained that here consciousness should not be confused with a soul or with a substance that is different from the body or world. He mentioned that there is a kind of interconnection between consciousness and world. They both cannot exist without the other. It is relative insofar as there can be no thought without an awareness that we are thinking about something. It is intentional because to think means to think of something. It is intentional insofar as consciousness, 'even as transcendental contains sensory contents', a point exemplified in Husserl's treatment of the lived body and the Buddhist way of dealing with the sensory system. So, our initial understanding is that there is much in common between Buddhist philosophy and phenomenology. Mohanty enquires that, what kind of knowledge is possible after the acceptance of the correlation between world and consciousness. By providing a major role to consciousness, phenomenology faced always a problem of relativism and historicism. Mohanty does not deny transcendental idealist view that objects only constitute themselves, relates with the consciousness. For him, these means knowledge is not only relative to one's perspective but, it is also relative to our cultural practises. So, relativism is not applicable here, because we can appeal to an objectivity that can be imposed into the plurality of our world view. In fact, objectivity emerges from within. Mohanty rejects the view that maintains consciousness is subjective, and it contrasted with anything that is objective, like

material objects. He supports the German philosophical standpoint about this matter. German philosophical standpoint is that, consciousness is objective and that the body is what is subjective. Mohanty shows that, consciousness has two levels. One is the acts of consciousness and other one is the contents of consciousness. Both acts and contents of consciousness are temporal but in different ways. There is no one-to-one correlation between acts and contents but the correlation holds in a many-to-one. The same content may be the correlate of many numerically different acts and the entire thing, comprising to the many correlations, is consciousness. Consciousness is neither just the content nor just the act. Thus, he refuses to remark that consciousness is merely subjective.⁴ Mohanty divided consciousness into two different levels, such as, Mundane consciousness and Transcendental consciousness. Now, let us analysis these in the following below,

(a)Mundane consciousness: Mundane consciousness is something that belongs to the world. This type of consciousness is possible for humans, or sub- human animals. It means more precisely that, it constitutes organic and inorganic materials within nature. That means mundane consciousness is for human and animals only.

(b)Transcendental consciousness: Transcendental form of consciousness is possible only philosophically through the mundane (human and animals) consciousness. In general, we understand ‘transcendental’ as something that goes beyond our experience, or the world, or the nature. But, it is possible only within the world. Whenever we know something transcendental, we know it only within the world, without the help of the world or nature it is never possible. ⁵ There are so many other things about the mundane and transcendental consciousness that Prof. Mohanty analysed in details, but it is not possible to go into details within this short scope.

A comparative analysis between Husserl and Mohanty:

There are some similarities as well as some differences between Husserl’s and Mohanty’s thought about intentionality of consciousness. Both Husserl and Mohanty rejects historicism, Husserl also rejects naturalism and Mohanty rejects relativism. Historicism is a kind of philosophical theory that considers everything from a historical point of view. But, it concludes that there is nothing that can be

interpreted as stable. They deny the objective truth of the world. It judged everything on the basis of fact. But, as we all know, facts are something that might be true or false. But, as a phenomenologist, our goal is to search necessary foundation of knowledge on the basis of absolute truth. So, they denied historicism. On the other hand, Husserl also rejects naturalism. Naturalism is a kind of theory that considers that only physical entities are real. But, in phenomenology we find not only objective reality but also subjective reality. The same arguments that historicism accept holds true for relativism. Relativism believes that everything is factual, but phenomenology deals with absolute truth.

There is another point where they both agree. Like Husserl, Mohanty accepts that consciousness does not always refer something objective; rather it has its subjective side too. Many philosophers criticise this. The very nature of consciousness is always about something. Whenever we are thinking about something, it always refers to something objective. But, it has supports its subjective notion. We all know that Husserl actual search is for to go to pure subjectivity or pure ego. He is actually looking for our inner subjective truth.

Mohanty himself acknowledged that, Husserl's phenomenology guided his search into Indian thinking about consciousness. Husserlian thinking consists of three major components regarding consciousness: Intentionality, temporality and foundational role of consciousness. Similarly, J. N. Mohanty searches these three perspectives from the Indian tradition. Mohanty refers about this point in his edited book entitled, *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy*. There he mentioned that these three ideas are very much similar with Husserl's concept of consciousness as well as something different from the Indian thinking. Now, let us discuss about Mohanty's interpretations about it.

- In Husserl's theory the concept of intentionality plays an important role. There are two parts that intentionality bears: Consciousness is always directed towards an object and every conscious stage has a correlative meaning. Regarding the first point there is a dispute among Indian philosophers. The Naiyaikas and Mimamsakas ascribe intrinsic object directedness to consciousness, whereas the 'spiritual' philosophers insist on the intrinsic object-less-ness of consciousness. The main point of contention

that arises here: whether the object directedness could also be ascribed to consciousness even when the later is purified from all naturalistic elements as Husserl claims.

Besides the above there are other two related issues: Does consciousness has form of its own or does it apparent form really derived from that of its object? According to Buddhist philosopher, consciousness has its own intrinsic form. But, the Naiyaikas and the Mimamsakas admit consciousness as such is formless.

- There is no doubt that everything is associated with time. But, Husserl's thesis regarding the temporality of consciousness should not be identified with this fact. Even after the bracketing of every naturalistic events consciousness as something 'purified' and transcendental is still temporal and this temporality of consciousness is the source of the objective time of nature and time of history. Here the question arises, does Indian philosophy recognize the temporality of consciousness in this sense? It is difficult to answer this question straight forwardly.
- Regarding the last components Mohanty points out, it may observed that in the Advaita Vedanta tradition consciousness only manifests, reveals evidences. The domain of objects is neither created by a god head nor an emanation of Brahman but it is created by Avidya or ignorance. In Husserl's phenomenology consciousness always directed towards an object.⁶

It is our tendency to relate between Advaita Vedanta and Husserl. But the case is not like that. Advaita Vedanta interprets Brahman as absolute real and world as non-real. Everything manifests by Brahman. But, Husserl does not deny the objective world. He maintains that, to reach to pure ego we just have to reduce ourselves from the worldly object. He is not looking for search the reality of the world. His actual concern is for pure subjectivity and that is his prime interest in phenomenological search.

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