

The Essentials of Husserl

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This article attempts to review Prof V.C. Thomas work on *The Essentials of Husserl: Studies in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Philosophically speaking this book provides an accessible and detailed introduction to Edmund Husserl's complex ideas, focusing on his development of transcendental phenomenology. This article comprises three sections: First Session describes the structure of the book. The second session illustrates author's comprehensive exploration of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology from chapter two to ten. The third session critically examines the author's argument regarding the insights into Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, as presented in the concluding chapter of the book.

Keywords: Transcendental, Inter-subjectivity, Lived-experiences, *noema* and *noesis*, etc.

I

Structure of the Book

The Essentials of Husserl: Studies in Transcendental Phenomenology is a comprehensive and accessible exploration of Edmund Husserl's philosophy, focusing on the development of his transcendental phenomenology. The book takes readers through Husserl's evolution from early influences to his groundbreaking contributions to philosophy. Proceeding from chapterization in chapter one, chapter two provides a historical backdrop, tracing phenomenology's roots from Euclid to Hegel, and discussing how Husserl, influenced by his teacher Franz

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Brentano, shifted his focus from individual self-analysis to broader concerns about human existence and its connection to the world. In chapter 3, the book delves into Husserl's ideas on consciousness and intentionality. Husserl posits that consciousness is always directed toward something—whether real or imagined—building on Brentano's theories but with a deeper emphasis on meaning rather than mere objects. The chapter explores how intentionality shapes human understanding, particularly through concepts like time and bodily experience. Chapter 4 highlights Husserl's lifelong concern with meaning. It discusses his views on verbal expressions and inner dialogue, examining how we interpret our experiences and the debates he had with other philosophers, such as Frege, over the nature of meaning. In chapter 5, the focus shifts to Husserl's method of *epoché* (bracketing) and phenomenological reductions. These techniques allow one to isolate the essence of an object, setting aside assumptions about its existence. While the chapter discusses the methodological rigor, it also acknowledges inconsistencies in Husserl's later work. Chapter 6 introduces the concepts of *noema* and *noesis*, discussing how these elements work together in intentional acts. The chapter also compares various interpretations by scholars like Gurwitsch and Føllesdal, offering readers a clear understanding of their significance. The book further explores Husserl's notion of the lived body (*Leib*) in Chapter 7. Contrasting it with the objective physical body (*Körper*), the chapter emphasizes the role of *Leib* in mediating between subjective consciousness and the material world, underscoring the importance of empathy and touch. In chapter 8, the life-world, or *Lebenswelt*, is examined as the foundational context of phenomenology. Husserl critiques the abstract frameworks of science, advocating instead for a return to concrete, lived experiences. The subsequent chapters cover critical concepts like intersubjectivity, lived time, and presuppositionlessness.

II

An In-Depth Exploration of Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology: A Critical Review of Chapters Two to Ten

Chapter 2, subtitled “Phenomenology: A Study of Self and Beyond,” serves as an insightful and accessible introduction to the field of phenomenology. The chapter emphasizes that phenomenology, founded by Edmund Husserl, is not just a philosophical theory but a dynamic and methodical approach to understanding human experience (Thomas 2022, 10). By focusing on how we experience phenomena through consciousness, phenomenology offers a deep, descriptive inquiry into the nature of lived experiences. The chapter begins by establishing the essence of phenomenology as a discipline, centred around the intentional structure of consciousness, which means that consciousness is always directed toward something—whether real or imagined. This insight opens up the philosophical exploration of how we perceive and interact with the world around us. The author breaks down key concepts like *epoché* (the method of suspending judgments about the existence of the external world) and *reduction* (the process of stripping away presuppositions to focus on pure experience), making these abstract ideas more accessible to readers. Through these tools, Husserl aimed to uncover the essence of subjective experience, providing a framework for understanding how we perceive the world and its meaning.

A standout feature of the chapter is its discussion on phenomenology’s broader applicability. The book highlights how phenomenology extends beyond philosophy into various disciplines such as psychology, literature, and even practical fields like dentistry. By analysing personal, subjective experiences, phenomenology uncovers universal truths that can be applied across different contexts. This connection between the subjective and the universal is a critical strength of Husserl’s approach, illustrating the power of phenomenology to bridge the gap between individual experiences and generalizable insights. However, the chapter

does not shy away from acknowledging the challenges that come with studying phenomenology. The text recognizes that phenomenology's dense, abstract language and complex ideas, along with the diverse interpretations offered by philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre, can make it difficult to grasp. Despite these challenges, the chapter effectively clarifies the core elements of Husserl's philosophy, particularly his insistence on phenomenology being a *presuppositionless science* (Thomas 2022, 12). This idea—that phenomenology should proceed without assuming prior knowledge about the nature of existence—remains a foundational principle in Husserl's work. The author also explores Husserl's evolving views on the "self." Early in his career, in works like *Logical Investigations*, Husserl took a non-egological approach, focusing on the objective aspects of consciousness. However, in later works like *Ideas I*, he refined his concept of the "transcendental ego," which becomes central to understanding how the self is intertwined with the world and its experiences. This shift in thinking is key to Husserl's broader philosophical journey. One of the chapter's most engaging aspects is its treatment of the concept of the "Lifeworld," which Husserl discusses in his later work, *Crisis of European Sciences*. The Lifeworld refers to the concrete, everyday reality through which individuals experience the world, bridging abstract philosophical ideas and lived human existence. This concept is vital in understanding how phenomenology connects philosophical analysis with tangible, real-world experiences. The chapter also touches on the intellectual exchange between Husserl and Heidegger. While Husserl laid the foundation for phenomenology, Heidegger extended these ideas, bringing a more existential and interpretive approach. The book highlights the synergy between these thinkers, showcasing the evolving nature of phenomenological thought. In conclusion of this chapter offers a thorough and engaging introduction to phenomenology. It effectively explains complex concepts while showcasing phenomenology's broad impact across different fields. The chapter makes Husserl's

transformative ideas accessible to both newcomers and experienced scholars, making it an invaluable resource for anyone interested in exploring the depths of human experience and consciousness.

In **chapter 3** “Consciousness and Intentionality: The Perspective of Husserl” delves into the core concept of intentionality, central to Husserl’s philosophy. Intentionality is the idea that consciousness is always directed toward something—whether a physical object, an imagined idea, or a conceptual thought (Thomas 2022, 26). The chapter explores how consciousness is not passive but actively shapes and assigns meaning to objects. For instance, a football transforms from a simple object to a meaningful one during a game, illustrating how intentionality imparts purpose and significance to experiences (Thomas 2022, 24). Building on Franz Brentano’s idea of intentionality, Husserl takes a step further by distinguishing between the act of consciousness, its content, and the object of consciousness. Unlike Brentano’s theory, which tied consciousness directly to physical objects, Husserl proposed that consciousness is not limited to perceiving external things but is also concerned with the meaning or *noema* associated with those things (Thomas 2022, 34). This allows us to engage with non-existent objects, such as mythical creatures or dreams, further expanding the scope of phenomenology. The chapter also critiques some of Mohanty’s Theses (Thomas 2022, 37), particularly Thesis 3, which suggests a many-to-one correlation between acts of consciousness and their contents. The reviewer offers a counter-argument, suggesting that each act corresponds to one content. This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of how consciousness shapes our experience of the world, emphasizing the foundational role of intentionality in transcendental phenomenology. It’s a thought-provoking discussion for those seeking to understand the dynamics between consciousness, meaning, and the world.

In **chapter 4** of the book, the author focuses on Edmund Husserl’s investigation into the nature and origin of meaning. Husserl makes a crucial distinction between the object of an act and its meaning, asserting

that meaning is not merely a representation but an ideal entity that is deeply connected to intentional acts of consciousness (Thomas 2022, 44-45). These acts include understanding, interpreting, and perceiving, all of which are guided by intention. Husserl argues that meaning is not only subjective but is universal and communicable, making it repeatable and shareable across various contexts.

This chapter also explores how non-linguistic forms of expression, like gestures and groans, can convey meaning, but only through interpretation. In contrast, inner speech, or monologues, provide a more lasting sense of meaning. Husserl emphasizes the role of language in constituting meaning, suggesting that meanings are ideal and objective, yet transcend the confines of mere linguistic expressions. Through his engagement with other philosophers like Frege, Husserl shows how his theory of meaning extends beyond language to encompass lived experiences and consciousness itself.

In the subsequent sections (4.5 and 4.6), the book compares Husserl's rejection of Platonic ontology with his acknowledgment of ideality, positioning meaning as an ideal correlate of intentional acts. (Thomas 2022, 54-55). These chapters further examine Husserl's genetic phenomenology, which connects meaning to history, language, and tradition, offering a rich understanding of the interplay between consciousness, language, and the world. This thorough analysis presents Husserl's complex views on meaning and essence with clarity and depth.

Chapter 5 "Natural Attitude, Epoche and Reductions" of the book delves into Husserl's concept of transcendental phenomenology, with a particular focus on how he uses the methods of epoché and reductions to remove the "natural attitude" (Thomas 2022, 64-65). The natural attitude refers to our everyday belief in the independent existence of the external world. Husserl argues that to reach a pure, presuppositionless starting point in philosophy, we must suspend this natural attitude. The method of *epoché* involves bracketing or setting aside assumptions about the

existence of objects, allowing us to focus purely on consciousness and its intentional acts, bringing a new perspective on how we understand reality.

This chapter also explores Husserl's phenomenological reductions, which are essential in his philosophy. These reductions, including the eidetic (Thomas 2022, 71), psychological (Thomas 2022, 72), and transcendental (Thomas 2022, 72) types, aim to uncover the essence of phenomena by stripping away all unnecessary assumptions. The text examines the inconsistencies within Husserl's treatment of these reductions, noting how they led to confusion among his followers. Despite these challenges, the primary goal of the reductions remains clear: to reveal the essence of experiences and phenomena. The author also reviews different scholarly interpretations of the reductions, offering a careful proposal of four essential types. This exploration provides a clearer understanding of how Husserl's methods contribute to the development of transcendental phenomenology and how they continue to influence philosophical inquiry into consciousness and experience.

Author, in **chapter 6** of the book explores Husserl's concepts of *noesis* and *noema*, (Thomas 2022, 78-81) central to his theory of intentionality. Building on Brentano's idea that consciousness is always directed toward an object, Husserl distinguishes between *noema*, the meaning assigned to an object by consciousness, and *noesis*, the act of consciousness itself. The chapter emphasizes how objects are never perceived neutrally but always interpreted subjectively, based on the perspective of the perceiver. Using examples, such as how a chair may hold different meanings depending on its context and the person perceiving it, the chapter illustrates how meaning arises from our experiences.

Further, the text delves into the debates between scholars Gurwitsch and Føllesdal on the concept of *noema* (Thomas 2022, 83). Gurwitsch highlights the idea of perceptual *noema*, which is the meaning we assign to an object based on sensory experience and perspective. In contrast,

Føllesdal emphasizes a more intellectual and conceptual interpretation of *noema*, drawing from Husserl's later works. The author examines these differing views and explores how they fit into Husserl's overall phenomenology. The chapter suggests that Føllesdal's conceptual noema is an extension of Gurwitsch's perceptual noema, (Thomas 2022, 93) showcasing how Husserl's ideas evolve from perception to more abstract, conceptual understandings.

This chapter provides an insightful exploration for the readers of how consciousness and meaning intersect, offering a deeper understanding of Husserl's phenomenology and the ongoing debates within this field.

Chapter 7, "Husserl's Examination of Lived Body" focuses on Husserl's examination of the lived body, offering a profound shift in philosophical thought. Traditionally, philosophy has overlooked the body in favour of the mind, but Husserl brings the body to the forefront of human consciousness. He distinguishes between *Körper* (the physical body) and *Leib* (the lived body), arguing that we are not merely objects with bodies, but our bodies are essential to our very existence (Thomas 2022, 105). The body is both a sensory and mobile organ that connects our subjective experience with the physical world, shaping our perceptions and actions. This emphasis on embodiment makes Husserl's phenomenology unique and central to understanding human experience.

This chapter also explores three different perspectives on the body: naturalistic (Thomas 2022, 107), personalistic (Thomas 2022, 107), and phenomenological (Thomas 2022, 108). Husserl critiques the naturalistic view, which reduces the body to a biological object, and instead insists that the body should be understood as a lived, expressive entity. This phenomenological approach highlights the body's role in perception and spatial orientation, asserting that the body is integral to both individual and social experiences. Through the lived body, we engage with the world and others, making it a bridge between subjective experience and objective reality. In his later work, Husserl increasingly emphasizes the

importance of the body in perception and intersubjectivity (Thomas 2022, 114). Initially, he downplayed its role in intentionality, but later recognized it as central to how we interact with the world and empathize with others. This shift challenges earlier, solipsistic views of consciousness, presenting a more holistic understanding of how we experience reality. Overall, Chapter seven offers valuable insights into the embodied nature of human perception, making it a key read for those interested in phenomenology and the mind-body connection.

Author in **chapter 8** of the book provides a thorough examination of Husserl's concept of the "life world," a key element of his later philosophy. The life world refers to the realm of everyday, pre-scientific experience that forms the foundation of human meaning (Thomas 2022, 127). The chapter traces the evolution of this concept, beginning with early influences like Richard Avenarius and leading up to its more developed form in Husserl's *Crisis of European Sciences*. In this work, Husserl critiques the dominance of mathematical abstraction, as exemplified by Galileo, arguing that it overlooks the lived experiences that are essential to human understanding (Thomas 2022, 124-125). According to Husserl, science, while valuable, must not lose sight of the subjective, practical experiences that provide the basis for all knowledge. The life world is depicted as a subjective, practical realm intertwined with human consciousness, offering a more personal and rich understanding of existence. This is contrasted with the objectivism of scientific thinking, which, according to Husserl, fails to account for the lived context in which human beings interact with the world. The chapter emphasizes the importance of returning to an empathetic and holistic engagement with the world (Thomas 2022, 131), arguing that this approach can help bridge the gap between scientific abstractions and the lived realities that ground our understanding.

Additionally, the life world is shown to be the foundation for both scientific and everyday experiences. It is not merely an object of perception, but a horizon that shapes how we understand and experience

things. The chapter highlights how the life world is interwoven with culture, history, and human interactions, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding human existence and its relationship with knowledge.

Chapter 9, “Husserl’s Notion of the Other and Intersubjectivity” of the book delves into the complex concept of intersubjectivity within Husserl’s philosophy. In this chapter, the author explores Husserl’s notion of “the other” and the critical role that both consciousness and the body play in understanding human relationships. He challenges solipsism, the belief that only the self can be known, by introducing the concept of “analogy.” Through analogy, we understand the other by reflecting upon ourselves, recognizing both our bodily and subjective experiences in relation to others (Thomas 2022, 138). This mutual understanding forms the foundation for human relationships, where communities arise from shared intentionality and psychic connections, not merely physical presence.

The chapter also discusses the evolution of Husserl’s views on intersubjectivity, especially in his later writings following *Cartesian Meditations* (CM) (Thomas 2022, 142). Husserl proposes that intersubjectivity exists on three levels: a priori (before experience), a-posteriori (after experience), and pre-theoretical (in everyday life). He argues that the ability for intersubjectivity is inherent in our consciousness even before we encounter others. This foundational capacity for mutual understanding is essential to how we experience the world, and it plays a central role in Husserl’s concepts of empathy, objectivity, and time. The later writings of Husserl, particularly after 1936, are significant in advancing phenomenology by providing solutions to the earlier challenges in understanding the relationship between self and other. In this context, intersubjectivity becomes an essential aspect of human experience, laying the groundwork for a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of how individuals relate to one another and share meaning. This chapter illustrates the profound

importance of shared consciousness and social bonds in shaping human relationships.

In **chapter 10**, author provides a deep dive into Husserl's understanding of lived time, particularly focusing on time-consciousness. Husserl challenges the conventional view of time as a linear progression, emphasizing instead that time is experienced dynamically in consciousness (Thomas 2022, 156). He introduces key concepts such as retention (Thomas 2022, 162-166) and protention (Thomas 2022, 166-170), which explain how we experience the present, recall the past, and anticipate the future. Retention refers to the immediate grasp of the just-past, while protention anticipates the near-future. Together, these concepts help create a continuous flow of consciousness that links our experiences across time.

The chapter traces Husserl's evolving reflections on time-consciousness from his early work, including the 1904-05 lectures, through later phases such as the Bernau Manuscripts and the C-Manuscripts. Initially, Husserl focused on immanent, static temporal experiences, but his later writings, influenced by genetic phenomenology, centred on the living present and the subjective experience of time. This shift marks a significant progression in his philosophical approach, as he began to explore how temporal experience is intertwined with self-awareness and intentionality. Husserl also challenges the traditional, isolated view of the present moment by showing how the primal impression—the direct experience of the present—is inherently linked with both the past and the future. The book illustrates this with examples like listening to music, where consciousness encompasses not only the present but also the past and future elements of the experience. This chapter ultimately reveals how consciousness flows continuously, with retention, primal impression, and protention working together to constitute our experience of time. Husserl's insights into the nature of temporal experience and self-awareness offer a profound understanding of how we engage with time, bridging the subjective and objective aspects of reality.

Author, in **chapter 11**, serves as a clear and insightful conclusion to this book by summarizing and evaluating the key themes of Edmund Husserl's philosophical contributions. The chapter reflects on important concepts such as intentionality, meaning, and temporality, emphasizing how Husserl's phenomenology evolved over the course of his career. Central to his philosophy are ideas like the transcendental ego, phenomenological reduction, and the relationship between consciousness and the objects it perceives. These ideas are explained in a way that makes them accessible to readers, breaking down complex concepts in an understandable manner. This chapter also offers a comparative analysis of Husserl's approach with other notable phenomenologists, such as Heidegger and Sartre. It highlights Husserl's unique emphasis on epistemology, or the study of knowledge, and his focus on the objectivity of meaning, which set him apart from his contemporaries. This book provides readers with valuable insights into Husserl's influence on the development of phenomenology and how his thought diverged from and contributed to the broader philosophical landscape.

Additionally, the chapter delves into Husserl's concept of time-consciousness, presenting the notion that absolute consciousness, through self-temporalization, serves as the foundation for concepts like primal impression, retention, and protention. It also critically examines Husserl's method of phenomenological reduction, stressing the importance of presuppositionlessness in uncovering the essence of experience. Overall, the conclusion offers a well-rounded perspective on Husserl's work, making this book an invaluable resource for advanced students of phenomenology. It provides a comprehensive overview of Husserl's complex ideas, particularly his exploration of subjectivity and its transcendental mysticism.

III

Critical Estimate

This book *The Essentials of Husserl: Studies in Transcendental Phenomenology* serves as an informative and succinct conclusion to the book, offering a comprehensive summary of the major themes in Edmund Husserl's philosophy. The chapters highlight key concepts such as intentionality, meaning, temporality, the transcendental ego, and phenomenological reduction. These complex ideas are clearly explained, making them more accessible to readers. The author compares Husserl's approach with other phenomenologists like Heidegger and Sartre, emphasizing Husserl's distinct focus on epistemology and the objectivity of meaning. This comparison helps situate Husserl's work within the broader philosophical tradition and underscores his significant contributions to phenomenology.

The chapters also provide a critical reflection on Husserl's concept of time-consciousness, explaining how self-temporalization is the foundation of primal impression, retention, and protention. These elements of time-consciousness are shown to be fundamental in understanding the flow of consciousness and how we experience the world in a dynamic, temporal manner. The author also discusses the idea of presuppositionlessness in phenomenology, which calls for bracketing all pre-existing assumptions to arrive at pure, untainted experience. The evaluation of Husserl's major works, and the integration of his ideas across different phases of his philosophy, offers a valuable insight into the development of his thought.

Critically, the book is a highly valuable resource for those seeking to understand Husserl's complex and often abstract ideas. However, while the author succeeds in making these ideas more comprehensible, some readers may find that the text still assumes a degree of familiarity with phenomenology. The book could benefit from more examples and practical applications to help connect Husserl's theories to real-world

experience. Despite this, the book excels in making complex philosophical ideas both clear and engaging, offering deep insights into Husserl's nuanced understanding of time and his methodical approach to philosophy. The book also serves as an excellent guide for advanced students looking to deepen their understanding of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and its relevance to modern philosophical discussions.

Overall, this book is an excellent resource for both newcomers and advanced students of phenomenology, offering a thorough and insightful overview of Husserl's philosophy.

Notes & References

Thomas, V. C. *The Essentials of Husserl: Studies in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Vernon Press, USA, 2022.

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