



# The Phenomenological Mind

2nd edition

Shaun Gallagher & Dan Zahavi



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# The Phenomenological Mind

*The Phenomenological Mind* is the first book to properly introduce fundamental questions about the mind from the perspective of phenomenology. Key questions and topics covered include:

- what is phenomenology?
- naturalizing phenomenology and the cognitive sciences
- phenomenology and consciousness
- consciousness and self-consciousness
- time and consciousness
- intentionality
- the embodied mind
- action
- knowledge of other minds
- situated and extended minds
- phenomenology and personal identity.

This second edition includes a new preface, and revised and improved chapters.

Also included are helpful features such as chapter summaries, guides to further reading, and a glossary, making *The Phenomenological Mind* an ideal introduction to key concepts in phenomenology, cognitive science and philosophy of mind.

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*Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi*

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A few comments about how we wrote this book. It is a co-authored work, and although we started out by dividing the chapters between us so that we each were first author on half of them, they were subsequently passed forth and back and rewritten so many times jointly that they now all stand as fully co-authored chapters.

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## Preface to the second edition

In preparing the revised second edition, we have greatly profited not only from ongoing discussions with our readers and colleagues, but also and in particular from the various reviews of and critical commentaries on the first edition. We have made various improvements, revisions and clarifications, and expanded each chapter with new material.

One change in particular calls for explanation. The first edition of our book was entitled *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*. In this new revised edition, we have dropped the subtitle. The reason for this is simple. The subtitle unfortunately (but perhaps not so surprisingly) has been taken by many readers to suggest that our book is something it isn't, namely a comprehensive introduction to philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Arriving with this kind of expectation, some readers have subsequently expressed frustration over the fact that we failed to treat and discuss this or that central topic in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. This is also a frustration and criticism that some of our reviewers have given voice to. By dropping the subtitle, we hope to avoid this misinterpretation. The aim of our book, as made clear in the first chapter, was never to provide a general introduction to phenomenology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science – a task that in any case would have been impossible to achieve in a single short volume. Our aim was to write an accessible and up-to-date introduction to phenomenology, but one that departed from other such introductions by its rather unique angle. On the one hand, we wanted to show people trained in phenomenology, how phenomenological philosophy could address issues also debated in contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive science, and how the phenomenological analyses could profit from and be improved upon by such an engagement with empirical science and analytic philosophy. At the same time, however, and even more pronounced, we wanted to show readers not already familiar with phenomenology what kind of contribution phenomenological philosophy could make to the

contemporary philosophical and scientific discussions of cognition and consciousness, be it by describing facets of experience that are somewhat overlooked in current debates, or by offering alternative conceptual frameworks for the interpretation of scientific data. These ambitions imposed some obvious limitations to our endeavour. On the one hand, we didn't extensively discuss topics in phenomenology that had little bearing on issues in analytic philosophy of mind or cognitive science. At the same time, we didn't touch and dwell on those areas of philosophy of mind and cognitive science where phenomenology has little or nothing to contribute. Some might consider the latter omission particularly problematic since one thereby misses out on the opportunity to show how phenomenology could be directly complemented by analyses of areas with which it has failed to grapple. But given our aims and the planned size of our book, this was a limitation that was practically unavoidable. Phenomenological interventions in and exchanges with cognitive science and philosophy of mind are ongoing. Our book was and is intended not as an exhaustive account, but as an introduction, and we think it has succeeded in that regard.

The approach we advocate in our book is an open-ended pluralistic methodology rather than a narrowly orthodox and rigorous phenomenological methodology. Strictly speaking, inference to best explanation and indirect arguments that proceed by way of eliminating competing positions is not phenomenological in nature. But we have adopted the view that the more arguments we could garner in support of our outlook the better. We are convinced that analytic philosophy of mind in many ways can, not only challenge, but also support, and enrich the phenomenological discussions. We wanted to convince our scientific colleagues that the problems addressed by the cognitive sciences – how the brain works, what counts as cognition, all the extremely difficult 'easy' problems, as well as the 'hard' problem of consciousness – are so complex that an adequate account of any one of them requires multidimensional studies from perspectives offered by many different disciplines, including neuroscience, artificial intelligence, psychology, philosophy of mind, and phenomenology. A complete neuroscience (even if that were possible) would not be a complete explanation of cognition; an exhaustive psychology would not exhaust what we can know about human nature; a perfect linguistics would not be a perfect account of everything we need to say about language. Cognitive science is not (or should not be) interdisciplinary for purposes of eliminating all but one discipline. Rather, the best account of cognitive science is that it consists of the *cognitive sciences*, and that these sciences have to stand together in order to develop the fullest account possible. It's not reduction, but multiplication – taking multiple perspectives on the problem – that characterizes the idea of the cognitive sciences that we defend in *The Phenomenological Mind*.

Let us end by expressing our gratitude to Rasmus Thybo Jensen, who in translating *The Phenomenological Mind* into Danish, called our attention to some points that needed clarification, a number of typos and some missing bibliographical information. We also want to thank Gottfried Vosgerau and Simona Chiodo, who guest-edited two comprehensive collections of commentaries on our book, and Roberta De Monticelli for organizing a Winter School on *The Phenomenological Mind* in Milan in 2010. Our thanks obviously also go to all the contributors to those special issues, and School participants, for their inspiring and challenging comments. Finally, we would like to thank Tony Bruce and Adam Johnson from Routledge for encouraging us to work on a second edition and for all their practical help, and James Thomas for his excellent copy-editing on the second edition.

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# 1

## Introduction

### Philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and phenomenology

This is a book about the mind. What the mind is, and how it works, are currently the topics of many complex debates that span a number of disciplines: psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, philosophy of mind – disciplines that belong to what is generally referred to as the cognitive sciences. The interdisciplinary nature of these debates is no coincidence. Rather, it is necessitated by the fact that no single discipline can do full justice to the complexity of the issues at hand. In this book, we want to explore a variety of issues that have traditionally been studied by philosophers of mind. However, we do not intend to take a *pure* philosophical approach – that is, we do not take a philosophical approach that would ignore the other sciences. We will frequently appeal to the details of scientific evidence from studies in cognitive neuroscience and brain imaging, developmental and cognitive psychology, and psychopathology. This is, however, a book on the *philosophy* of mind, and no matter how interdisciplinary it gets, it remains an attempt to address philosophical problems.

Everything we said so far, however, could be the basis for a standard philosophy of mind or philosophy of cognitive science textbook, of which there are already a sufficient number. We propose to do things differently, and for reasons that will become clear as we proceed, we think this difference is important and productive, and one that signals a change in the way things are developing in the cognitive sciences. Specifically, we will take a phenomenological perspective on the issues that are to be discussed, where phenomenology refers to a tradition of philosophy that originated in Europe and includes the work of Husserl,



Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and other more recent thinkers. We will not try to do justice to all aspects of phenomenology. Rather, our treatment involves a selection of topics that we think are of particular importance for contemporary discussions in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Also, our focus will not be historical or based on textual exegesis of figures in the phenomenological tradition, although we will certainly cite their work where relevant. To understand the motive for this selection of perspective, let us look briefly at the way philosophy and psychology have developed in the past century or so.

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## **AN OVERSIMPLIFIED ACCOUNT OF THE LAST 100 YEARS**

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If we took a snapshot of the philosophical and psychological discussions of the mind around the end of the nineteenth century, we would find complex discussions about the nature of consciousness (for example, in the writings of the American philosopher/psychologist William James, and the European philosopher Edmund Husserl), the intentional structure of mental states (e.g. in the work of the Austrian philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano, Bertrand Russell, and again, Husserl), as well as discussions about the methodology needed for a proper study of the mind (e.g. Wilhelm Wundt, Gustav Theodor Fechner, and again, James and Husserl). One would also notice that all of these people were influencing each other, sometimes directly (corresponding by letters in a pre-electronic age) or indirectly (by reading each other's work). So, for example, James was inspired by theorists and experimentalists in Europe, and in his 1890 *Principles of Psychology* (1950) he cited the work of Brentano and many of his students, including the psychologist Carl Stumpf. Although James did not cite Husserl, a student of both Brentano and Stumpf, the latter had recommended that Husserl read James's *Principles*. Husserl did so, and he clearly learned from James. Husserl also corresponded with the logician Frege. Both criticized the then prevalent doctrine of psychologism, that is, the idea that the laws of logic are reducible to laws of psychology.<sup>1</sup> Both of them had a strong interest in the philosophy of mathematics and logic, which was also of interest to Russell, who had a copy of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in his prison cell (where he served time for civil disobedience).

As we move further into the twentieth century, these thinkers and their particular philosophical approaches start to move apart. James became less involved in psychology and occupied himself with the development of the philosophy of American pragmatism. The kind of logical analysis found in the work of Frege and Russell became the basis for what has become known as analytic philosophy. And Husserl developed an approach to consciousness and experience which he called phenomenology. By mid-century, and indeed throughout most of the latter part of the twentieth century, we find that with respect to discussions of the mind (as well as other topics) very little communication is going on between analytic philosophy of mind and phenomenology. In fact, on both sides, the habitual attitude towards the other tradition has ranged from complete disregard to outright hostility. Indeed, up until the 1990s, it was unusual to find philosophers from these different traditions even talking to each other. There has been plenty of arrogance on both sides of the aisle. Thus, for example, Jean-Luc Marion (1998) suggested that during the twentieth century phenomenology had essen-

tially assumed the very role of philosophy, apparently ignoring any contribution by analytic philosophy. On the other side, Thomas Metzinger allegedly proclaimed phenomenology to be 'a discredited research programme ... intellectually bankrupt for at least 50 years'.<sup>2</sup> Even when phenomenologists do talk with analytic philosophers we find reactions such as John Searle's claim, in response to a critique by Dreyfus, that phenomenology suffers from serious limitations, or as he puts it, using the less reserved economic metaphor, 'I almost want to say ... bankruptcy – and [it] does not have much to contribute to the topics of the logical structure of intentionality or the logical structure of social and institutional reality' (Searle 1999a, pp. 1, 10).<sup>3</sup>

To explain how these different philosophers came to think of themselves as so opposed to each other, or perhaps even worse, indifferent towards each other, would involve telling a larger story than is necessary for our purposes. We endorse David Woodruff Smith's observation: 'It ought to be obvious that phenomenology has a lot to say in the area called philosophy of mind. Yet the traditions of phenomenology and analytic philosophy of mind have not been closely joined, despite overlapping areas of interest' (Smith 2003). In this book, however, you will be able to discern some of the important differences between the approaches of the analytic philosophy of mind and phenomenology, as well as some of their overlapping concerns.

Another part of the relevant history involves what happens in psychology. Here is the standard version, which is a somewhat distorted history of what actually happened, although it is the one given in almost every textbook account. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century there was a great interest in explaining conscious experience and the cognitive processes involved in attention and memory. The early experimental psychologists relied on introspection as a method that aimed to produce measurable data about the mind. Around 1913, however, the emphasis shifted to the notion of behaviour as the proper object of psychological study. Behaviourism, as an approach to the study of animal and human psychology, was defended and articulated in the work of the American psychologist John Watson (1913), and came to dominate the study of psychology, especially in America, until the 1970s, peaking around 1950. The shift to behaviour and its emphasis on the measurement of observable action was at the same time a shift away from the interior life of the mind and the method of introspection. Behaviourism, however, was ultimately replaced by cognitive approaches that returned to the earlier interest in the interior processes of mental life, this time armed with computational models developed in computer science, and more recently, all of the scientific advancements in brain research. Finally, in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, researchers again focused on attempts to understand and explain consciousness.

This story is distorted and oversimplified even in its broad strokes. One could easily point to historical evidence that suggests, in complete contrast to the standard story, that behaviourist approaches and attempts to obtain objective measures were common in the earliest psychology laboratories of the nineteenth century, and introspection was frequently considered problematic, even by the so-called introspectionists, although it continued to play some part in psychological experimentation throughout the twentieth century. Furthermore, computational concepts of the mind can arguably be traced back to the eighteenth century;

and consciousness has been of continuing interest since the time of René Descartes, in the first half of the seventeenth century, and perhaps since the time of the ancient Greeks. One might also claim that the standard story is simply partisan, reflecting the interests of the people who pieced it together. As Alan Costall (2004, 2006) has argued, the understanding of the early history of psychology as introspectionist was an invention of John Watson, who wanted to put behaviourist psychology on everyone's agenda. Yet, the psychologist that Watson most associated with introspection, Wilhelm Wundt, expressed his own distrust of introspection: 'Introspective method relies either on arbitrary observations that go astray or on a withdrawal to a lonely sitting room where it becomes lost in self-absorption. The unreliability of this method is universally recognized' (Wundt 1900, p. 180; translated in Blumental 2001, p. 125). Furthermore, although cognitivists claimed to offer a revolution in psychology, as Costall (2004, p. 1) points out, 'Cognitivism is very much a continuation of the kind of mechanistic behaviorism it claims to have undermined.'

The story, then, is more complex than standard accounts indicate. The 'cognitive revolution', the emergence of cognitive science after 1950, and mid-century analytic philosophy of mind were all influenced by behaviourist thought. Gilbert Ryle, for example, wrote in his book *The Concept of Mind*, that what we call the mind simply is 'overt intelligent performances' (1949, p. 58), and he admits to the importance of behaviourism for this kind of insight (1949, p. 328).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, it is often thought that phenomenology was primarily an introspectionist enterprise. As we will show in the following, this is also a misconception (see Chapter 2). In terms of comprehending the relation between phenomenology and philosophy of mind, however, it is certainly the case that analytic philosophers of mind thought of phenomenology as being introspectionist, and from their point of view introspection, as a method for understanding the mind, was dead.

If we set the question of introspection aside for now, another way to characterize the difference between contemporary mainstream analytic philosophy of mind and phenomenology is by noting that whereas the majority of analytic philosophers today endorse some form of naturalism, phenomenologists have tended to adopt a non- or even anti-naturalistic approach. However, matters are somewhat complicated by the fact that naturalism is by no means an unequivocal term. We will discuss this point in more detail in Chapter 2. For now it will be sufficient to point out that science tends to adopt a naturalistic view, so that when finally the cognitive revolution occurred, that is, when psychology started to come under the influence of computational theories of mind in the 1950s and 1960s, and when the interdisciplinary study of the mind known as cognitive science started to emerge, the philosophical approach that seemed more attuned to science was analytic philosophy of mind. Moreover, there was quite a lot of work for philosophers of mind to do when the dominant model was a computational one. Logic and logical analysis play an essential role in the computational model. More importantly, however, philosophy of mind contributed important theoretical foundations and conceptual analyses to the emerging sciences of the mind. The philosophical definition of functionalism, for example, plays an important role in explicating the computational model so that it can apply both to natural and artificial intelligence.

In this organization of cognitive disciplines, the specific philosophical approach of phenomenology was pushed to the side and generally thought to be irrelevant. For a long

time the one lone voice that insisted on its relevance to issues pertaining to the field of artificial intelligence and the cognitive sciences was Hubert Dreyfus (1967, 1972, 1992). But this situation has recently changed, and it is this change that motivates this book. Computationalism is not as dominant as it had been in the first 30 years of cognitive science. Three developments have pushed it off its throne. The first is a revived interest in phenomenal consciousness. Starting in the late 1980s (see, for example, Marcel and Bisiach 1988), psychologists and philosophers started to talk about consciousness in the context of the cognitive sciences. During the 1990s a broad debate about the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness began, led by David Chalmers (1995), in the wake of important writings by, among others, Thomas Nagel (1974), Searle (1992), Daniel Dennett (1991), Owen Flanagan (1992), and Galen Strawson (1994). When methodological questions arose about how to study the experiential dimension scientifically, and therefore, without resorting to old-style introspectionism, a new discussion of phenomenology was started. In other words, in some circles, *phenomenology* as a philosophical approach was thought to be of possible importance when consciousness was raised as a scientific question.

The second thing that happened to motivate a reconsideration of phenomenology as a philosophical-scientific approach was the advent of embodied approaches to cognition. In the cognitive sciences, the notion of embodied cognition took on strength in the 1990s, and it continues today. Scientists and philosophers such as Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991), Antonio Damasio (1994), and Andy Clark (1997) objected to the strong Cartesian mind–body dualism that, despite the best efforts of philosophers like Ryle, Dennett, and others, continued to plague the cognitive sciences. Functionalism led us to believe that cognition could be instantiated in a disembodied computer program, or ‘brain-in-a-vat’, and that embodiment added nothing to the mind. Varela et al., as well as Clark and others, pointed back to the insights of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) as a way to develop their objections to disembodied cognition. Indeed, we will see that Merleau-Ponty offers one of the best examples of how phenomenology can play an important role in the cognitive sciences.

A third development that has made phenomenological approaches to cognition relevant to experimental science has been the amazing progress of neuroscience. In the past 20 years we have been able to learn a tremendous amount about how the brain works. Technologies such as brain imaging (fMRI, PET) have generated new experimental paradigms. The science of brain imaging is complex, and is certainly not just a matter of taking a snapshot of what is going on inside the head. But the generation of images of neural processing using non-invasive technology has made possible a variety of experiments that depend on reports about the experience of the experimental subjects. Both in order to design the experiments properly and in order to interpret their results, experimenters often want to know what the subject’s experience is like. Again, the issue of methodology calls for some consideration of dependable ways of describing conscious experience, and phenomenology offers just such a method.

It seems clear, then, that the time is ripe for a careful account of how phenomenological philosophy and method can contribute to the cognitive sciences. This book is an attempt to do that. What marks out the territory covered in this book, in contrast to other textbooks on

philosophy of mind, then, is that it develops a *phenomenological* approach to the philosophy of mind. The idea, however, is not to displace or dismiss analytic philosophy of mind. Indeed, part of what we want to explore is how phenomenology can enter back into a communication with analytic approaches in a way that goes beyond generalities. To us the most exciting development of the past few years has been the growing interest of both analytic philosophers of mind and phenomenologists in experimental science. If, for a variety of historical and conceptual reasons, analytic philosophy and phenomenology have for a time been ignoring each other, the thriving field of consciousness research is certainly an area where communication has been re-sparked.

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## WHAT IS PHENOMENOLOGY?

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Phenomenology, understood as the philosophical approach originated by Edmund Husserl in the early years of the twentieth century, has a complex history. In part it is the basis for what has become known as continental philosophy, where ‘continental’ means the European continent, despite the fact that much continental philosophy since 1960 has been done in America. Within this designation one finds a number of philosophical approaches, some building on the insights of phenomenology, such as existentialism and hermeneutics (theory of interpretation), and others reacting critically against phenomenology, including certain post-structuralist or postmodernist ideas. There is, however, a line of major philosophical thinkers, including Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, who extend phenomenological philosophy from its origins in Husserl. Following this lineage means that we understand phenomenology to include a somewhat diverse set of approaches. To provide a basic idea of phenomenology, however, we will here focus on what these approaches have in common. In later chapters we will have the opportunity to explore insights provided by some of the individual phenomenologists.

Most introductory textbooks in philosophy of mind or in cognitive science start by or frame the entire discussion by describing various metaphysical positions: dualism, materialism, identity theory, functionalism, eliminativism . . . and so on (see, for example, Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson 2006; Chalmers 2002; Heil 2004; Kim 2005). Before we even know for sure what we are talking about, it seems that we have to commit ourselves metaphysically and declare our allegiance to one or the other of these positions. Phenomenology pushes these kinds of questions aside, brackets them, sets them out of play, and asks us instead to pay attention to the phenomenon under study. One of the underlying ideas of phenomenology is that the preoccupation with these metaphysical issues tends to degenerate into highly technical and abstract discussions that lose touch with the real subject matter: *experience*. It is no coincidence that Edmund Husserl’s maxim for phenomenology was, ‘Back to the things themselves!’ (Husserl 1950/1964, p. 6). By this he meant that phenomenology should base its considerations on the way things are experienced rather than various extraneous concerns which might simply obscure and distort what is to be understood. One important concern of the philosophy of mind and cognitive science should be to provide a phenomenologically sensitive account of the various structures of experience.

But what is the thing under study? Don't we have to know whether we are studying the mind, or the brain, or whether it is something material or immaterial? Is consciousness generated by specific brain processes, or not? How can the phenomenologist set such questions aside and hope to make any progress? Or, someone might object, 'How can the phenomenologist deny that the brain causes consciousness?' The proper response to this is that phenomenologists do not *deny* it; nor do they *affirm* it. They suspend these kinds of questions and all judgements about them. They start with experience.

Take perception as an example. When I look out of the window and see my car parked in the street, I am having a visual perception. An experimental psychologist would want to provide a causal explanation of how visual perception works, perhaps in terms of retinal processes, neuronal activation in the visual cortex and association areas in the brain that allow me to recognize the car as my own. She might devise a functionalist account that explains what sorts of mechanisms do the work, or what sort of information (colour, shape, distance, etc.) needs to be processed in order for me to have the visual perception of my car. These are important explanations for science to develop. The phenomenologist, however, has a different task. She would start with the experience itself and by means of a careful description of that experience she would attempt to say what perceptual experience is like, what the difference is between perception and, for example, an instance of imagination or recollection, and how that perception is structured so that it delivers a meaningful experience of the world. Without denying that brain processes contribute causally to perception, such processes are simply not part of the perceiver's experience.

There is of course a relationship between what the phenomenologist is doing and what the psychologist is doing. Clearly they are trying to give an account of the same experience. But they are taking different approaches, asking different questions, and looking for different kinds of answers. To the extent that phenomenology stays with experience, it is said to take a first-person approach. That is, the phenomenologist is concerned to understand the perception in terms of the meaning it has for the subject. My perceptual experience of seeing my car in the street, for example, includes nothing about processes that are happening in my brain. The typical cognitive scientist, on the other hand, takes a third-person approach, that is, an approach from the perspective of the scientist as external observer rather than from the perspective of the experiencing subject. She attempts to explain perception in terms of something other than the experience, for example certain objective (and usually subpersonal) processes like brain states or functional mechanisms.

One might think that there is nothing much to say about experience itself. One simply experiences as one experiences. The phenomenologist finds quite a lot to say, however. For example, the phenomenologist notes that my visual perception of the car has a certain structure that characterizes all conscious acts, namely an intentional structure. Intentionality is a ubiquitous character of consciousness, and as the phenomenologists put it, it means that all consciousness (all perceptions, memories, imaginings, judgements, etc.) is *about* or *of something*. In that sense, experience is never an isolated or elemental process. It always involves reference to the *world*, taking that term in a very wide sense to include not just the physical environment, but the social and cultural world, which may include things that do not exist in a physical way (for example, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark). The phenomenological

analysis of intentionality leads to a number of insights. For example, the intentionality of perception is richly detailed in the following sense. When I see a particular object in the street, I see it as my car. Perception is not a simple reception of information; rather, it involves an interpretation, which frequently changes according to context. To see my car as my car already suggests that perception is informed by previous experience, and at least in this sense Locke and the empiricists were correct to suggest that perception is educated by experience. One should think of this as perception enriched by experience and by habitual, as well as customary, ways of experiencing things rather than as a case of perception plus thought. It's not that I perceive *x* and then add something quite different and novel, namely the thought that this is my car. One way to put this is to say that perception is 'smart'. To say that perception involves interpretation doesn't mean that first we perceive some nebulous entity and then we add an interpretation – something over and above perception that bestows meaning on it. Rather, perception *is* interpretational. I see the car already as my car.

Perception is smart; it's already meaningful. In part this means that it is already enriched by the circumstances and possibilities of my embodied existence and surrounding environment. The phenomenologist would say that perceptual experience is embedded in contexts that are pragmatic, social, and cultural and that much of the semantic work (the formation of perceptual meaning) is facilitated by the objects, arrangements, and events that I encounter. In a particular instance I may see the object as a practical vehicle that I can use to get me to where I'm going. In another instance I may see the exact same object as something I have to clean, or as something I have to sell, or as something that is not working properly. The way that I see my car will depend on a certain contextual background, which can also be explored phenomenologically. To encounter my car as something to drive is to encounter it as something I can climb into, as something located in a place that affords the kind of motion the car is built for. My perceptual experience will consequently be informed by the bodily abilities and skills I possess. It has been customary to say that perception has representational or conceptual content. But perhaps this way of talking fails to fully capture the situated nature of perceptual experience. Rather than saying that I represent the car as driveable, it might be better to say that – given the design of the car, the shape of my body and its action possibilities, and the state of the environment – the car is driveable and I perceive it as such.

The intentional structure of perception also involves spatial aspects that can be explored phenomenologically. My embodied position places precise limitations on what I can see and what I can't. From where I am standing I can see the driver's side of the car. The car appears in that profile, and in such a way that what I do see of the car occludes other aspects or profiles of the car. Standing where I am I cannot literally see the passenger side of the car, for example – it is not in my visual field. Nonetheless, I see the car as *having* another side to it, and I would be extremely surprised if I walked around the car and found that the passenger side was missing. The surprise that I would feel indicates that I have a certain tacit anticipation of what my possible action in the immediate future will bring. I am surprised because my anticipation is disappointed. This temporal structure of our experience has been described in great detail by phenomenologists, and it is a feature that we will return to repeatedly in the following chapters.

In any perception of a physical object, my perception is always incomplete in regard to the object – I never see a complete object all at once. Let's call this 'perspectival incompleteness'. There is always something more to see that is implicitly there, even in the perception of the simplest object. If I move around a tree in order to obtain a more exhaustive perception of it, then the various profiles of the tree, its front, sides, and back, do not present themselves as disjointed fragments, but are perceived as synthetically integrated moments. This synthetic process is once again temporal in nature.

Phenomenologically, I can also discover certain *gestalt* features of perception. Visual perception comes with a characteristic structure such that, normally, something is always in focus while the rest is not. Some object is at the centre of my focus, while others are in the background, or on the horizon, or at the periphery. I can shift my focus and make something else come into the foreground, but only at the cost of shifting the first object attended to out of focus and into the horizon.

Notice that in these kinds of accounts the phenomenologist is concerned with particular experiential structures of perception, and precisely as they relate to the world in which the perceiver is situated. That is, even as she attends to experience, the phenomenologist does not get locked up in an experience that is purely subjective, or detached from the world. The phenomenologist studies perception, not as a purely subjective phenomenon, but as it is lived through by a perceiver who is *in the world*, and who is also an embodied agent with motivations and purposes.

In addition to this kind of intentional analysis of how we experience the world, or how the world appears to us, the phenomenologist can also ask about the phenomenal state of the perceiver. This is sometimes referred to in the philosophy of mind literature as the qualitative or phenomenal features of experience – or, in a fortuitous phrase made famous by Nagel (1974), the 'what it is like' to experience something. The phenomenal features of experience are not divorced from the intentional features. What it is like to stand around and admire my new car is obviously quite different from what it is like to stand around and see my new car get smashed by another car.

In a short reflection we have identified some ubiquitous aspects or structures of perception: its intentionality, its *gestalt* character, its perspectival incompleteness, its phenomenal and temporal character. There is much more to say about temporality (see Chapter 4), perception (Chapter 5), intentionality (Chapter 6), and phenomenality (Chapter 3). Notice, however, that what we have been outlining here amounts to a description of experience, or more precisely a description of the structures of experience, and that as phenomenologists we have not once mentioned the brains behind this experience. That is, we have not tried to give an account in terms of neuronal mechanisms that might cause us to perceive the car in the way that we perceive it. So in this way a phenomenological account of perception is something quite different from a psychophysical or neuroscientific account. Phenomenology is concerned with attaining an *understanding* and proper *description* of the experiential structure of our mental/embodied life; it does not attempt to develop a naturalistic *explanation* of consciousness, nor does it seek to uncover its biological genesis, neurological basis, psychological motivation, or the like.

This kind of phenomenological account is consistent with Husserl's original conception of



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