PERCEPTION
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Perception is a central concern for psychologists, philosophers, and anyone at all interested in understanding how—or if—creatures such as ourselves achieve cognitive contact with our surrounding world. But it is a puzzling phenomenon. On the one hand, perception is made possible by a range of broadly physical facts, including what occurs in the sense organs, nervous systems, and brains of perceivers, facts investigated by the cognitive sciences. On the other hand, there is a wide range of facts about perception—broadly phenomenological facts—which seem to be available to each of us from a first-person point of view and, arguably, unavailable from a third-person point of view. We can tell the difference between perceiving and merely thinking, remembering, imagining, and, even dreaming, without appealing to any facts about our nervous systems or brains—without, indeed, even knowing any such facts. Phenomenologists working on perception have attempted to describe it as it reveals itself upon careful phenomenological reflection without attempting, as Merleau-Ponty put it, to “deduce, from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what we are to see, hear, and feel” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 266). In this entry, I will discuss the views of those traditional phenomenologists who have dedicated the most effort to understanding the nature of perception.

1. Background: The Theory of Ideas

Throughout most of the modern period of philosophy from Descartes forward, the orthodox theory of perception has been some version of what Thomas Reid called the “theory of ideas,” henceforth “TI.” According to TI, the immediate objects of perception are non-physical, private entities of some sort, such as ideas or sense data.
Two main arguments have traditionally supported TI. The first is the Argument from Perceptual Error:

P1. In cases of perceptual error (illusion, hallucination), we directly perceive non-physical objects.

P2. For any veridical perception, there is an indistinguishable erroneous one.

P3: If two experiences are indistinguishable, then they have the same kinds of objects.

C: Therefore, in veridical perception we directly perceive non-physical objects.

If a penny appears elliptical (illusion), or if it appears that there is a tiger in my room when there is not (hallucination), then, on this view, I am directly perceptually aware of something that is elliptical or tiger-like. Since no relevant physical object is elliptical or tiger-like, I must be aware of something non-physical. But (P3) veridical experiences would be indistinguishable from these erroneous ones, and would therefore present the same kinds of objects. So we are never directly perceptually aware of physical objects.

The second main argument for TI is the Argument from Perceptual Relativity, which David Hume presents as follows:

The table which we see seems to diminish as we remove further from it; but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration. It was, therefore, nothing but its image which was present to the mind (Hume 1955: 161).

That is:

R1: The immediate objects of perception change in virtue of changes in our orientation and the condition of our senses.

R2: Physical objects do not change in virtue of changes in our orientation and the condition of our senses.

C: So, physical objects are not the immediate objects of perception.
One of Edmund Husserl’s teachers, Franz Brentano, endorsed a particularly radical version of TI. Brentano famously argued that what distinguishes mental phenomena such as acts of being presented with something, judging, and so on is “the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object,” their “reference to a content” (Brentano 1973: 88). Mental phenomena are also unique in being the objects of inner perception. The objects of external perception include “color, sound, warmth,” and other sensible qualities (Brentano 1973: 92). Despite characterizing such things as “physical,” Brentano regarded sensible qualities as mind-dependent in much the way that Locke and Hume had; they “demonstrably do not exist outside of us” (Brentano 1973: 9). Since such qualities seem, naively, to characterize objects outside of us, Brentano concluded that “the objects of sensory experience are deceptive” (Brentano 1973: 8). Only inner perception possesses “immediate, infallible self-evidence” (Brentano 1973: 92), and its objects, mental phenomena, are the only things that are strictly speaking perceived (Brentano 1973: 97-8; 119). So, while the majority of advocates of TI held that we directly perceive both sensible qualities and mental operations, Brentano restricted perception in the strict sense to the latter.

2. Edmund Husserl

The extent to which Husserl diverged from Brentano can best be appreciated by turning to a concrete example of perception and examining some of its features. Before me on the table is a rectangular wooden box. It strikes my interest, so I begin to explore it further. I pick it up and feel its weight, turn it around and examine its sides, top, and bottom. I notice some of the imperfections in the wood, and see various discolorations. I open it up to discover that it’s empty. Eventually I am satisfied, set the box down, and turn my attention elsewhere. This thoroughly humdrum experience offers a wealth of phenomenological data. What follows is a list of what Husserl regarded as some of the most noteworthy parts and features to be discovered therein.
**Intentionality**: Husserl agreed with Brentano that perceptual experiences are about things. My experience is of a wooden box, but is not itself wooden or a box. My experience is not something that is seen or touched, nor is it something that I could throw against a wall or sell to someone. The perceived box is.

**Presentational Character**: There are many ways of being conscious of the box on the table. I could remember it. I could imagine it. I could merely think about it without perceiving it or forming any mental image of it at all. Perception differs from all of these in readily apparent ways. Unlike empty or “signitive” thinking, perception presents its object. Unlike imagination, it presents it as existing. And unlike remembering, it presents its object as present. “[P]erception is characterized by the fact that in it … the object ‘itself’ appears, and does not merely appear ‘in a likeness’” (Husserl 1970: 712).

**Content-Object Structure**: One of the most important aspects of Husserl’s theory of intentionality in general and perception in particular is his sharp distinction between a mental act’s contents from its object. The object of an act is what it is about. Its contents are those parts and features of the act in virtue of which it is about its object in a determinate manner. In the example above, the box is the object of my experiences, not their content. Although each perceptual experience presents me with the box, those experiences present it by means of different contents. Some of the contents are intuitive, while some—those pointing to its undisclosed parts and sides—are empty.

**Horizons**: No phase of my experience of the box is complete. The box is “transcendent” to my experience insofar as it has more to it than what is revealed to me in any single phase of experience, or even in any possible finite series of experiences. It has a backside, an inside, and so forth, which would come to proper givenness were I to view the box from a different perspective. Moreover, the box doesn’t just have more to it than what I properly perceive, but is given as having
more to it. Each phase of my experience is “a mixture of fulfilled and unfulfilled intentions” (Husserl 1970: 714). The empty intentions constitute an act’s inner horizon (Husserl 2001: 43; 144), the body of contents that specify, more or less determinately, the box’s unperceived features and the possible courses of future experience of the box that harmonize with my present one. (Husserl also sometimes uses the term ‘horizon’ to designate (a) the unperceived and further-determinable parts and sides of the object and (b) the set of possible experiences in which they would be properly given.) In virtue of the empty horizon, I anticipate that the box will take up less of my visual field if I move away from it, that its backside will also be made of wood, that it will stay put if untouched rather than fly away or sprout legs and walk. Since I am already familiar with the box, the inner horizon specifies its properties fairly specifically—though not as specifically as subsequent intuition reveals them. If the box were unfamiliar to me, the horizons would specify its features with less precision.

Furthermore, the box is perceived as an object in an environment thanks to the work of the outer horizon. The box appears in a room, on top of a table, a little to the left of a lamp. The surrounding environment is there for me despite the fact that I do not attend to the objects making it up, and provides the ground against which the box appears as a figure.

Inadequacy: Because the box, along with each of its parts and properties, cannot be completely disclosed in any single experience, my experience of them is inadequate. But inadequacy is the price to pay for having physical objects given in perception. If all perception were adequate, then physical objects would be unperceivable. And without inner horizons, all perception would be adequate. We would take the one-sided presentation of a thing for the thing (Husserl 2001: 41). Moreover, on Husserl’s view, this inadequacy is mainly the box’s fault, not mine. “Inadequate modes of givenness belong essentially to the spatial structure of things; any other way of givenness is simply absurd”
This marks a drastic departure from Brentano. On Brentano’s view, all genuine perception is adequate.

**Constancy:** As I examine the box, my experiences change in readily detectable ways. Nevertheless, “I always see one and the same box, however it may be turned and tilted” (Husserl 1970: 565). The same holds of its intrinsic properties. Contrary to Hume, what I see does not get bigger as I move the box closer to me, nor does it perceptually appear to. Its color, shape, and other features appear differently under different conditions, without appearing to be different. I perceive the box as having one uniform color, size, and shape, while the sensations in virtue of which I perceive those qualities can, and often must, vary with changes in my environment and condition. In normal perception we do not attend to these sensations, and they are not among the perceptual experience’s objects. “I do not see colour-sensations but coloured things, I do not hear tone-sensations but the singer’s song” (Husserl 1970: 559). On Husserl’s view, then, the Argument from Perceptual Relativity breaks down at premise R1. The immediate object of perception, as I view the box from varying angles, does not change and does not appear to change. Rather, the experiences and sensations in virtue of which it is present change, and those experiences and sensations are the contents, not the objects, of perception.

**Unity:** Although my experience of the box changes from moment to moment, each phase evidently bears upon the same object. As I perceive the box in a continuous series of experiences, I experience a peculiar “identity-consciousness” (Husserl 1997: 24). In each phase of the experience, the same box presents itself to me, and, after the initial encounter, presents itself as the same thing that was already presenting itself. As I move from seeing the front of the box (p1) to the back (p2), what was merely emptily pre-figured becomes intuitively fulfilled. I find the back to be more or less as it was emptily anticipated as being. If the back turns out to be otherwise than I expected it to be—it has a different color, say—I will experience a conflict. But this experience of conflict can only
occur against the background of an identity-consciousness. If I took the object disclosed in p2 to be completely different from the one I emptily intended in p1, I could not find the same thing to be other than I had anticipated.

_Sensory Content:_ Unlike Brentano, Husserl regarded the aforementioned sensations, whose presence renders an experience intuitive rather than empty, as constituents of perceptual acts. Husserl also, at times, wrote that sensations in some sense resemble the properties that they present (Husserl 1970: §26; Husserl 1982: §97). Husserl did agree with Brentano that such sensations are not intrinsically about anything. The reason is that different sensations or “hyletic data” can present the same object, and the same sensations can present different objects (Husserl 1997: §15). The sensations in virtue of which I see the box’s brown surface would, in another context, present me with a tan object or a black object. Sensations can only present us with objects by means of “interpretation,” “apprehension,” or “apperception.” In perception sensory data are “in a certain manner ‘interpreted’ or ‘apperceived’, and … it is in the phenomenological character of such an animating interpretation of sensation that what we call the appearing of the object consists” (Husserl 1970: 539; also see Husserl 1970: 563-9, Husserl 1997: §15, and Husserl 2001: 55).

While it is not obvious just what interpretation is, it is clear that the interpretation of sensations is not at all like the interpretation of, say, a text. We do not, on Husserl’s view, first make objects of our sensations and then try to interpret them as signs of something else. Rather, “Sensations plainly only become presented objects in psychological reflection” (Husserl 1970: 310). And at least in his early work, it sometimes seems that interpretation involves sensations being united in certain ways with meanings or concepts. “The perceptual presentation arises in so far as an experienced complex of sensations gets informed by a certain act-character, one of conceiving or meaning” (Husserl 1970: 310). Husserl also, however, argued that perception is not a carrier of meaning (Husserl 1970: 680-7). Whether Husserl believed that perception has conceptual content—

**Bodily Dependence:** I can only perceive the box from a perspective. The box is close or far, in front of me, to the right, and so on. But this implicates my body: “The ‘far’ is far from me, from my Body; the ‘to the right’ refers back to the right side of my Body, e.g., to my right hand” (Husserl 1989: 166). Furthermore, my body is a locus, not only of the constituting sensations that undergo objective interpretation, but of kinesthetic sensations—sensations of active self-movement—that bear a functional relationship to the appearances of the box. As I turn my head left, the stationary box is supposed to “move” to the right of my visual field. I can tell the difference between an experience that presents the box as stationary and one that presents it as moving, despite their involving potentially identical visual sensations, because I am aware of my own kinesthetic sensations or lack thereof (see Husserl 1997: §50).

**Existence Independence:** The content/object distinction also underlies Husserl’s account of how nonveridical perception is possible. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl resolutely rejected the view that external perception involves any reference to an “immanent” object contained within the act itself. The box I see is on a table in a room, not in my mind. Nor is there anything box-like in my mind functioning as a sign or image of it. However, the act, with its content, can exist even when the object does not: “the object’s real being or non-being is irrelevant to the true essence of the perceptual experience” (Husserl 1970: 565-6). This holds for states of affairs as well. If I perceive a mannequin as a human, or a red thing as an orange thing, there is no guarantee that what I perceive is in fact a human or orange. The states of affairs that my experiences posit as real might not obtain. This is, moreover, a phenomenologically discoverable feature of the experience itself. While each experience provides reasons to believe in the reality of what it discloses, each also stands open to correction by future experience. As Husserl puts it, “this rational positing within perception is not an
absolute positing; it is like a force that can be overwhelmed by stronger counterforces” (Husserl 1997: 251). Only adequate perception guarantees the existence of its object. Accordingly, Husserl’s account also provides the resources to reject premise P1 of the Argument from Perceptual Error. If I hallucinate a box, my experience is a nonveridical perception of a box, not a veridical, much less adequate, perception of something else.

This summary barely scratches the surface of Husserl’s detailed analyses of perception, which became increasingly complex as he turned his attention to a genetic account of the “constitution”—that is, the processes in virtue of which objects make their appearance—of physical things from the passive givenness of primitively structured sense-fields to the constitution of modality-specific (visual, tactile, etc.) “phantoms” or “sensuous schemata” (Husserl 1989: §10) to the constitution of full-fledged material objects causally dependent on surrounding circumstances.

Finally, it remains an open question whether Husserl’s theory is a form of direct realism. In the Logical Investigations, Husserl was committed to the view that the objects of perception include ordinary things like trees and cats and their parts and features, and those sorts of objects are not “in” consciousness as parts. However, Husserl insisted that the distinction between immanent and transcendent objects is “prior to all metaphysics” (Husserl 1970: 568-9), so admitting that ordinary material objects are perceived doesn’t settle the question of their ontological status.

Moreover, Husserl’s claim that we directly perceive ordinary, transcendent objects is made much more problematic by the introduction of the much-disputed perceptual noema or the “perceived as such,” which is “the perceived, taken precisely as characterized phenomenologically” (Husserl 1989: 38). The noema is not the box (Husserl 1982: §89), and the box alone is what I perceive (Husserl 1982: §90). So, oddly, the “perceived as such” is not perceived. Elsewhere, however, Husserl depicted noemata as objects of perception, which dispels the oddity, but casts some doubt on the claim that we directly perceive ordinary objects.
3. Merleau-Ponty

Husserl’s theory of perception constituted a major shift away from the theory of ideas. If anything unites the major phenomenologists working on perception after Husserl, it is a rejection of the last vestiges of that theory remaining in Husserl’s theory, especially the view that perception involves the interpretation of intrinsically meaningless sensations.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is best known for emphasizing the role of the body in perception, and his work has probably informed contemporary discussions in both philosophy and cognitive science more than that of any other phenomenologist. Although Husserl had also drawn attention to the role of the body, and had distinguished between the objective body and the lived body, he still conceived of the lived body as constituted, through sensations of touch, for a constituting consciousness (Husserl 1989: §36). For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is itself the subject of perceptual experience, and there is no ego, transcendental or otherwise, standing behind it as a more fundamental subject. “In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 277). Not only that, but this body is, unlike transcendental consciousness (Husserl 1982: §49), essentially worldly, so we cannot regard the world itself as constituted by a transcendental subject. For Merleau-Ponty, as for Martin Heidegger, we are “through and through compounded of relationships with the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xiv). A proper understanding of perception can only occur when we examine, beneath the personal intentionality of thought, the anonymous, pre-personal intentionality of the body and the egocentrically oriented, often indeterminate world that it discloses.

Bodily intentionality is best revealed in motor intentionality, something which Husserl also discussed under the heading ‘passivity’, which we exercise in skillful activities such as typing or
driving a car. In typing, I don’t think about the location of the keys. My knowledge of their whereabouts is not something that I, as a center of consciousness, must represent, nor is it a kind of knowledge I can exercise without the assistance of my body. The knowledge constitutive of my typing ability is “knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 166). Or rather, the knowledge is in my body. In typing, as in walking or throwing a ball, my whole body cooperates to bring about the desired end. I sit down. My legs relax. My head turns towards the screen. Of course there is not some highly specific manner in which I must sit or turn my head. But part of my skill as a typist consists in understanding that. To master a skill such as typing or doing a handstand is to understand, corporeally rather than intellectually, the range of possible bodily attitudes compatible with its execution. This understanding is among the things that Schneider, a pathological patient discussed at length by Merleau-Ponty, lacks; his motor behavior tends to be either rigidly mechanistic or overtly conceptualized.

What has motor intentionality got to do with perception? Thanks to motor intentionality, a perceived object has a motor significance, the specific character of which determines, and is determined by, its perceived qualities. This becomes clear when we consider how objects can be more or less integrated into one’s own lived body, and how incorporating such an object alters the motor and perceptual significance of the world. Being skilled in the use of a cane does not involve interpreting sensations of pressure on one’s hands, but in perceiving with the stick. And with this skill, the perceived world expands. “Once the stick has become a familiar instrument, the world of feelable things recedes and now begins, not at the outer skin of the hand, but at the end of the stick” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 175-6). Similarly, when I bump the car in front of me while parking, I feel the impact out there, at the point of contact between the cars. Changes in one’s flesh-and-blood body often bring about comparable changes. When you visit your childhood bedroom as an adult, it is
typical to be surprised by how small it is. This is not because of any fault in your memory; it really looked larger then. Now, the distances and the amount of effort required to carry out former tasks have shrunk, and this change in motor significance carries with it—or rather is—a change in perceptual significance.

Because motor intentionality involves the whole body, so does perception. And because there is nothing more phenomenologically basic than the appearing of phenomena to the living body already immersed in a world brimming with significance, we cannot think of perception as being founded on the interpretation of non-intentional sensations. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

To the world or opinion, perception can appear as an interpretation. For consciousness itself, how could it be a process of reasoning since there are no sensations to provide it with premises, or an interpretation, since there is nothing prior to it to interpret? (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 43)

Though possibly intended as a repudiation of Husserl’s position, it is not at all clear that Husserl understood interpretation along these lines. Interpretation, for Husserl, is not a special kind of act that stands in a founding relation to perceptual experiences. Rather, for a sensation to undergo interpretation is for it to stand in a distinctive sort of relation with the intentional components of an act—to stand, as Husserl puts it, in a distinctive kind of “form of representation” (Husserl 1970: 740). Merleau-Ponty also argues that we cannot regard the senses themselves as providing isolated bits of data to be synthesized, through association (empiricism) or judgment (intellectualism), with other bits of such data. The box on the table calls upon my entire body and all of my senses; its durability, its heaviness, the coolness of its surface, are present to me as soon as I lay eyes on it. If it were made of glass rather than wood, this would not just constitute a change in “visual data.” Rather, it would then look fragile. Without thinking, I would exercise greater care as I reached for it.
I am able to pay special attention to the box’s visible shape and color, and my experience of them, when I assume a special, reflective attitude. In doing so, however, I do not discover constituents of my initial experience, but change its whole structure. The box that I see as durable, heavy, and so on is not what I see when, in the “highly particularized” attitude of reflection, I pay attention solely to the box’s visible shape and color (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 262). I then see a visual phantom, not because it was there all along, but for the first time and thanks to my own efforts.

Natural perception is something “which we achieve with our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of inter-acting senses,” and in atomizing my experience into visual or tactile data, I render it “unstable” and “alien” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 262). This is why, according to Merleau-Ponty, what we see and hear is not exhausted by what someone analyzing experiences into their “parts,” would consider to be strictly visible or audible. “A wooden wheel placed on the ground is not, for sight, the same thing as a wheel bearing a load” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 60), since sight, in natural perception, carries references to what can also be discovered by the other senses.

Synaesthesia is the norm. The sighted do not share tactile and auditory sensations with the blind, since sight—or its absence—changes the whole structure of experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 261).

4. Aron Gurwitsch

Like Merleau-Ponty, Aron Gurwitsch also emphasized the Gestalt-structure of perception, and argued vigorously against the “constancy hypothesis,” according to which “sense-data depend entirely upon, and are determined exclusively by, the corresponding physical stimuli” (Gurwitsch 1964: 90). Gurwitsch instead argued that the identity of any part or quality of a perceived object depends on its “functional significance” within an overall “Gestalt-contexture” (Gurwitsch 1964: 121). This is best revealed in the cases of ambiguous figures, such as Rubin’s famous faces/vase drawing:
Let us consider a certain segment of the boundary between the two areas. When the two faces are seen, the segment appears as the outline of the half-open mouth of the face to the right. When, however, the white goblet is perceived, the same segment is seen as the contour of a small projecting part of the goblet (Gurwitsch 1964: 118).

The segment’s functional significance changes without any change in the stimulus, contrary to the constancy hypothesis. Gurwitsch concludes: “the existence of a phenomenal datum is entirely determined by its functional significance for the contexture to which it belongs” (Gurwitsch 1964: 119).

Gurwitsch argued at length that the Gestalt-organization of the perceptual field is not imposed on unrelated sense-data by any agent or principle, but is intrinsic to the field itself (Gurwitsch 1964: 139). Moreover, every perceptual field essentially contains certain formal structures, including a theme, a thematic field, and a margin (Gurwitsch 1964: 55-6). In viewing the box, the box and its parts constitute the theme of my experience, that to which I am attending. Those parts are unified into a theme thanks to their Gestalt-coherence (Gurwitsch 1964: 354). All of the co-perceived objects having some relevance to the box comprise the thematic field. For instance, the table on which it rests is part of the thematic field because it partially accounts for the fact that the box is in the location it is. Finally, the margin of my perceptual field includes all of the objects, which are merely co-present with the box, such as the garbage truck I hear outside or the color of the leaves on the tree outside. It is also clear that on Gurwitsch’s view, every perceptual field is characterized by having an inner and outer horizon (Gurwitsch 1964: 237, 369). Interestingly, Husserl himself seems to put forward a view very much like this in some of his later works. The appearing aspects of a thing, he writes, “are nothing for themselves; they are appearances—of only through the intentional horizons that are inseparable from them” (Husserl 2001: 43).
Gurwitsch’s theory of Gestalt-contextures leads him to reject not only Husserl’s account of perception as the interpretation of sensations (Gurwitsch 1964: 265-7), but also the alleged data that Husserl’s theory was designed to explain. For Husserl, sensations stand in need of interpretation because the same sensations can present us with different sensible properties. For Gurwitsch, however, appearances cannot be identified with appearances in other Gestalt-contextures. The appearance of a brown surface would not, in another context, present me with a black or a tan object, because the appearance in question depends on precisely this Gestalt-contexture for its identity. While we can experience changes in functional significance of objects, parts, and features even while looking at identical physical objects and states of affairs, these changes affect the entire perceptual field. Instead of explaining such alterations of functional significance in terms of shifting interpretations of identical sensations, they can instead be accounted for in terms of changes in the Gestalt-contexture of the perceptual field, including changes in its horizon (Gurwitsch 1964: 272).

Gurwitsch also develops Husserl’s theory of the perceptual noema. The perceptual noema is “the material thing perceived from a given stand-point, in a determinate orientation with regard to the perceiving subject, under a certain aspect, etc.” (Gurwitsch 1964: 173). Each noema contains components directly given in sense-experience and an empty horizon; all of these depend for their identity on being bound up with the others (Gurwitsch 1964: 279) Each noema is also a meaning, insofar as it refers to the whole material object. Noemata are, furthermore, ideal (atemporal) entities, which do not arise and pass away with actual acts of perception (Gurwitsch 1964: 174) and are “uninvolved in any causal relations” (Gurwitsch 1964: 180). Finally, while no single perceptual noema is identical with any material object (Gurwitsch 1964: 175), a noema is not an appearance of a “hidden reality” or an image of an “original” (Gurwitsch 1964: 184). Rather, a material object just is a system of noemata, an “all-inclusive systematic grouping of its appearances” (Gurwitsch 1964: 184). Whether any of these claims constitutes a departure from Husserl is an interesting question.
Husserl, for instance, claims that a noema’s “esse consists exclusively of its ‘pericipi’” (Husserl 1982: 241), which is not, on his view, true of ideal objects like numbers and propositions. There is, moreover, no clear evidence that Husserl regarded material objects as systematic groupings of noemata, or that he thought it possible that any system of atemporal, causally inert entities could be identical with something that is temporal and causally efficacious. Nevertheless, Husserl’s and Gurwitsch’s accounts of the perceptual noema are not radically opposed in the way that their positions with respect to the reality of hyletic data are.

Despite his disagreements with Husserl on certain issues, Gurwitsch’s views are ultimately closer to his than to Merleau-Ponty’s. While Merleau-Ponty regarded the body as the ultimate agent and subject of perception, Gurwitsch argued that the “phenomenal body” can only be granted a role in the constitution of the perceived world to the extent that we are conscious of it. “Bodily phenomena may be resorted to only as experienced bodily phenomena” (Gurwitsch 1964: 305). And while our consciousness of the body may be unthematic, it is still consciousness, and we are, therefore, owed a phenomenological account of the constitution of the living body itself. For Gurwitsch, as for Husserl, all questions of the constitution of objects of any type “must be formulated and treated exclusively in terms of consciousness” (Gurwitsch 1964: 305).

5. Conclusion

Despite significant disagreements among major phenomenologists, there is a substantial overlapping consensus among them. All of them reject the Theory of Ideas. All of them emphasize the importance of horizons, the inadequacy and incompleteness of perceptual experiences, and the importance of the lived body in perceptual experience. And all of them agree that careful phenomenological reflection, in which we consult perception itself rather than our theories about what perception must be, can yield substantive results.
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**Further Reading**


