

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the science of the structure and contents of experience.

It studies phenomena, i.e. the **appearances** of things from the first-person perspective. A great variety of experiences is investigated this way, including perception, memory, imagination, thought, desire, emotion and agency.

According to **traditional phenomenology**, one important structure found in all the different types of experience is intentionality, meaning that all experience is **experience of something**. In this sense, experience is always directed at certain objects by means of its representational contents.

Experiences are in an important sense different from the objects of experience since experiences are not just presented but one lives through them.

Phenomenology is also concerned with the study of the conditions of possibility of phenomena that may shape experience differently for different people. These conditions include embodiment, culture, language and social background.

There are various different forms of phenomenology, which employ different methods. Central to traditional phenomenology associated with Edmund Husserl is the so-called **epoché**, also referred to as **bracketing**. In it, the researcher suspends their judgement about the external existence of objects in order to focus exclusively on the structure of the experience itself, i.e. on how these objects are presented.

An important method for studying the contents of experience is called **eidetic variation**. It aims at discerning their essence by imagining the object in question, varying its features and assessing whether the object can survive this imaginary change. Only features that cannot be changed this way belong to the object's essence.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, by contrast, gives more importance to our pre-existing familiarity with experience. It tries to comprehend how this pre-understanding brings with it various forms of interpretation that shape experience and may introduce distortions into it.

Neurophenomenology, on the other hand, aims at bridging the gap between the first-person perspective of traditional phenomenology and the third-person approach favoured by the natural sciences. This happens by looking for connections between subjective experience and objective brain processes, for example, with the help of brain scans.