

The noema in Husserl's phenomenology

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Edmund Husserl's theory of the noema has precipitated considerable controversy within the arena of Husserlian studies. Various interpretations of the noema have surfaced over the years, particularly in response to a 1969 paper by Dagfinn Føllesdal. With many enlistees in the debate, one would think that some resolution might finally have been reached. Yet several crucial issues require clarification so that Husserl's unique contribution to the study of human experience can become more obvious, both to phenomenologists and non-phenomenologists alike. For the theory of the noema is at the very center of Husserl's descriptions of human experience and is intended to function as a unifying core within an account of the various types of consciousness. But the very fact that the noema must display such unity within diversity makes an adequate and thorough account of it difficult. Also, the doctrine of the noema is one element of a complex description of consciousness uncovered by the method employed by Husserl. An understanding of noema both gains from and grants access to that methodological domain called phenomenology.

In light of these points, it would be best to locate Husserl's discussion of the noema within a sufficiently broad context. Consequently, this paper will first outline the aspects of experience which Husserl's theory of noema is meant to address. Second, it will describe the various uses of the term 'noema' and thereby sort out two different levels of usage and, third, will then demonstrate that the interpretations of some commentators, informed by their particular understandings of Husserlian method, cannot adequately account for important aspects of Husserl's program and methodology. Finally, in light of these considerations, I hope to clear a path through the ambiguities in Husserl's theory of the noema so that we might do justice to the complexities of experience that Husserl hoped to describe.

I. Function and noema

What function is Husserl's theory of the noema intended to perform? In general, it provides the underpinning of the concept of intentionality, one of the chief tenets of Husserl's thought. According to Husserl, consciousness is always consciousness of..., it is always related to some object or other.¹ In spelling out this notion of intentionality, Husserl speaks of a correlation between what he calls 'noesis' and 'noema'. These technical terms are meant to displace the traditional categories of subject and object. 'Noema' is the term for the "object" side of the intentional relationship, while 'noesis' is the term for the "subject" side, the really inherent (*reell*), ongoing conscious processes (*Erlebnisse*). Together noesis and noema display the necessary correlativity that consciousness has with its intended object or objectivity. Its relationality is such that Husserl will describe it as a necessary interconnectedness of the "subjective" and "objective" sides of experience.² As a necessarily essential aspect of the intentionality of consciousness, the correlativity of noesis/noema speak to the essential structures of consciousness in general, in other words, to structures that are essential to any type of conscious activity, as well as to various other types of conscious processes. This distinction between consciousness in general and specific types of conscious activity in particular must be maintained, for part of the difficulty cited above was the fact that 'noema' functions as a unitary element that is "the same" in consciousness in general and "the same" in the many types of conscious activity, even though in the latter many types 'noema' indicates many types of noema. Since both the generic consciousness and these specific types are the goal of the eidetic search within phenomenology, this search more than likely begins with reduced individual conscious activities of specific types, so that we could encounter 'noema' as elements of the individual activity first, and then move through eidetic variation to find the essence 'noema'. Many commentators gloss over these distinctions, even when Husserl is careful to indicate at what level he is discussing "noema." In this paper I adopt the practice of speaking of either 'noema in general', or 'specified noema in general' (e.g., 'perceptual in general' or 'depictive noema in general'), or 'the individual noema', that is, the noema that is the "object" side of an individual conscious activity. Where 'noema' stands alone, it means 'noema in general', since my paper is most interested in understanding Husserl's theory of the general structures of consciousness.

The theory of noema is intended to make a second point about

consciousness in general: in some way all conscious activities contain an element of “meaning.” This point is indicated through an element essential to the noema, the noematic sense – in German, *Sinn*. It is over the implications of Husserl’s discussion of *Sinn* that the greatest debates still rage, in part due to the varying usages to which the term ‘noema’ is put. It identifies both (1) the object-correlates of consciousness (and we have just noted three understandings of this usage) and (2) the term itself as a device of theoretical description. The debates center on two points: one, the fact that Husserl describes the notion of noema as a generalization of the notion of linguistic meaning, and, two, the way in which, in *Ideas I*, Husserl draws much of the structures for describing noema in general from the example of perceptual experience.

Let us examine the first point. It is the key issue in both the Føllesdal and the McIntyre/Smith approach to the noema. This approach takes its origin, but not all of its evidence, from a text in Husserl’s *Ideas III*, which notes that noema is a generalization or universalization of the notion of linguistic or conceptual meaning (*Bedeutung*) to all types of conscious activities: “The noema in general is, however, nothing further than the universalization of the idea of signification [i.e., linguistic meaning] to the total province of the acts.”³ Noema is said to be the formal embodiment of the *Sinn* of the conscious occurrence, with *Sinn* variously translated as ‘sense’ or ‘meaning.’ Neither *Sinn* nor noema, however, should be immediately identified with linguistic or conceptual meaning. In *Ideas I* Husserl clearly states that there is a distinction between *Sinn* and linguistic meaning. For instance, he indicates that the two terms have varying extensions, *Sinn* having a far broader denotation than *Bedeutung* (*Ideas I*, § 124).⁴

Other indications exist that Husserl intends his use of ‘*Sinn*’ to underline the fact that there is always a “meaning” to every experience, whether this experience is linguistic and displays meaning in the traditional sense, or is another kind of experience, such as perception, and somehow embodies a sense of “meaning.” We will see in a moment how this generalization of linguistic meaning to every type of experience might not, in itself, imply that sense (*Sinn*) in this broad context is identical with what is usually called conceptual meaning, but only that something resembling linguistic meaning is present in every experience.

More importantly, I do not think that Husserl intends “universalization of” to be taken in its fully logical sense. Yet how might this phrase be taken? Here is my suggestion for rendering the text: rather

than characterizing *Sinn* as a universalization or “generalization of,” let us speak of it as a “generalization from”; a careful delineation of the two phrases will help us avoid ambiguity and thus see more precisely Husserl’s intent. I will use the phrase “generalization from” to indicate an activity that takes one or several elements from a notion (as articulated in its definition) and applies it/them to what might be essentially different in other respects. In the case of ‘linguistic meaning’, I want to claim that such is Husserl’s intent — he is taking one or more of its essential components — but not all — and saying that they apply to nonlinguistic activities. In contrast, a “generalization of,” understood in the full logical sense, occurs when we recognize that a notion not only applies accurately to the usual group of individuals but also is appropriately used for one type or several other groups of individuals. Thus, many interpreters take Husserl’s claim concerning noema as generalization from meaning to be a “generalization of” in this sense, claiming that what is true of linguistic meaning must then apply not only to the group of idealities commonly identified as words or statements or whatever, but also is true in Husserl’s mind of all types of activities not normally taken to be linguistic. Thus a generalization of the notion of linguistic meaning would find that the notion, *in toto*, characterizes other, seemingly nonlinguistic activities, such as the perception of physical things or aesthetic observation. It is this latter claim that my distinction of phrases undermines.

In terms of its logical import, a generalization from is always weaker than a generalization of, but the former does not necessarily preclude the latter. Husserl’s preliminary characterizations of the noema place the concept under the former rubric. Certain further claims by Husserl about the noema or aspects of the noema, such as the noematic *Sinn*, might cause readers to see the noema, in whole or in part, as falling under the latter rubric as well. It is against such an interpretation that I have argued and will continue to argue in the rest of the paper by showing that noema in general is not a type of linguistic meaning, although some types of noema are essentially linguistic.

The second difficulty for interpreters of noema is Husserl’s use of the perceptual example during the eidetic or technical delineation of the noema. The manner of use has led some commentators to overlook certain limitations of this example, some of which Husserl himself may not have seen clearly.⁵ Some aspects of Husserl’s descriptions of the perceptual noema are often incorporated into the eidetic articulation of noema in general. But, while the perceptual noema must share all eidetic characteristics of noema in general, the reverse is not the case. Care must be taken to clarify when Husserl is describing percep-

tion as an example of experience in general or when he is giving it as it is in itself – and thus with some essentialities not shared by all other types of conscious activity. We will return to this point later.

The mention of “eidetic articulation” here raises the issue of method, a topic of crucial interest in understanding the function of noema in Husserl. A brief investigation of Husserl’s method seems called for in order to set the parameters within which Husserl operates, since it is these parameters by which Husserl hopes to accomplish one of his principal goals in doing phenomenology – the justification of scientific knowledge insofar as this knowledge is rooted in the operative belief of our everyday attitude.

Within the limits set by his method, Husserl uncovers certain essential aspects or characteristics of his subject matter, the sphere of consciousness in general. One such aspect is what Husserl terms the noema. A clear understanding of the noema must grow out of an accurate grasp of the method which, so to speak, produces it. The phenomenological method can be abstractively separated into four elements: a move into reflection, the phenomenological epoche, the use of free imaginative variation in order to bring up essences available for eidetic insight, and the description of these essences.⁶ Given these elements, how does the method work and what does it yield? Rather than describe each element, it should suffice to note certain aspects of method relevant to the discussion of noema. (I should also note that the order given is not the only one possible for producing the desired phenomenological results, but we can return to this point later.)

First, the shift into a reflective stance upon our individual conscious processes is not necessarily, in and of itself, a shift into a transcendental stance. But the reflection in which Husserl is interested is what he terms “phenomenological” and consequently must become engaged with the other element of method, the phenomenological reduction. Also, when we are reflecting on and thus attending to ongoing conscious processes rather than to their usual objects, we do not discontinue the previously unreflected experiences but continue living through them, although with some “modification” of the experiences. And, although reflection does not immediately yield the “objects” sought by phenomenology (since the latter are essences, not individuals), it keeps us rooted to the “*Sache selbst*.”⁷

Second, the phenomenological epoche “purifies” what I am reflecting upon by making me aware of the transcendental import of what is before me. More importantly, it marks out the territory in which I should be interested and defines my interest in that sphere.

Rather than being concerned with my individual empirical/factual self and ego, my empirical history, my being and experiencing as an actual living human being, I become interested in my individual self or ego as the *ground* for my conscious experiences as a human ego. Epoche, then, is primarily a change of attitude, a shift in interest, that in itself puts other interests and their embedded positings out of the range of my new interest, to the extent that I no longer act in them.

Third, imaginative variation upon my individual experiencings with their objects – both of which are given in reflection – this variation leads me to eidetic insight or vision, a seeing of the essences “in person,” of what is essentially the case in general, in regard to these experiencings. And if indeed we have carried out the phenomenological epoche prior to this step, then the seeing of these essences is marked by this epoche, is somehow different from what such eidetic vision would be outside the reduction (a vision which is possible, in Husserl’s eyes). Consequently, the essences are given with a purity and clarity – although they may not be given with completeness. The phenomenological ideal for this step is apodictically evidenced essences.

Fourth, my description of these essences, takes place by means of a natural language. Any such language has a long history and a system of symbols and meanings already in place. While using this language in order to describe what is seen, the phenomenologist must take care to capture the eidetic insight as accurately as possible, even if a radicalization of language is necessary.⁸ Husserl indicates that phenomenology as a descriptive eidetic science is unlike exact eidetic sciences (such as geometry) both in the types of concepts it uses and the correlative essences that it attempts to express. The concepts are descriptive rather than “ideal” and exact, and the essences are morphological rather than ideal.⁹ Phenomenology, of course, may run across such exact idealities – that is, when it investigates those types of conscious activities that have them as their objects.

Does this method accomplish the goals of phenomenology? Let us look at one interpretation of Husserl’s noema that would claim it does not. Hubert Dreyfus focuses on the perceptual noema and claims that it is like the noema of judgment. According to Dreyfus, neither perceptual nor judgmental noema can be identified as the perceived object, for each is an ideal entity while the perceived object is not. In consequence, using the language of linguistic philosophy, Dreyfus thinks we must concede that, given Husserl’s method, both perception and judgement would be understood as referentially opaque: “The phenomenological reduction ... generalizes referential opacity beyond

the sphere of its everyday application, extending it to all, even filling, acts [e.g., those of perception].”¹⁰ To establish his point, Dreyfus cites certain phrases designating the intentional correlates of judgment and perception: “what is judged” and “what is perceived.”¹¹ For Husserl, in judgement, what is judged, i.e., the judgement, is the judgemental noema and is *not* the object about which one is judging. Dreyfus then argues that, in parallel fashion, that is perceived must be the perceptual noema, but cannot be the object perceived, and Dreyfus takes this latter point to establish the referential opacity of perception. If Dreyfus is correct, Husserl’s method only succeeds in showing us that perception is not what we, in the natural attitude, would consider it to be. We human beings believe that our perceptions are referentially transparent, so Husserl’s phenomenology would not fulfill its purpose and give an essential description of perception as we “naturally” experience it. Of course, on the Dreyfusian view of phenomenology, it could show that experience is not at all what it seems and, in fact, not even essentially what it seems. But can we and Husserl be satisfied with this result, particularly when we recall one of the principal tasks of phenomenology, the justification of scientific knowledge. Husserl needs to justify the belief in the spatio-temporal world and consequently the ability to experience this reality as it is. When he moves into the epoche, he discovers a “hidden” truth about this reality (as do many philosophers), but he never refutes the ordinary belief underlying everyday life. Rather he attempts to show how it comes about and is rationally justified in a non-metaphysical sense.

II. An interpretation of noema

We must keep in mind this important question, since in light of the debate over Husserl’s theory of noema it concerns the extent to which this theory helps Husserl meet this central objective in doing phenomenology. It is mandatory for those interested in the overall objectives of Husserl’s phenomenology to find a new interpretation of noema in general that will avoid the pitfalls noted thus far. Such an interpretation of noema will be presented here; it will differ in part from both “schools of thought” on the subject, that following Gurwitsch and that of Føllesdal. It centers on the connection between noema and object. Husserl offers a clue when he states that “the color of the [noema] tree trunk ... is precisely the ‘same’ as the one which, before the phenomenological reduction, we took to be the color of the actual

tree....”¹² This passage indicates that between the perceived object and its properties, on the one hand, and the noema with its noematic *Sinn* and its predicates, on the other, there is an *identity*, but also a *difference*, since ‘same’ is placed in quotation marks. This difference between noema and perceived object stems from the change in attitude called the phenomenological epoche.¹³

Husserl frequently identifies how one is to mark this difference brought on by the epoche: one uses inverted commas, that is, quotation marks, around the term ‘object’ when as phenomenologists we discuss an object experienced within the natural attitude. There is, however, another way of discussing “objects” and their “properties” within the epoche, and it is this way with which I will introduce another interpretation of noema in general.¹⁴

One methodological point can be clarified here: within the epoche we often use examples to describe essential characteristics of consciousness, etc. In using such examples, we must use quotation marks to show “reduced” objects:

E1. When I reflect upon my perception of this “table” in front of me, I can see that it has an “oblong” shape; this “object” with its “property” is correlated with certain specific elements of my current perceiving.

But alternatively I might want to be more direct or use what is called a metalanguage, a technical language to describe this perceptual experience and thus avoid all the quotation marks. Husserl provides us with such a notation. We can discuss “objects” of our conscious experience by using the technical designation, ‘noema’. And we can discuss different components of these “objects” with technical designations; for example, we can refer to their “properties” with the technical term ‘Objective predicates’. Of the table, then, I might say:

E2. This noema, the “table,” contains the Objective predicate, “oblong,” a predicate which is correlated to the characteristics of the current sensation.

This interpretation of noema notes the fact that the noema is found through, not invented by, phenomenological reflection.¹⁵

Noema is an essential component of any conscious process, but an element that is not itself a really inherent (*reell*) component. That is, noema in general is not itself a conscious process. Given any specific

type of noema, perceptual or otherwise, the above claim concerning the identity/difference of noema and object can be made. “The same” is viewed differently – on the one hand, *what* I am conscious of from within the natural attitude; on the other hand, the same object, now as I view it within the phenomenological epoche that establishes a “new” attitude and thus a new vocabulary.

On this view of noema in general some descriptions of noema are actually descriptions of “object as experienced,” while other claims concerning noema apply only to noema where it is recognized as technical designation. We might articulate this point by noting the level of discourse involved: on the one hand, we use the term ‘noema’ and denote a specific “experienced object as experienced” – we will call this type of use a “first-order” use of the term ‘noema’. On the other hand, we recognize that the term ‘noema’ is a technical one and its various usages are described – we will call this type of use “second-order,” for it is one which arises within the phenomenologist’s self-critical reflection upon the method. These differences must be made clear, despite the identity of term, because the failure to understand them gives rise to misinterpretations of some claims by Husserl concerning ‘noema’,¹⁶ particularly a misapplication across types of noema (i.e., from perceptual to judgmental) and from specific types to noema in general.

We can now classify the types of statements in which the term ‘noema’ can occur. These types fall into two broad categories indicated above by the terms “first-order” and “second-order” usage. Within the first-order, however, we must note a further distinction, depending on the aspect of the individual conscious experience with which we are concerned:

1. *First-order use #1*: we use the term ‘noema’ when describing a particular experienced “object,” that is, when giving an example of “experienced object as experienced.” In this type of description natural attitude terms (including “object”) are placed in quotation marks (thus: “tree,” “red”). But the term ‘noema’ can replace any phrase denoting the specific “object as experienced” and thus serves as a handy technical shorthand. For example, ‘The noema, e.g., this “tree,” has “green leaves” and “apples.”¹⁷ This statement makes clear that we are within the epoche and that the tree and its properties are phenomenologically reduced. And we can tell such a statement is an exemplification because neither every specific noema nor noema in general has “apples.”

2. *First-order use #2*: we use the term ‘noema’ when describing an

experienced “object” in general as we regard it from within the epoche. This type of statement might mention a specific example or speak of “objects” of experience not in general, but in either case the statement makes a claim about *any* object of experience *qua* object of experience. For example, “The noema, e.g., a “tree,” does not burn up, while a tree does’. Here, although a specific “object” is mentioned (a “tree”), the claim concerning burning is true of any “experienced object” – is true of any noema.

This example illustrates something of the implications of the identity/difference claims concerning noema. Of course, a tree can burn up – it is a natural object (and this one claim is not made within the epoche); but a “tree” cannot burn up although a “tree” can “burn up” and often “does.” For here “tree” is a tree-being-viewed-from-within-the-epoche, and we cannot ascribe a natural characteristic to a “tree” in the same way we can to a tree while within the natural attitude. We should not even make natural attitude ascriptions (in the usual sense) while within the epoche, but we can note – in a technically specified way – such ascriptions as they have been made within the natural attitude – thus, we can say of the “tree” that it “burns.” Put another way, if we said ‘This “tree” burns’, we would be misusing language within the epoche.

3. *Second-order use*: we use the term ‘noema’ when referring to the term *as* used in either 1. or 2. In other words, we can make claims concerning the phenomenologically technical function of the term, that is, claims noting the denotation or connotation. For example, ‘The noema is the intended as such, the noema is the perceived as perceived, the judged as judged, etc.’ This statement’s intent could be clarified by putting it in a wordy way: ‘The term “noema” is used to indicate the intended as such, to point to the perceived as perceived, the judged as judged, etc.’ That is, the term ‘noema’ is used to note those characteristics of the “object” side of conscious experience which are uncovered from within the epoche. We thus use ‘noema’ in the second-order mode to give essential descriptions of noema in general – and often in such a way that this second-order use and that of the first-order can easily become confused. For they both explain noema in general. To be more accurate, however, we should say that first-order use #2 speaks of noema in general, second-order speaks of ‘noema in general’.

In summary, then, this interpretation of noema claims that ‘noema’ is a technical term within phenomenology. The term ‘noema’ is used in place of “object” when discussion specifies an “experienced object”

or speaks of “experienced object as experienced” in general (first-order #1 and #2). ‘Noema’ is used to designate the technical term ‘noema’ recognized as such. This double-order interpretation of noema provides a framework within which to understand specific claims by Husserl concerning noema, both noema in general and the perceptual noema in particular (as well as other specific types of noema). Together with an accurate interpretation of phenomenological method, this double-order view of noema could clarify those Husserlian statements which have led to alternative interpretation of the noema, particularly the “noema-as-concept” view already illustrated by Dreyfus’ position.

Further, the double-order interpretation of noema can provide a coherent clarification of characteristics attributed to noema by Husserl, as well as those characteristics attributed to other related terms such as *Sinn* and object. The characteristics of particular importance for this discussion include ‘*nicht reell*’ and ‘*irreell*’ (both translated variously as ‘irreal’, ‘not real’, or ‘nonreal’), both ‘*ideal*’ and ‘*ideell*’ (each translated as ‘ideal’), and ‘pure’ and ‘abstract’ (cognates of the German terms). Any discussion of these terms must be accompanied by a accurate schematization of noema in general, so that even when such characteristics are ascribed to only a part of the noema, the intent of such an ascription can be made clear. We will take up this point in a moment.

First, a brief look at how the double-order view of noema has bearing on our understanding of phenomenological method. Consider this point: in what order do we undertake reflection and the epoche? One answer sees the epoche as a “revision” of reflection, that is, reflection is first accomplished in a nonphenomenological way and then “purified” by the epoche. The double-order interpretation of noema is relevant to this question because it concerns where exactly the “inverted commas” go when we are within the epoche. This point is crucial, for the answer tells us what is put out of action by the epoche. According to my interpretation, the “inverted commas,” the quotation marks, go around any natural-attitude ascription one comes across after moving into the phenomenological attitude; and one can make this move either before or after becoming reflective. The alternative interpretation of reflection claims that it is post-reductive.¹⁸

Under my interpretation, the parenthesizing of the epoche would put a “marker” on the positing/position layer of the act being reflected upon, for example, a perception of a tree. Where this act involves a correlation of certain belief on the noetic side and real existence on the noematic side, both the belief and the being would still

be “in” that particular reflected-upon act, but the correlata would be marked as something in which we as active – now active as reflecting – no longer take part. In this model we would have available to us the full concretum of external perceptions with their positional aspects, but with a modification tag attached to these latter. This interpretation seems to conform to Husserl’s use of quotation marks around the perceived object’s name and the name of its “real” characteristics, including its reality. We see him speaking of a “tree” with its “green leaves,” etc. These quotation marks indicate that, within the epoche, a neutralization of the position-taking of the reflected-upon act, not of the reflecting act, has taken place. Remember that the latter has its own positing character, but as an act of immanent perceiving it is directed primarily at the reflected upon act such that its positing is correlated with the “position” on the side of the reflected upon object, i.e., here a conscious act.

A different view of what is parenthesized by the transcendental epoche would say that the positing ordinarily taking place in the reflecting act itself would be put out of action, and thus the modification tag would be on the position taken in regard to the reflected upon act (not the position taken by the reflected upon act).¹⁹ Under this view, there is a reflection (an immanent perception) directed upon a conscious process, for instance, an ongoing transcendent perceiving of a tree. In the ordinary everyday attitude such a reflection would usually incorporate a certain belief in the “real” existence of the reflected-upon perceiving as just noted (with its “existing” transcendent object). According to that view, in the epoche this reflectional positing with its correlative position would be parenthesized. If such were the case, it would seem that the marks used by Husserl to indicate parenthesization would have to be placed around the characteristics of the reflected-upon act and not those of the object of this act (at least not directly). Similarly, if the reflected-upon object is an eidetic intuiting, then the epoche would put out of action the “usual” positing by that intuiting of the being-characteristic of the intuited essence. Yet in this latter case Husserl would surely object, for it is certain of these essences, when given to insight in a particular way, that provide the final grounding not only of the reasonableness of the natural attitude and natural sciences, but also of the truths of phenomenology itself. It must be only certain conscious activities whose positings are put out of play; it cannot be every activity that we are able to reflect upon.

III. Noema as “concept”

Let us look now at a more important implication of the double-order interpretation of noema, in particular by analysing alternative interpretations of noema, specifically the type of interpretation that views noema in general (together with one component of it, the noematic *Sinn*) as very much like, if not identical with, linguistic meaning. Dagfinn Føllesdal was among the first and most influential writers to approach the notion of noema in this way. His exposition gives a clear indication of the particular points of Husserl’s texts which must be addressed when interpreting the noema. Look first at the eighth of his twelve theses: “Noemata are abstract entities.” The meaning of ‘abstract’ in this context is not fully articulated by Føllesdal, although it seems at least to exclude physical existence on the part of the noema and hence also excludes ordinary spatial and temporal determination. And, as Thesis 9 goes on to state: “Noemata are not perceived through our senses” — a point which follows from the previous claims, since only physical objects as such are sensually perceivable. Given the logical move that Føllesdal makes from his eighth to his ninth thesis, we can see that it is of greatest importance to seek out the textual backing for the claim concerning “abstractness” as applied to noema, both when taken in general and when speaking of the perceptual noema.²⁰

For abstractness can be taken to mean that noema is a *conceptual* entity, has conceptual rather than physical existence. If such is Føllesdal’s intention, then many would say that his view leads in the wrong direction.²¹ For, in light of the double-order theory, noema when understood in a certain way is the object of the conscious experience, but this claim might not be true of noema in general. Specifically, in the case of perceptual experience, the noema is, in a specific sense, identical with the perceived object and thus could not possibly be a conceptual entity.

Føllesdal himself does not yet explicitly state that noema is in essence a conceptual entity, but several of his younger colleagues have indeed done so. Richard McIntyre and David Smith boldly state that “Husserl identifies intentional contents, or noemata, with the meanings [*Bedeutungen*] that are expressed in language.”²² The sense of noematic *Sinn* here at issue is only one element of the total noema; it appears to be what is also termed by Husserl the “pure objective sense” or noematic nucleus in a narrow sense, taken in abstraction from the “subjective” modes of appearance (such as “perceptual”). McIntyre and Smith argue from what they call the “expressibility thesis” — Hus-

serl's claim that every noematic *Sinn* is in principle *expressible* in language. From this claim, which Husserl indeed makes, McIntyre and Smith conclude that every noematic *Sinn* is a linguistic meaning.²³ I will call the latter claim the "identification thesis." It is quite clearly a logically different claim from the expressibility thesis, a point that McIntyre and Smith must understand, since they devote much space attempting to show that the identity of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* follows logically from the expressibility thesis.

McIntyre and Smith are careful to note several claims which are not included in either the expressibility or the identification thesis. The expressibility thesis does not state that (1) all acts are intrinsically linguistic,²⁴ and neither it nor the identification thesis states that (2) every *Sinn* is actually expressed, (3) some actual (natural) language is rich enough to express every *Sinn*, or (4) other elements of the noema, not including noematic *Sinn*, are expressible.²⁵ Only the first point will be considered here. In rejecting the notion that for Husserl all acts are intrinsically linguistic, McIntyre and Smith are apparently disclaiming one way that we might understand their identification thesis. That is, if we take that thesis (*Sinn* is *Bedeutung*) together with Husserl's insistence on the essentially necessary correlation of act (noesis) and noema, we could reasonably conclude that in McIntyre and Smith's view all acts would have to be linguistic in some essential way. McIntyre and Smith forestall this obvious inference by their disclaimer — of course, identifying *Sinn* with linguistic meaning does not include an essential description of every act as linguistic. Such a claim clearly violates commonsense.

But we cannot accept this as an end to the discussion. Let us look more closely at this problem, clarifying first what is meant by Husserl's thesis of the essential correlation of noesis and noema. According to this thesis, every element on the side of noema is necessarily correlated with an element on the side of noesis.²⁶ Husserl's elaboration of these correlations occupies much of Part Three of *Ideas I*. The main idea embodied within this claim is that wherever some character, some aspect or whatever is found on the side of the noema, then there is essentially connected with it a character, an aspect or whatever on the side of the noesis. The essential connection here is termed constitution or consciousness' relation with its intensive object. Now, given the correlation thesis of Husserl and assuming that McIntyre and Smith are correct in claiming that noematic *Sinn* is in every instance a linguistic meaning, then there would have to be some linguistic aspect on the side of the noesis essentially correlated with that noematic aspect,

and thus all acts would have to be in some sense linguistic. If, alternatively, the identification thesis is not making a claim about the essential character of all acts, then what are McIntyre and Smith doing – making merely a factual claim? Are they simply noting that each noematic *Sinn* just happens to be linguistic? Yet their *identification* of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* seems to be a much stronger point.

So what, then, do McIntyre and Smith mean by this identification? Can they get around the above factual/contingent vs. essential dichotomy by saying that some acts are superficially linguistic or quasi-linguistic, given their correlation to a noema that is, on McIntyre and Smith's account, in part essentially linguistic? This move, however, cannot resolve the problem. The identification thesis seems to abrogate Husserl's thesis of the essential correlation of noesis and noema. McIntyre and Smith can refute this point only by showing that in reflecting on each and every type of act, upon a transcendent perception for instance, one would uncover an essentially linguistic element on the side of the noesis and could consequently account for the linguisticity on the side of the noema as McIntyre and Smith understand it. The possibilities are few, since the noematic *Sinn* of perception contains only the core elements of the predicates and their "object simpliciter"; the noetic elements correlated to these noematic elements are the sensuous hyletic data and, perhaps, the adumbrating that takes them as giving an object so characterized by those predicates. It would be difficult to see either of these as *essentially* linguistic.

We must pursue the perceptual example further at this point, since it is in perception and other "intuitive" (*auffassende*) acts that this identification thesis displays the greatest disruptive force. If McIntyre and Smith are correct in their identification thesis, then for their interpretation to be internally consistent the claim that noematic *Sinn* in all types of acts is identical with linguistic meaning would apply to perception – the perceptual noematic *Sinn* would be an ideal and conceptual entity. (Husserl agrees that *Bedeutung* is ideal and conceptual; he would not say as much of *Sinn* in general.) A consequence of this interpretation of noematic *Sinn* is that perception could not reach a perceptual object in the sense usually understood in everyday experience. Perception would reach an ideal object rather than a real object, it would "really" get only to an ideal entity which would refer ("point") to the "perceived object" that we, when outside the phenomenological attitude, naively believe to be what we see. This purportedly perceived object is the intentional object of the perception, it is the object toward which the perception is intently related.

But, in McIntyre and Smith's interpretation, this intensive relatedness is reduced to an appendage of the relatedness of noesis to noema. Of course, McIntyre and Smith do note accurately that the perceptual noematic *Sinn* (as they understand it) is *not* identical with the perceptual *object*; to claim otherwise would be to overlook crucial discussions in several Husserlian texts, notably Part Four of *Ideas I*. However, the mere admission by McIntyre and Smith of this point does not in and of itself turn aside implications flowing logically from their position, and one implication is that perception could not actually be of – in the sense of 'reach' – this perceptual object. Since McIntyre and Smith want to say also that perception is not of the perceptual noema in the sense of intensive directness, their interpretation presents us with a quandary – how can the perceiving act be intensively directed toward a perceptual object (agreed to by both Husserl and McIntyre and Smith) but not reach that object except in some peculiar way via an essentially linguistic entity called the perceptual noema (an implication of McIntyre and Smith's interpretation)?

McIntyre and Smith's point concerning the "ideality" of noema is an interesting one, because it does have some textual grounding – that is, Husserl does describe noema as ideal. It is thus crucial to see what he means by the term 'ideal' and whether his descriptions of noema support McIntyre and Smith's view of *Sinn* as conceptual/linguistic. Let us see with what results the double-order view of noema can be read into the various phrases describing noema. With this double-order view, we can maintain that the noema is not ideal in McIntyre and Smith's sense, that perceptual noema and perceived object are both the same and different, thus avoiding the quandary noted above. Following that discussion we can look again at whether transcendent perception can "reach" its object, as it is understood to do within the natural attitude – a crucial matter for Husserl's phenomenology.

The most important evidence for the Føllesdal and McIntyre/Smith interpretation are Husserl's frequent claims that noema and its *Sinn* are *nicht reell*, *irreell*, and *ideell*. Do these terms in their very application to noema support the claim that noema and its *Sinn* are conceptual? Look, for example, at § 97 of *Ideas I*, where Husserl tells us that, while noesis and hyle are *reell* (really inherent) components in their intensive conscious experience, noema is *nicht reell*, that is, in some sense not itself "within" the conscious experience although an essential component of it. In the next section Husserl uses what appears to be an alternative term for '*nicht reell*' and that is '*ideell*', which he carefully places in quotation marks (inverted commas, as Husserl calls them):

As characteristics belonging to what is, so to speak, “ideally inherent” [*Ideellen*], they [modes of object’s givenness] are themselves “ideal” [*ideell*] and not really inherent [*reell*].

The use of the quotation marks occurring at this point around a term said to characterize the noema must be noted carefully, for it is both interesting and provocative in this case – and may be sufficiently important for establishing a point. Husserl says of the noema, of its *Sinn*, and of the Objective predicates comprised by the *Sinn* that they are “ideal” – the German “*ideell*.” In the text this term as so applied always occurs in quotation marks. What could be Husserl’s intent with such a usage, one not accompanying the term with which it is contrasted, *reell*? Compare this usage with other explicitly mentioned uses of the marks throughout the discussions of noema. These we mentioned in the above delineation of the double-order view of noema – when speaking within the epoche of a natural attitude object we must use such marks both for “object” and for its characteristics such as “red,” “tree,” “burns” (see §§ 89 and 130). Is Husserl following this practice here – i.e., is the term “*ideell*” enclosed in marks to designate it as a reduced characteristic of an intentional object? Such cannot be so, for “*ideell*” is ascribed of the noema in essence, that is, of noema in general, rather than of an “object.”

Another understanding of “*ideell*” with its marks comes from a comparison with the more usual use of the term, *ideell*, as it is ascribed to the type of objectivities called concepts or ideas, including but not limited to the Kantian Idea. We could say that the latter usage of *ideell* is primary, while that in marks is secondary and thus incorporates only some of the connotative contents of *ideell* in its primary sense (this distinction parallels the early discussion of generalization from and to). The primary sense incorporates all the essentially necessary components of the conceptual nature of an idea. For example, a concept or idea is constitutively found by consciousness as an objectivity that, while seemingly proceeding from the constitutive intellectual activities of an individual’s consciousness, takes on (even, has) a life of its own. Part of this “life” is the “survivability” – an idea can (but does not always) last beyond the moment of constitution, is capable of being detached from that moment. In a word, ideas can transcend the moment of their constitution, they are transcendent to the temporality of constituting, not immanent within it and thus bound to it.

Another characteristic essential to ideas is that in their transcen-

dence, they retain their total self-sameness across moments of constitution. At a moment subsequent to its originary formation, I can think exactly the same idea – with its identity given totally. I can also subsequently change that idea, build on it, etc., but then it could become a different idea. Given an idea's detachability from the constituting consciousness, its transcendence and its total self-sameness, the idea is also said to be a-temporal, not characterized in its essential being as temporally determined. Even though the idea is originally constituted at some "point" within the flowing of a consciousness, this temporality is not essential to the idea as idea, but is only incidental to the specific idea as a constituted objectivity.

Now, since Husserl does say of noema *not* that it is *ideell*, but that it is "*ideell*", then the noema per se cannot be an idea, not totally as an idea in its essence. Yet as equivalent to *nicht reell*, the term "*ideell*" does capture certain determinations of *ideell* in the primary sense laid out above. As "*ideell*" the noema is in a sense "detachable" from consciousness as the streaming processes, for noema is not really inherently (*nicht reell*) part of this stream. Husserl also thus speaks of noema as "transcendent" and I think the previous noninherence is meant here (in *Ideas I* Husserl notes several uses of the pair transcendence and immanence). Thus "*ideell*" (in marks) connotes nothing more than this minimal content and so in no way should be taken as implying conceptual status, intensional status, or entitive status as an idea or – giving McIntyre and Smith's specific characterization of noema – as abstract particular.

Given this understanding of the terms '*ideell*' and "'*ideell*'", to what does the term apply according to the double-order interpretation of noema? Statements with a second-order usage of 'noema' are claims about the term, concerning either its denotation or its connotation. The previous claim that noema is "*ideell*" is obviously not a first-order type one claim – about an "object," since some "objects" are non*ideell* in every sense. It might be either a first-order type two or a second-order claim, depending on the discussion. A certain quivering ambiguity arises in this case, for a second-order usage of 'noema' is a claim about the term itself and this term is an expression, i.e., a conceptualization put to words. Since we are in this instance speaking of a linguistic term, there might be some truth in McIntyre and Smith's claim that noema in general is a concept, a linguistic entity, even an abstract particular. Yet even this claim should not be taken as definitive, for I would rather say of noema in general, used in the second order: 'noema in general' is a linguistic objectivity and thus is even

ideell in the full primary sense of the term discussed above, but ‘noema in general’ is not “*ideell*,” even though noema in general is. Perhaps I would go so far as to say that Husserl’s view of ‘noema’ in this sense might be characterized as a methodological nominalism, just as certain commentators speak of his phenomenology as a methodological idealism. Neither would involve a metaphysical claim, since his phenomenology moves beyond the usual categories of such metaphysical positions.

IV. Noema in perception

One advantage of this double-order interpretation of noema is that it allows us to keep clear separate realms of discourse, that of the natural or everyday attitude and that of the phenomenological attitude. In the natural attitude we speak of the object, in the phenomenological attitude we speak of the “object” and its “properties” or of the noema that is correlative to the constituting activity. In some ways, what is so designated by ‘noema’ cannot always be really distinguished from the object as viewed from the everyday attitude, but is separable only in the reflective phenomenological attitude. On this reading of noema, if we are discussing perception, then the noema *is* the “perceived object” — both as it is presently perceived and as a self-identical object.²⁷ On the other hand, if we are discussing judgemental activity, the noema is the judgement as the correlate of judging, but is *not* the object or state of affairs judged about. For Husserl, then, in the terminology of linguistic philosophy, perception is referentially transparent and judgement is referentially opaque. And — if we want to make metaphysical judgements about the noema when outside the epoche — we might, if we are realists, say that the noema of perception is a real entity and that of judgement is an ideal one.

With such a reading of the Husserlian theory of noema, the ultimate task of phenomenology, grounding scientific knowledge, finds a beginning. For here we have a phenomenological description of perception which recognizes the validity of everyday experience of things and the world — perception is of real objects, not ideal ones. I say “beginning” because this opening toward the real object must be developed in light of the reasonableness of one’s claims to be “really perceiving,” a topic taken up in the final part of *Ideas I*. The double-order interpretation of noema has the added advantage of justifying phenomenology itself to the extent that the immediacy of reflection

allows access to the perceived object rather than to a stand-in called the noema. Phenomenological reflection, then, can describe both the physical object as well as the experiencing of such objects. Husserl's intention to reach the things themselves and to describe the essential aspects of our modes of awareness of them can therefore be met in his phenomenology.

NOTES

1. Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana III/1: Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, First Book (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), § 84, p. 168; first half volume translated as *Collected Works*, Vol. 2: *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book: *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 199. Cited as *Ideas I*, with page references to the 1913 edition pagination as given in the margin of all the above editions.
2. *Ideas I*, §§ 93, p. 193, and 97, pp. 201ff. I should clarify my point here by noting that I do not intend a conflation of the noesis/noema relation and the consciousness/object connection. The correlation of noesis and noema are merely the first lengthy articulation, in *Ideas I*, of the intentional relatedness of object and consciousness.
3. Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana V: Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Third Book, §16, p. 89; translated as *Collected Works*, Vol. 1: *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences*, trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980). Cited as *Ideas III*, with German pagination.
4. J.N. Mohanty makes this point in Chapter 3, "Theory of Sense," of his *Husserl and Frege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 75. In this chapter Mohanty takes as his primary task proving Husserl's noema is not the same as Fregean *Sinn*, nor is it, to a certain extent, what either Føllesdal or McIntyre and Smith take it to be – a conceptual entity. On both these points I agree with Mohanty, although I do not in consequence agree with everything he says about the noema in his monograph; Lloyd Carr adds further evidence of the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in his review of McIntyre and Smith's work, *Husserl and Intentionality. A Study of Mind, Meaning, and Language* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1982), in *Husserl Studies* 1 (1984):119–120.
5. An instance of such a limitation is that the description of perception of things must allow for the explanation of mistakes, in particular, the mistaken notion that I saw something when in fact I saw nothing. In the latter case, a clear distinction must be made between what I thought I saw (the "perceived as perceived") and what was really there. Husserl seems to indicate that such a situation can be accounted for within the epoche by discussing the noema, on the one hand, and the object (here nonexistent), on the other. See *Ideas I*, § 88, p. 182.
6. The sense of "abstraction" intended here is a type of eidetic separation of what Husserl terms an abstractum, a nonselfsufficient part, from what stands in contrast to an abstractum – a concretum or selfsufficient part or whole; in this case the parts are essentially necessary elements of the phenomenological method. See *Ideas I*, Part One.
7. For Husserl the "coalescence" between reflecting and reflected upon would obviate any possibility that some essential change occur to the reflected upon experience via the reflective "modification" that takes place when a previously unreflected act is reflected upon; see *Ideas I*, §§ 77–78.
8. Husserl himself took great care to delimit the meanings of words used in his descriptions,

noting that “in general long investigations must precede their definitive clarifications and determinations” within the phenomenological framework. See *Ideas I*, p. 6; see also *Ideas I*, § 125.

9. *Ideas I*, § 74.
10. Dreyfus, “The Perceptual Noema: Gurwitsch’s Crucial Contribution,” in *Life-World and Consciousness: Essays for Aron Gurwitsch*, ed. L. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 135–168; reprinted in *Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science*, ed. by H. Dreyfus and H. Hall (London: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 97–124. Citations are from the latter volume.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.
12. *Ideas I*, § 97.
13. William McKenna sees this passage as raising “the question of the identity of, or difference between, a perceived object or perceived property of an object and their reflected upon bracketed noematic counterparts.” McKenna interprets “the same” as “an *experienced* identity, i.e., ... the object perceived is experienced to be the same as the noematic sense when we switch from the natural to the phenomenological attitude.” See his *Husserl’s “Introductions to Phenomenology”: Interpretation and Critique* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 61. McKenna also characterizes the difference as one in “ontological status,” but it is not clear what he means here. Certain other aspects of the discussion on this point seem incompatible with my overall interpretation.
14. Besides McKenna, Theodor DeBoer and Richard Holmes indicate a somewhat similar direction to move in the interpretation of noema in general. DeBoer notes: “*The difference between the noema and the object [simpliciter] is a noematic interpretation of the same state of affairs.... Thus the object does not hide behind the noema but manifests itself in the noemata....*” See his *The Development of Husserl’s Thought*, trans. T. Plantinga (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 448. Holmes speaks of “a parallelism between what is seen and described from the phenomenological attitude and what is seen prior to the adoption of the phenomenological attitude”; see his “An Explication of Husserl’s Theory of the Noema,” *Research in Phenomenology* 5 (1975):150.
15. *Ideas I*, § 108, p. 221 [FK 256]: Husserl states that it is “mere construction” to take aspects of noema “as determinations merely produced by reflection” (italics omitted).
16. Føllesdal’s thesis 8, “Noemata are abstract entities,” illustrates this type of misunderstanding, which in part might stem from a misreading of the Husserlian text. Føllesdal cites *Ideas I*, § 89: “The tree, the thing in nature, is by no means the perceived tree as such, ... The tree can burn, ... The Sinn, however, ... cannot burn, ...” Here an important difference is noted, but it is overemphasized by translating “*nicht weniger als*” as “by no means” instead of as “no less than,” and by ignoring the context of the citation, which follows Husserl’s statement concerning an actual tree and a “perceived tree as perceived” – that they are “given as ‘precisely the same.’” See Føllesdal, “Husserl’s Notion of Noema,” *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969):680–687; reprinted in *Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science*, ed. by Dreyfus and Hall, p. 77. A careful reading and critique of Føllesdal’s various theses is found in L. Langdorf’s “The Noema as Intentional Entity: A Critique of Føllesdal,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 37 (June 1984):757–784; the author’s “elaboration” upon Husserl’s structures of noema has merit, but is too narrowly grounded on § 131 of *Ideas I*.
17. In these examples I will reverse the usual practices of single quotation marks within double ones in order to preserve the double marks around the phenomenologically reduced objects and their properties.
18. See William McKenna, *Husserl’s “Introductions,”* p. 151. McKenna’s discussion of the transcendental epoche is based on Husserl’s statement that the epoche is “closely related” to what is termed “neutralizing” consciousness. The citation at issue is from *Ideas I*, § 109. The close relationship of the two includes a similarity between them in that they both put out of action the noetic positing and the correlative noematic position at some

level of conscious activity. But, while closely related they are not exactly the same, there is some difference. The difference would be that the epoche can only be carried out on one specific level of activity, and neutralizing can relate to any level. McKenna claims that the epoche neutralizes the position-taking of the reflecting act itself. I would say that it neutralizes the position-taking of the reflected act.

19. Such is McKenna's view: "First of all, the epoche is the neutralization of a *reflective* act, and although a neutralized reflection is neutral in the same sense that a straight-forward act is [when it has been neutralized], i.e., it lacks a certain position-taking, the effect of the neutralization on that which appears is different in the two cases due to the way the reflective neutralization must be brought about"; see his *Husserl's "Introduction,"* p. 151.
20. Føllesdal, "Husserl's Notion of Noema," as in Dreyfus and Hall, pp. 77f.
21. See Richard Holmes, "An Explication of Husserl's Theory of the Noema," *Research in Phenomenology* 5 (1975):150.
22. McIntyre and Smith, *Husserl and Intentionality*, Section 2, p. 170. This section is a rewrite of the essay, "Husserl's Identification of Meaning and Noema," *The Monist* 59 (1975):115–132; reprinted with revisions in Dreyfus and Hall, pp. 81–92. Another writer who follows Føllesdal is Izchak Miller. See his "Husserl's Account of Our Temporal Awareness", in Dreyfus and Hall, pp. 125–146; and *Husserl, Perception, and Temporal Awareness* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1984), especially sections 1.4 and 1.5, pp. 16–32.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 183; "Husserl's Identification," p. 126; in Dreyfus and Hall, p. 87.
24. *Husserl*, p. 183.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
26. See *Ideas I*, § 93, for a summary of this point.
27. I have not here expanded on one very important distinction between noema and object, a distinction that functions within the context of Husserl's justification of the reasonableness of the natural attitude. The unwinding of the distinction of noema and object on this ground, in Part Four of *Ideas I*, is extremely relevant to this discussion, but has not been accomplished here due to limitations on space. In brief, Part Four considers why it makes sense for human consciousness to act towards the world as though what it takes itself to be confronting within the world is actually what is really there – for this is an important feature of the natural attitude. The discussion concerns the relation of consciousness and object and thus we are on a different level of analysis than that dealing with noesis and noema. The main point to keep in mind is that descriptively presenting the essential correlation of a particular noesis with its noema does not exhaust the description of the particular consciousness having that noesis/act. In the context of this discussion, the specific perceptual noema is *not* identical with this consciousness' perceived object. Rather the latter is constituted out of several elements on the side of consciousness – inclusive of perceptual noeses (usually synthesized across temporal phases), habitualizations providing the "passive" transmission of *Sinn* from the embedded past, the Idea "thing" functioning regulatively, etc.