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William James and Phenomenology

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WILLIAM JAMES AND PHENOMENOLOGY

by

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## Contents

1. Introduction .......................................................... 1  
2. Historical Evidence .................................................. 5  
3. Phenomenological Description ...................................... 10  
4. The Phenomenological Reduction .................................... 18  
5. Essences and Their Essential Relationships ...................... 35  
6. Intentionality .......................................................... 47  
7. The Life-World ......................................................... 53  
8. The Lived-Body .......................................................... 63  
9. Phenomenological Constitution ...................................... 68  
X. Conclusion ............................................................... 83  

Bibliography ............................................................... 86
I. Introduction

Until recently when one thought of the great thinkers of phenomenology, one thought of Husserl or Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty or some other European phenomenologist. Seldom was the name of William James thought of in this context. The mention of James conjured up many words such as Pragmatism, Radical Empiricism, Pluralism, but the word phenomenology was not associated with this great American Philosopher. Today a number of thinkers both in America and in Europe are beginning to recognize William James as one of the original contributors to the phenomenological movement. Recently, literature on James and Phenomenology has grown enormously. The American philosophers who are anti-phenomenological but treasure James and the European philosophers who are anti-Jamesian but treasure phenomenology are finding it more and more difficult to avoid the mounting evidence of the connection between William James and Phenomenology. There are also those who see the link between James and Phenomenology but carefully place him outside the movement as a precursor along side thinkers like Brentano and Stumpf.

It is our aim in this paper to demonstrate that James deserves the title of phenomenologist as much as any successor of Husserl does and perhaps more so than some who write under the flag of phenomenology. He was certainly inconsistent in his practices of what later came to be called phenomenology, but he did practice it, and made a number of important phenomenological discover-
ies. In this paper we shall attempt to determine in what sense if any can James be classified as a phenomenologist. Our main concern is not to show how James influenced Husserl and his successors. Rather our goal is to see if James' philosophy is phenomenological by contemporary standards. We intend to explore in detail the relationship between James and Phenomenology.

What is the criteria for being a phenomenologist? The fact is, there is no set criteria. There are almost as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists. Nevertheless there is a common core of belief among phenomenologists and we shall use the common core to point out the degree to which James' thought is phenomenological.

In this paper we shall examine James' philosophy in light of the main themes of phenomenology and the phenomenological method. Despite the differences that exist between the various members of the phenomenological movement there are common themes explored by nearly all the great phenomenologists: phenomenological description, the phenomenological reduction, essences and their essential relationships, intentionality, the life-world, the lived-body, and phenomenological constitution. When one thinks of Husserl these themes naturally come to mind. It will be the task of this paper to show that William James dealt with these same themes and in a manner very similar to Husserl and his successors. The degree to which he anticipated the insights of phenomenology shall be the central concern of this paper.

Before we begin our investigation it is important that we point out that James was a diverse thinker who because of his continual growth was not always consistent nor systematic in his philosophy. A phenomenological approach is present in James' thought but is must be carefully developed.
because it is intertwined with other aspects of his thought, such as his physiological orientation, his pragmatism, and his radical empiricism. It must be admitted that James' concept of psychology as a "natural science" and his ascription of thought to its cerebral conditions are unacceptable to contemporary phenomenology. Yet Husserl's concept of transcendental subjectivity would not be acceptable to James. There are a number of differences between Husserl and James and between other phenomenologists and James. Yet there are major differences among many philosophers identified as belonging to the same school.

The diversity of his thought and this mixing of approaches to the phenomena of conscious life is perhaps one of the major reasons James' contribution to phenomenology was overlooked for such a long time. We don't intend to overlook James' anti-phenomenological tendencies; nevertheless, our main concern in this paper shall be to find out where there is a sharing of positions with James and phenomenology. It is neither our intention to prove that James was merely a precursor of phenomenology, nor to deny the originality of Husserl's thought. Both men are to be regarded as powerful and original thinkers who often approach the same topics from different angles while conducting their own independent investigations. It is our principal aim to show that despite their differences a number of essential starting points, as well as principal views are common to James and Phenomenology.

Taking the major themes of phenomenology one at a time, we expect to show that James did practice phenomenology and does indeed deserve the title "phenomenologist" despite the fact he was never consistent nor explicit in his practice of it. But the initiators of a movement are always among the
least consistent members of the movement. This is however, no grounds for expulsion from the movement. Both James and Husserl were distrustful of achieved systems of thought which needed no further revision. Both James and Husserl were beginners and regarded themselves as such. We shall now try to show that phenomenology was common to the thought of both men.
II. Historical Evidence

The first consideration is the historical data that testifies to the link between James and Phenomenology. The information collected by historians of philosophy now indicate that James had a profound influence upon the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl.

Europeans, and especially the Germans, were the first people to take notice of the thought of William James. George Santayana in fact once remarked "until the return wave of James' reputation reached America from Europe, his pupils and friends were hardly aware that he was such a distinguished man."¹

The link between James and Phenomenology can be traced back to October 30, 1882 when William James paid an unexpected visit to Professor Carl Stumpf in Prague. Herbert Spiegelberg describes this as "one of the more momentous events in the pre-history of phenomenology."² During their three day visit, James and Stumpf spent over twelve hours in conversation and James wrote his wife that he planned to engage Stumpf in a regular correspondence.

¹George Santayana, Character and Opinion in the United States (New York, 1921) p. 94.
According to Ralph Barton Perry, they continued to keep in touch until James' death in 1910.³

Stumpf was a close friend of Husserl and both were students of Brentano. In 1931 Dorion Cairns was told by Husserl that it was Stumpf who had drawn his attention to James' Principles of Psychology.⁴ Stumpf, the founder of experimental phenomenology said the following about James' Principles of Psychology which he referred to as "the best of all psychologies."

In English speaking countries no thorough investigation of psychical life in its peculiar nature even remotely equal in penetration and scope has been carried out since Locke. The entire edifice of English Associationistic Psychology, so admirable in itself, was thus shaken to its foundation and a correctly drawn outline of the psychical life mapped out.⁵

Although certain scholars have noticed many parallels between Husserl's and James' analysis of the structure of consciousness,⁶ Husserl made very few specific references to James in his works. But when he did refer to him, he was generous in his praise of him. In a footnote in the Logical Investigations Husserl writes,


⁵Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 67.

⁶See the works of Alfred Schuetz, Herbert Spiegelberg, Aron Gurwitsch, Hans Linschoten, Bruce Wilshire, James Edie and John Wild that are listed in the Bibliography of this paper. We shall mention the views of these men later in this paper.
It will be apparent from the present work that James' genius-like observations in the field of descriptive psychology of the cognitive experiences are far from making psychologism inevitable. For the help and progress which I owe to this excellent investigation in the field of descriptive analysis have only aided my emancipation from the psychologistic position.

In another reference to James, Husserl credits him with being the first to describe the horizontal structure of experience in his notion of the fringes of consciousness.

According to Spiegelberg, Husserl was more generous in acknowledging his debt to James in conversation with American visitors during the twenties and thirties. To Alfred Schuetz and Dorion Cairns, Husserl made known his intention to review James' Principles and to abandon his project for the Monatshefte in order to study James more thoroughly. Husserl even admitted to Ralph Barton Perry that he had abandoned his plan of writing a psychology, "feeling that James had said what he wanted to say."

Besides a few footnotes in his works and certain oral statements, there is also Husserl's own diary which testifies to the profound influence James had upon him. During his first years as lecturer at the University of Halle, Husserl wrote in his diary the following words:

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Then in 1891-92 came the lecture course on psychology which made me look into the literature on descriptive psychology, in fact look forward to it with longing. James' *Psychology*, of which I could read only some and very little, yielded some flashes. I saw how a daring and original man did not let himself be held down by tradition and attempted to really put down what he saw and to describe it. Probably this influence was not without significance for me, although I could read and understand precious few pages. Indeed, to describe and to be faithful, this was absolutely indispensable. To be sure, it was not until my article of 1894 that I read larger sections and took excerpts from them.11

Husserl's article of 1894 is the earliest evidence of Husserl's study of James. In it he refers twice to James' chapter on "The Stream of Thought" and specifically to his doctrine of "fringes."12

In Husserl's personal library there was found most of the independent publications of James. Of these James' *Principles of Psychology* and an article sent by James himself to Husserl, "The Knowing of Things Together," show signs of being studied in detail. Hans Linschoten who had access to Husserl's personal copy of James' *Principles* at Louvain remarks that it contains marginal notes, key words and translation of terms especially in Part I, ch. 4-9, 11, 12, 14-16; Part II, ch. 17-22 and 26.13 These sections deal with a number of topics including: habit, stream of thought, attention, conception, time, sensation, reasoning, the emotions and the will.

The historical and textual data clearly indicate that James had a clear influence on Husserl, but there is however no evidence that James was influenced by Husserl. In fact James was not even aware that he had such a pro-

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found influence on the German thinker Husserl. Despite his friendship with Carl Stumpf, James never became interested in Husserl. In fact when asked by a publisher whether it be advisable to publish a translation of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, James replied, "Nobody in America would be interested in a new and strange German work on Logic." 14

As a result of this there did not appear an English translation of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* until 1970. 15 Perhaps if James had advised differently, knowledge of his relationship to phenomenology might have surfaced sooner.

Fortunately there were students of Husserl's works such as Alfred Schuetz and Aron Gurwitsch who saw the link between James and Husserl and began research in this area, but this will be discussed below.

The historical data clearly indicates that James had a strong influence on Husserl. The historical data itself however, does not point out that James clearly anticipated the essential features of Phenomenology. But the historical data when taken together with the textual evidence which we are about to present in the following chapters, does indicate he anticipated many of the essential insights later associated with phenomenology.


III. Phenomenological Description

This section will focus upon the main themes of phenomenology and their relation to the thought of James. The themes are: phenomenological description, the phenomenological reduction, essences and their essential relationships, intentionality, the life-world, the lived-body, and phenomenological constitution. Herbert Spiegelberg believes these to be the essential features of phenomenology and a good criteria for determining who is and who is not a phenomenologist.16 We shall discuss James' relation to each of the themes.

In phenomenology's methodology, the emphasis is on a description of conscious phenomena. Phenomenology is above all a descriptive science. In launching his program Husserl gave the order "Back to the things themselves." He insisted that we must describe the phenomena as it appears before any theoretical explanations of it can be allowed to seep in. Emancipation from preconceptions and the reclamation of the immediate phenomena is one of the main principles of phenomenological research. Phenomenological description demands a faithfulness to the particular phenomena as it appears and a distrust of any form of reductionism such as employed by traditional empiricists.

16Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 655-702.
The emphasis on description of the phenomena as it appears was a central feature not only of the method of Husserl but of James as well. In fact, there are indications that James' successful use of this method in his Psychology may have been significant in Husserl's adoption of this method. Referring to James' Principles of Psychology, Husserl wrote in his diary that James' faithful description of phenomena as they actually appeared in consciousness, probably had a significant influence upon him.17

"Phenomenological description" was used extensively by James in all of his works especially in his Principles of Psychology although this term had not yet been invented. His Psychology was primarily a descriptive doctrine of experience. He was as John Wild points out "a phenomenologically oriented thinker with a primary interest in describing empirical structures as we live them through."18

James like Husserl was against closed systems and favored a descriptive approach to the phenomena of conscious life. In his preface to his Psychology James states, "The reader will in vain seek for any closed system in the book. It is mainly a mass of descriptive details . . ."19

In describing psychic phenomena faithfully, James like Husserl later was able to avoid the mistakes of the traditional empiricist. James accuses these empiricists of abandoning the empirical method, i.e., of describing the phenomena as it appears. James states at the beginning of his chapter on the stream of thought,


Most books start with sensations, as the simplest mental facts, and proceed synthetically, constructing each higher stage from those below it. But this is abandoning the empirical method of investigation. No one ever had a simple sensation by itself. Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree. It is astonishing what havoc is wrought in psychology by admitting at the outset apparently innocent suppositions, that nevertheless contain a flaw.20

Like Husserl and his followers James demanded that we describe experience with the minimum of assumptions. "The only thing which psychology has a right to postulate at the outset" says James "is the fact of thinking itself, and that must first be taken up and analyzed."21

Not only is faithfulness to the description of concrete phenomena apparent in his attack on the elementaristic theory, inaugurated by Locke, but this descriptive anti-reductive orientation is evident throughout James' *Psychology* and most of his other works. This phenomenological orientation is at work throughout his *Varieties of Religious Experience* in which he continuously faithfully describes religious phenomena without immediately passing judgment on its validity. Later on in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* his descriptive powers in reference to phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness is even more obvious. His intention to be faithful in his description of the concrete phenomena as it appears is expressed in the following words: "To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from

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21Ibid.
them any element that is directly experienced."22

A return to the things themselves was the watchword not only of Husserl but also of William James. By things themselves Husserl meant the phenomena as it presents itself before the footlights of consciousness. James put similar stress on the intuiting, analyzing and describing of particular phenomena and their mode of appearance prior to any reflection on them. Like Husserl and his followers, James regarded all phenomena equally worthy of faithful description before making any judgment concerning their status in reality. Thus a phenomenological description of religious and psychical experience was given by James in his Varieties of Religious Experience and his "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher." In his essay "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," James argues strongly against letting our presuppositions enter into our description of experience. This protest against this blindness was later taken up by members of the phenomenological movement.

Herbert Spiegelberg, speaking of "phenomenological descriptions" states that:

the common concern is that of giving the phenomena a fuller and fairer hearing than traditional empiricist has accorded them. In this sense the phenomenological goal is closely related to that of William James . . .23

There is no better evidence of what benefits can be reaped from a refusal to diminish the phenomena below what is intuitively given then James' chapters on stream of thought, the consciousness of self, and the perception of time in his Principles of Psychology. Like the successors of Husserl, James stood firm against any tendency to simplify or any economy of thought.


that would distort the phenomena by stripping it to the bare bones. We must
describe the whole phenomena just as it appears and neither add explanatory
concepts and hypotheses nor subtract any part of what is intuitively given
in the phenomena.

James' opposition to simplification and reductionism in the descrip-
tion of phenomena is apparent: "The object of every thought, then is neither
more nor less than all that the thought thinks exactly as the thought thinks
it, however complicated the matter, and however symbolic the manner of the
thinking may be."24

This loyalty to the phenomena in James' description of its appearance
reaped James many important and original ideas such as fringes of conscious-
ness and the retentional-protentional structure in our perception of time. A
number of these ideas gained through his descriptive approach to psychic
phenomena had an influence on the phenomenological movement and we shall
discuss these in detail later in the paper. The important thing to note here
is that Husserl's treatment of description in the phenomenological methodo-
logy that he advanced had much in common with the thought of William James.
By continuing this descriptive approach to conscious phenomena the phenomeno-
logical movement gained more insights than even William James dreamed of, but
there is no doubt that it was James who first showed the great promise that
the descriptive approach to our conscious life offered. Husserl acknowledges
this in the following words, "I owe to this excellent investigation in the

field of descriptive analysis . . . my emancipation from the psychologistic position."25

Although James initially saw psychology as a biological science, he came to realize that integral experience is irreducible and that the structure of the function of the brain gives us no clue to its make up. James recognized that an investigation of conscious life required an approach somewhat independent of the biological approach. Although James held certain physiological presuppositions, he felt that Psychology as an investigation of human experience must begin with the description of this experience, and not try immediately to explain it away by reducing it to brain processes. According to James, the description of the stream of thought is an investigation "from within."26

As Hans Linschoten points out, James used both the "way of analysis" and the "way of history" and was unable to reconcile these in a satisfactory manner.27 The "way of analysis" as practiced by James is the phenomenological descriptive investigation of experiential data in their own right. In investigating the stream of thought the way of analysis according to James is concerned with "What does it consist in? What is its inner nature? Of what sort of mind-stuff is it composed?"28 As a scientist working within the natural attitude, James also practiced the "way of history." Here he was concerned with the conditions of production of the stream of thought and its connection with other facts, that is with processes and events that are not

27Linschoten, Phenomenological Psychology, pp. 57-58.
evident from within the stream of experience itself such as brain processes.

Although James felt as a psychologist he must maintain both approaches, it is clear that the descriptive approach of the "way of analysis" proved more fruitful for his investigation of the life of consciousness. It is also apparent that James was aware that most of his endeavors to reduce experience to brain processes were unconvincing.29

Eventually James came to recognize the impossibility of going to something more basic than experience. James' failure in his Psychology to discover sound connections between things experienced and objective processes lying outside the realm of direct experience is perhaps the origin of his later doctrine of a world of pure experience in Essays in Radical Empiricism.

Unfortunately in his Psychology, James shifted back and forth from emphasis on "way of analysis" to emphasis on "way of history." As Linschoten points out the price he paid for this indecision was a lack of unity in the early views he expressed.30 There is no doubt however that when he gave priority to the way of analysis he was practicing phenomenological description in the best sense of that term, that is, he was giving a descriptive account of the stream of experience from within, on its own terms, and without distorting the experiential data through physiological considerations.

We must conclude that James did practice what later came to be called phenomenological description, but at the same time we must acknowledge that he practiced this method in a less consistent and systematic way than Husserl and most of his followers. But if James seems to be guilty of stepping out-

29Linschoten, Phenomenological Psychology, p. 58.

30Ibid.
side of the descriptive approach from time to time, so also are many of the existential phenomenologists who engage in hermeneutics, and perhaps even Husserl himself when he ceased bracketing existential claims and posited a transcendental ego as the source of all objectivities.
IV. The Phenomenological Reduction

One of the main features of Husserl's phenomenological method is what he called the phenomenological reduction. Similar in some respects to Descartes' methodological doubt, the reduction is the act by which the general thesis of belief in factual existence characteristic of the natural attitude is inhibited, suspended, bracketed or turned off for the purpose of discovering the acts of transcendental subjectivity which constitutes pure phenomena. This reduction which eventually led Husserl to transcendental idealism came to be considered by him as the cornerstone of his philosophy.

One of the main reasons James' contribution to phenomenology is often overlooked is the fact that he never explicitly carried out what Husserl calls the phenomenological reduction. But overlooking James' contribution for this reason is a mistake, because many of the members of the phenomenological movement, who came after Husserl, rejected his explicit reduction and carried on phenomenological analysis without it as Husserl himself did in his early work, Logical Investigations.

As Spiegelberg points out, the notion of the phenomenological reduction and its function was never stated by Husserl in an unambiguous and definitive fashion, not even in a way that satisfied him personally.31

According to Husserl's original notion of the reduction we must suspend judgment as to the existence of non-existence of this content of consciousness. We do not deny or doubt its existence as in Descartes' procedure, we simply bracket this question for the purpose of concentrating exclusively on what appears as it appears, i.e. the essential content of the phenomena. This suspension of judgment concerning the existence of transcendent beings eventually was replaced by Husserl's denial of their independent existence with the adoption of his transcendental idealism. Very few phenomenologists have been willing to follow Husserl on his road to transcendental idealism and many regard the performance of an explicit phenomenological reduction as unnecessary and dangerous.

Although the reduction is a great aid, in that it helps the phenomenologist to treat all data real or unreal on the same level, it is not required for an investigator like William James who is careful not to let his existential bias interfere with his description of phenomena exactly as they are given to consciousness.

Spiegelberg points out that although the phenomenological reduction is helpful in describing phenomena and their mode of appearance and the manner of their constitution in a way that treats objects both real and unreal on an equal footing, it "is still not indispensable for the investigator who is already immune to the possible distractions of the existential bias."\(^{32}\)

\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 693.
As a group, the members of the phenomenological movement do treat the appearance of phenomena equally regardless of whether they are thought to have an existence outside the mind or not. If this be accepted as the minimum meaning of a phenomenological reduction which is implicitly accepted by most phenomenologists then I think we have no right to exclude James' name from the movement. He was clearly one of the first to treat all appearances on an equal footing. James' notion of sub-universe and his description of the role of belief without regard to existential claims indicates clearly that he did not let existential bias interfere with his investigation of concrete phenomena. James' willingness to suspend traditional beliefs and merely describe phenomena as they appear in consciousness is demonstrated in practically every single chapter of the Principles of Psychology as well as in most of his later works. For example, in his chapter on the "Mind-Stuff Theory" in his Psychology, James attacks elementaristic theory, inaugurated by Locke and points out that the explanation implied foisting into the mental state under examination knowledge which the psychologist has as a psychologist, for example, knowledge about the organic conditions of this state and about the consequences of eventual variations of these conditions.33 James was determined to describe phenomena as they appear without letting scientific theories interfere with a faithful description.

33 James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 196.
Aron Gurwitsch has claimed that James' rejection of the "mind-stuff theory" (i.e. the exclusive and isomorphic dependency of "sense data" on physical stimuli) should be considered an implicit phenomenological reduction. 34 James felt that we must describe the world as it is experienced and "lived" prior to reflection on the mental processes themselves. James Edie says:

This thesis in James comes to an incipient and implicit phenomenological reduction and is, no doubt, what he means by the idealistic reflections which kept intruding upon him and impeded his attempt to give an explanation of knowledge in terms of physiology and science, since physiology and science themselves are possible only within the life-world as special and restricted systems of explanation of what is primordially given. 35

The claim that there is an implicit phenomenological reduction in James' Psychology does not seem to be supported by James' assertion in his preface that "Psychology, the science of finite individual minds, assumes as its data (1) thoughts and feelings, and (2) a physical world in time and space with which they co-exist and which (3) they know." 36 It is important to note, however, that James does not remain strictly within the realm of science as he here depicts it. He states immediately after the above that "Of course these data themselves are discussable; but the discussion of them (as of other elements) is called metaphysics and falls outside the province of this book." 37


36James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. xiii.

37Ibid.
He does not, however, stick to this program in his *Psychology*. Although he began by saying that a properly scientific study of the mind would eschew all metaphysics, he was unable to maintain this program even through the first chapter of his book; by chapter five he is freely mingling metaphysics and science and by chapter six he has become dominantly metaphysical. In the last chapter of the *Briefer Course*, James admits that his "scientific psychology" has become one into which "the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint."  

James' initial starting point of methodological dualism involved assumptions which he could not leave uncriticized and this led to a breakdown in his initial dualism and eventually an acceptance of the "natural attitude" which the phenomenological reduction is designed to combat. James clearly admits:

> from the common-sense point of view (which is that of all the natural sciences) knowledge is an ultimate relation between two mutually external entities, the knower and the known. The world first exists, and then the states of the mind; and these again a cognizance of the world which gets gradually more complete. But it is hard to carry through this simple dualism, for idealistic reflections intrude.

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39Ibid., pp. 465-466.
James' initial plan of methodological dualism does not invalidate Gurwitsch's and Edie's claim that there is an implica
tional phenomenological reduction in his Psychology because he never remained loyal to this plan. James intended to correlate brain states and mental states but he soon realized in order to do this, he would have to be able to specify each. It was in the specifying of mental states that the phenomenological orienta-
tion creeped in, for it was impossible to specify what a "mental state" is merely on the basis of its being externally and causally conditioned by something outside it.

In the beginning James felt the psychologist must dismiss the philo-
sophical question about knowledge and presuppose two elements, the knowing psyche and the known thing, and the one cannot be reduced to the other.\(^40\) In his attempt to specify mental states, James began speaking of objects of thought in two senses: in one sense as independently existing thing and in another as objects of consciousness. James feels that the psychologist must believe that the objects of our consciousness have a twofold existence. Yet James wasn't able to avoid a consideration of the presuppositions involved in this dualism. He soon comes to the realization that our faith in independently existing things is based on a sense of sameness.\(^41\) This"sense of sameness" is the backbone of our consciousness and is the basis of the experience of (identical) things.\(^42\) James is here not concerned with whether

\(^{40}\) James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 218.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 272.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 459.
there exist any real identity in the things themselves because whether it is so or not, we would never notice an identity if we had no sense of sameness. James chooses, in the manner of implicit phenomenological reduction, "the point of view of the mind's structure alone." Although James does not suspend or bracket his belief in the factual existence of the objective world, he does seem to recognize that the structures of experience are logically independent of and "transcendently" prior to their physiological conditions. In his analyzing of the life of consciousness, James was equally concerned, as Husserl was, with its apriori structure and was unwilling to let his physiological bias interfere with a faithful description of the structure of experience.

As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out Husserl was constantly re-examining the possibility of the reduction. "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us" says Merleau-Ponty "is the impossibility of a complete reduction." The existential interpretation of the reduction put forth by Merleau-Ponty which rejects transcendental idealism is one that is quite compatible with the thought of William James. There is nothing un-Jamesian in the following crucial passage from the Phenomenology of Perception:

The best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world. Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. 45

43Ibid.


Not only is this statement not un-Jamesian it is actually a restate-
ment of James' primary goal in his chapter on conception. The slackening
of our intentional threads with the world in order to bring them into full
view is precisely what James does when he presents his version of inten-
tionality under the title, conception. We shall discuss this point in
greater detail in our chapter on intentionality. For now let me point out
that James anticipates Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's view that we should
examine our involvement in the world by temporarily suspending that involve-
ment in order to determine the relation between our states of consciousness
and that to which they refer, i.e. our intentional threads which link us
to the world. The following passage makes clear why Linschoten says con-
ception is James' term for intentionality. James writes:

The function by which we thus identify a numerically distinct
and permanent subject of disclosure is called conception . . .
The word 'conception' is unambiguous. It properly denotes neither
the mental state nor what the mental state signifies, but the re-
lation between the two, namely, the function of the mental state
in signifying just that particular thing.\footnote{James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 461.}

It is evident that what Merleau-Ponty regards as the best formulation
of the reduction is precisely what James is doing in his chapters on con-
ception and the perception of reality. James steps back from involvement
in the world in order to discover the intentional structure of consciousness
which links him to that world; he certainly rejects idealism and stands in
wonder in the face of the world.
That James was willing to treat the data of experience in a manner that the reduction was designed to foster is clear in his chapter on the perception of reality. Like most of the phenomenologists after Husserl, James did not perform an explicit bracketing of the objective world yet he did treat all phenomena both real and unreal equally in the description of its essential content. This being the main purpose of the reduction in the first place, one can say that James like the early Husserl of the Logical Investigations and most of his successors made use of an implied phenomenological reduction.

This is evident in James' discussion of the "orders of reality." Similar in many respects to Husserl's "regional ontologies," James gives a list of the "orders of reality" or the "many worlds" of experience. He states that the world of experience consists of perceptual objects, past objects, remembered objects, imaginary and unreal objects, hallucinatory objects, fictional objects, formal or categorical objects, number systems, scientific laws, theoretical objects, scientific and religious entities, "idols of the tribe", particular myths, etc., all of which are given as belonging to different but internally coherent systems which constitutes the orders of reality.47

Every object we think of gets at last referred to one world or another of this or of some similar list . . . Each world whilst it is attended to is real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with the attention.48

James points out, in this chapter on the perception of reality, that any object of experience which remains uncontradicted is ipso facto believed

48Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 293.
and posited as absolute reality. He argues that a disbelief in the real existence of something occurs only when it is experienced as incompatible with something else in our world. Thus our dreams are the whole of reality for us while we are dreaming and it is only when awake that we find it necessary to distinguish the dream world from the perceptual world.

When James discusses what he calls "The Many Worlds" he suggests the possibility of something closely resembling what was later to be called "transcendental phenomenological reduction." Here James points out that in the practical attitude of everyday life, dreams, fantasies, illusions and the like simply do not count and are dismissed as non-existent. In the natural attitude such mental objects "are not even treated as appearances; they are treated as if they were mere waste, equivalent to nothing at all."49 James says that "the genuinely philosophic mind" must hold a wider view of being than that which guides our practical life. He believes the true philosopher should detach himself from the practical attitude in order to gain a sound understanding of "the total world which is."50 He recognizes that there exist many orders of reality such as fancy, illusion, collective belief, abstract reality, ideal relations, etc. Although aware that the "natural attitude" plays an important role in one's practical life, he holds this attitude in suspense in order to analyze it more carefully. The true philosopher must begin by neither asserting nor denying the "natural attitude,"


50 Ibid.
rather it becomes for him an object of investigation in order that its
structure may be more clearly grasped in relation to the many other sub-
worlds.

The complete philosopher is he who seeks not only to assign
to every given object of his thought its right place in one or
other of these sub-worlds, but he also seeks to determine the
relation of each sub-world to the others in the total world which is.51

In this chapter of his Psychology, James abandons the practical notion
of existence for one that is much wider and more abstract, and which includes
not only practical existence, but mathematical, aesthetic, normative, and
dream existence as well.

In the strict and ultimate sense of the word existence, every-thing which can be thought of at all exists as some sort
of object, whether mythical object, individual thinker's object,
or object in outer space and for intelligence at large. Errors,
fictions, tribal beliefs are part of the whole great Universe ... 52

John Wild points out quite accurately that James takes up a detached
or transcendental position in order to examine all the sub-universes one by
one with the hope of gaining a final understanding of all of them together,
and, therefore, of the "total world which is."53 An understanding of experi-
ence which is unbiased and impartial requires that James take into account
all the sub-worlds of experience, and it requires that he assign "every
given object . . . its right place" and then determine "the relationship
of each sub-world to the other's in the total world which is."54

51 Ibid.


53 John Wild, The Radical Empiricism of William James (New York:

This approach to human experience demanded by James would become in Husserl's middle period the main task of phenomenology. The essence of what Husserl will later call the phenomenological reduction appears in James' discussion of orders of reality certainly not in the full sense that Husserl gave to it, but certainly in its essential features. We see here a willingness on James' part to bracket the practical mind's narrow conception of existence which treats all the sub-universes except one as nothing. The reduction appears in this sense in James' writings but it never hardens into an explicit suspension of the questions of existence.

Like the existential phenomenologist and the later Husserl who spoke of the Lebenswelt, James states that all these sub-universes have as their ultimate foundation the life world in which alone the ultimate meaning of the other sub-worlds is to be found. It is at this junction that James as well as the existential phenomenologist part company with Husserl's transcendental reduction and affirm the existence of a life-world that is not constituted by transcendental ego but a world that is always already there and one in which we always find ourselves. James, like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, never employed the reduction in the strict and consistent manner that Husserl advocated. Like these thinkers, James was too concerned with revealing the life-world and its basic patterns by an existential study.

Like Merleau-Ponty, James recognized the primacy of the perceptual world and with this recognition, one might say, they both stepped outside of Husserl's bracket. It should be noted, however, that James accomplished
this recognition by first suspending the natural attitude concerning the existential claims of the various sub-universes in order to discover their relation to each other.

"Nowhere in the Principles" asserts Wilshire, "is the force of the phenomenological strand more evident, and its flowering more nearly complete, than in the chapter the Perception of Reality. Here is his version of the Lebenswelt."\(^{55}\)

We will discuss the Lebenswelt later in this paper. The point I want to emphasize here is that James recognized the various orders of reality and he also recognized that they should be treated equally by an investigator of their essential structure and relationships. This is what Speigelberg regards as the minimum meaning of the phenomenological reduction that all members of the phenomenological movement are willing to accept. It is this sense of the reduction that James (of the Principles) would be willing to accept. The later James who spoke of a world of pure experience came even closer to Husserl's notion of the phenomenological reduction. But even the early James, who was still tied to dualism, refused to let his acceptance of the natural attitude interfere with his analysis and description of the structures of experience. His denial of consciousness as a substance would never have occurred in his Psychology if he did not refuse to let his

existential bias interfere with his report of what actually appears in the
stream of thought as it appears.

One should not exclude James from a discussion of phenomenology be-
cause of his initial dualism in his *Psychology*. One should keep in mind
that James conducts two levels of investigation in his *Psychology*. One is
phenomenological and the other is physiological. Little by little James
abandons the latter (which he terms his "Physiological preliminaries") and
begins a phenomenological analysis of the knowing process. He is forced in
this direction because he soon realizes that in order to correlate brain
states with mental states (which was his initial goal) he has to specify
both and this leads him to the discovery that no mental act can be specified
except through its object. James' analysis of thought's object in his
chapter on the "Stream of Thought" is thoroughly phenomenological. One
might say that he begins here to bracket his "physiological preliminaries"
and introduce an intentional theory of consciousness and a number of other
phenomenological principles. Unfortunately, James continues to speak two
very different languages (of the theory of meaning on the one hand and of
the causal conditions of thought on the other) haphazardly throughout the
rest of the text. The physiological level of his investigation keeps
cropping up here and there and when it does the implied phenomenological
reduction which Edie and Gurwitsch claim for James is nowhere evident. But
when he leaves his physiological preliminaries behind him it is clearly
evident that James is willing to meet and describe the stream of experience
on its own terms without an existential bias interfering with his investi-
gation. It is here that James' dualism undergoes internal attack from two sides: the intrinsic referentialness of thought to world, and the intrinsic intendability of the world. And this is what James refers to when he writes, "... it is hard to carry through this simple dualism, for idealistic reflections intrude."56

The fact that James shifts back and forth between these two types of investigation is, according to Bruce Wilshire, what makes the book seriously "flawed."57 There is no doubt that this could have been prevented by an explicit bracketing of the objective world, that is an explicit phenomenological reduction. Husserl was able to avoid many of James' problems by his explicit suspension of belief in the objective world. But then Husserl had the advantage of reading James and not the reverse.

There is, of course, a danger in Husserl's Phenomenological reduction. As Spiegelberg points out, the reduction becomes hazardous and can indeed falsify the approach to the phenomena when this temporary suspension of belief hardens into a cancellation and unnoticeably leads to the permanent neglect of the question of being and existence. This is perhaps the main reason the bracket is not found in the works of existential phenomenologists like Heidegger and Sartre.

What is common amongst phenomenologists is not Husserl's bracketing. What is common amongst them is a willingness to intuit, analyze and describe

56James, Psychology: A Briefer Course, pp. 464-465.
57Wilshire, James and Phenomenology, pp. 16-17.
all phenomena just as it appears without first taking into account its claim to reality and without distorting the phenomena through an existential bias. Spiegelberg calls this an implied phenomenological reduction although it is a watered down version of Husserl's notion. But if his notion of the reduction is not watered down and its transcendental idealistic tendencies removed, and if the explicit bracket is made a requirement for membership in the phenomenological movement, Husserl would stand almost alone not only without James but without Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, and many others.

As mentioned before, Husserl was doing phenomenology quite well in his *Logical Investigations* without any explicit bracketing. And it will be shown that William James was doing it even before Husserl also without any explicit suspension of belief in the objective world. In any case, let it suffice for now that James' refusal to bracket is no grounds to exclude him from phenomenology. Let it also be noted that James, like the later existential phenomenologists, did employ what Spiegelbert calls the minimum sense of the reduction which is shared by all phenomenologists.

At this point, I may lose those readers who identify phenomenology solely with the thought of Edmund Husserl. Nevertheless, I am unwilling to admit that phenomenology has only one voice, that of Husserl. There are others -- all of them equally important to the phenomenological movement -- such as Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Scheler and Hartmann among many. If one now objects that Husserl is the founder of phenomenology and, therefore is the sole voice of phenomenology, one might reply in a Jamesian
manner that he merely gave a name to some old ways of thinking. I say old because James was practicing phenomenology prior to Husserl. I do not mean to say that Husserl was not an original thinker. He was, and he did establish many phenomenological principles, but he is not the sole speaker of phenomenology and there are indications that he may not have even been its first speaker. About these indications this paper will have more to say.

Nevertheless, even those who regard Husserl's explicit bracketing as a necessary feature of phenomenology must admit that James' chapter on the perception of reality with its discussion of belief and sub-universes certainly comes close to Husserl's version of the reduction and is quite compatible with the view adopted by later existential phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty who spoke of the primacy of perceptual reality.
V. Essences and their Essential Relationships

The phenomenological reduction is not the only reduction that Husserl spoke of. He also spoke of an eidetic reduction. Through it we are able to describe essences and their essential relationships just as they are given in consciousness. We must not analyze James' relation to the phenomenological theory of essences and their essential relationships.

Phenomenology is concerned with investigating general essences, that is, it is an eidetic science. According to Husserl, we do directly experience essences and they are irreducible entities like particulars. There is no common formula by which all phenomenologists practice the eidetic method. It in fact goes under various names in phenomenology such as "experience of essences" (Wesenserfahrung), "insight into essences" (Wesenseinsicht), "cognition of essences" (Wesenserkenntnis) and "essential intuiting" (Wesensschau). Herbert Spiegelberg points out that "eidetic intuition constitutes a common element of the phenomenological method as interpreted by the Movement, even though it is played down or reinterpreted by the existential phenomenologist."58 The question we have to be concerned with now in our investigation of the relationship between James and Phenomenology is: Is James' notion of essence so incompatible with Husserl and his followers that it is grounds for his exclusion from the phenomenological movement?

I hope to show in this section of my paper that James' notion of essence is not totally incompatible with that of Husserl's and it is even more compatible with the existential phenomenologist like Heidegger.

First, let us state flatly that Husserl never opted for Platonic "realism." According to Husserl essences have merely "ideal" being and they have in no sense a reality superior or even equal to that of particular entities. In fact the later Husserl argued that they are constituted by transcendental subjectivity. According to Husserl, exemplifying particulars are needed in advance for any adequate intuiting of essences. These particulars may come from either perception or imagination, but in any case particulars as examples are necessary in order to apprehend general essences. Husserl saw particulars as stepping stones that led to an intuition of essences. He called this process by which we proceed from the particular to the universal "ideation." Through this process, Husserl believed we actually come to experience general essences, and it is untrue to say that we experience only particulars. These general essences are phenomena given in experience. Although particulars as examples are required for the experience of a general essence, the essence is not the same as the particular. Husserl in fact argues that it is impossible to see particulars as particulars without seeing also the general essence which they particularize.

In its study of essences, phenomenology is concerned with revealing essential relationships within a single essence and between various essences. "Free imaginative variation" is used to determine the internal relations with-

59 Ibid.
in one essence. By this method one can determine what are the essential components of an essence like triangle. The essential relationships between different essences is also revealed through the method of imaginative variation. Here it is possible to determine the relationship between such essences as color and extension, i.e., whether this relationship is essentially necessary or not. We soon discover in the investigation of the relationship of various essences that there is a hierarchy of essences and that the relationship between several essences is determined by their joint essences. Thus we soon discover that essences belong to the context of other essences and this context is fixed. While this seems quite Platonic, we must remember that for Husserl, unlike Plato, essences are only ideal being and are in fact constituted in transcendental subjectivity.

Perhaps the best way to begin a discussion of the compatibility of James and the Phenomenologist's conception of essence is with James' notion of conception:

Each conception thus eternally remains what it is, and never can become another. The mind may change its states, and its meanings, at different time; may drop one conception and take up another, but the dropped conception can in no intelligible sense be said to change into its successor. The paper, a moment ago white, I may now see to have scorched black. But my conception 'white' does not change into my conception 'black'. On the contrary, it stays alongside of the objective blackness as a different meaning in my mind, and by so doing lets me judge the blackness as the paper's change. Unless it stayed, I should simply say 'blackness' and know no more. Thus, amid the flux of opinions and of physical things, the world of conceptions, or things intended to be thought about, stands stiff and immutable, like Plato's Realm of Ideas.60

The fixed structure of the relationship among essences which Husserl argued for is here pointed out by James. The title radical empiricist may mislead, but James is a conceptualist, not a nominalist.

We saw ... that the image per se, the nucleus, is functionally the least important part of the thought. "Our doctrine, therefore, of the 'fringe' leads to a perfectly satisfactory decision of the nominalistic and conceptualistic controversy, so far as it touches psychology. We must decide in favor of the conceptualist ..." 61

The preceding two statements from James offers support for the view of Professor Edie:

... James' "nativism" seems to have been an original attempt to elucidate the "transcendental" pre-conscious structures of lived perception with which phenomenology has made us familiar. It is not a question here of "innate" forms or ideas, structures of the perceiving subject, but rather a question of certain "open" structures which arise in experience ... James resolutely opposed the metaphysics of empiricism (Hume) and naturalism (Spencer). While he was also wary of "transcendentalism," it is because he knew only Kant and Hegel. 62

This view may come as a shock to those who thought James was only interested in doing empirical psychology. The text does reveal however that in his Principles, James, like Husserl, was concerned with fixed meanings and their relationship to each other.

Those who take a different stand regarding James might regard the following statement by him as evidence that he is anti-phenomenological: "A permanently existing idea or Vorstellung which makes its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodical intervals is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades." 63 Actually however, there is nothing at all anti-phenomenological about this statement of James. Husserl says practically

the same thing in his *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. James is not advocating nominalism here, and he is not denying that we have fixed meanings and are capable of intending the same object over and over again as Husserl will later claim. Actually on this point he is in thorough agreement with Husserl. What he is attacking here is the psychologist's fallacy of the associationism's theory which holds that the thought of the object's (physical thing's) recurrent identity is the identity of the recurrent thought.

Against this, James argues that thought is not a sequence of identical mental bits, what is got twice is the same cognized object as being the same, not the same thought.

The psychologist is often misled because,

... he ordinarily has no other way of naming (the thought) than as the thought, percept, etc., of that object. He himself, meanwhile, knowing the self-same object in his way, gets easily led to suppose that the thought, which is of it, knows it in the same way in which he knows it, although this is often far from being the case.64

Any further discussion of this will lead us into a discussion of James' version of intentionality which will be taken up later in this paper. The only point I emphasized here, is that James' rejection of a permanently existing "idea" far from being anti-phenomenological or a rejection of essences, clearly anticipates Husserl's notion of intentionality with its distinction of *noesis* and *noema*. We shall discuss this point more thoroughly however in our section on intentionality.

James dealt with the fundamental connections of essences which he called concepts in a manner that also clearly anticipated the work of Husserl. In

64Ibid., Vol. I, p. 496.
the last chapter of the Principles he gives an explicit treatment of necessary truths. Here James denies that necessary truths are generalizations from experience. These truths cannot be explained by an empirical account of the psychological processes of abstracting, generalizing, and habituation. James writes, "There are then ideal and inward relations amongst the objects of our thought which can in no intelligible sense whatsoever be interpreted as reproductions of the order of outer experience."65

James' position here will become clearer when we turn our discussion to his version of intentionality. Let me say now however that the structure of necessary truth pertains to the objects of thought. According to James when we intend something in the world we intend it in terms of "permanent and fixed meanings, ideal objects or conceptions." He states,

In chapter XII we saw that the mind can at successive moments mean the same, and that it gradually comes into possession of a stock of permanent and fixed meanings, ideal objects, or conceptions, some of which are universal qualities, like the black and white of our example, and some, individual things. We now see that not only are the objects permanent mental possessions, but the results of their comparison are permanent too. The objects and their differences together form an immutable system. The same objects, compared in the same way, always give the same results; if the result be not the same, then the objects are not those originally meant.66

Surprisingly, we even find James the advocate of indeterminism stating that it is not conceivable that a future experience would invalidate the necessary truth. "Instead . . . of correcting the principle of these cases, we correct the cases by the principle."67

The preceding words certainly put James in the camp of Husserl and Phenomenology. For Husserl and his successors there also exist a fixed system of essential relationships between essences called necessary truths which are not open to revision by future experience.

The differences here between James' and Husserl's views must not be overlooked. Where James is inclined to attribute our acquisition of permanent and fixed stock of meanings to the congenital structure of the brain which creates an apriori interest structure, Husserl sees it as constituted by transcendental subjectivity. Although this is no small difference between these two thinkers, it should be pointed out that most phenomenologists reject Husserl's transcendental idealism. It should also be noted that James eventually acknowledges his inability to trace our mental states back to brain structures. It should also be pointed out that despite their differences here both James and Husserl reject both Platonic realism and the associationist theory of abstraction. Above all it should be recognized that both James and Husserl believe in the existence of apriori structures in human experience even if they differed on the ultimate origin of these structures.

Concerning the study of essences, I believe William James would not hesitate to agree with the view expressed by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. After pointing out that there has been a general misunderstanding concerning Husserl's notion of essences, Merleau-Ponty states:

But it is clear that essence is here, not the end, but a means, that our effective involvement in the world is precisely what has to be understood and made amenable to conceptualization, for it is what polarized all our conceptual particularizations. The need to proceed by way of essences does not mean that philosophy takes them as its object, but, on the contrary, that our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement, and that it requires the field of ideality
in order to become acquainted with and to prevail over its facticity ... The eidetic reduction ... is the ambition to make reflection emulate the unreflective life of consciousness.  

That a field of ideality is needed to grasp the meaning of immediate experience was also pointed out by James. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, James remarked:

An immediate experience, as yet unnamed or classed, is a mere that we undergo, a thing that asks, What am I? When we name and class it, we say for the first time what it is, and all these whats are abstract names or concepts. Each concept means a particular kind of thing, and as things seem once for all to have been created in kinds, a far more efficient handling of a given bit of experience begins as soon as we have classed the various parts of it.

In his chapter entitled "Necessary Truths and the Effects of Experience," James attacks the views of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer who had argued that even formal structures of categorical thinking could be reduced to psychological processes. James completely rejects their psychologism as Husserl did later in his *Logical Investigations*. Three "Ideal" worlds are discussed by James: those of aesthetic, of ethical, and of scientific experience. James declares that we experience in all these realms ideal and inward relations amongst our objects of thought which can in no intelligible sense whatever be interpreted as reproductions of the order of outer experiences.

James argues, as Husserl will later, that the laws of thought which govern logical necessity can in no sense be reduced to empirical experience or associative connections. In response to those who believe the above reduction possible, James proposes a mental experiment. It should perhaps

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be called an "eidetic" experiment for it uses what Husserl will later call "free imaginary variation."

Suppose a hundred beings created by God and gifted with the faculties of memory and comparison. Suppose that upon each of them the same lot of sensations are imprinted, but in different orders. Let some of them have no single sensation more than once. Let some have this one and others that one repeated. Let every conceivable permutation prevail. And then let the magic-lantern show die out, and keep the creatures in a void eternity, with naught but their memories to muse upon. Inevitably in their long leisure they will begin to play with the items of their experience and rearrange them, make classificatory series of them, place gray between white and black, orange between red and yellow, and trace all other degrees of resemblance and differences. And this new construction will be absolutely identical in all the hundred creatures, the diversity of the sequence of the original experiences having no effect as regards this rearrangement.

... Black will differ from white just as much in a world in which they always come close together as in one in which they always come far apart; just as much in one in which they appear rarely as in one in which they appear all the time.

To learn whether black and white differ I need not consult the world of experience at all; the mere ideas suffice. What I mean by black differs from what I mean by white, whether such colors exist extra mentem meam or not.71

James holds that judgments of categorical thought have an a-temporal and a-spatial quality of a very special kind, which we can call "ideal." He holds that there exist apriori truths which no mere outgrowth of habit and association can account for. For James judgments of comparison belong to a realm of experience which is not subject to the conditions of perception. "Necessary and eternal relations" says James "form a determinate system, independent of the order of frequency in which experience may have associated their originals in time and space."72

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71Ibid., pp. 641-644.
72Ibid., p. 661.
psychologism in holding that the laws of logic have a mode of reality independent of psychological processes.

James is also in agreement with Husserl in arguing that necessary truths are "of perception," i.e., that they are inseparably given together with primary, perceptual reality. According to James, we experience "feelings" of and, of if, of but, and of by, as surely as we do feelings of blue and cold. Both Husserl and James agree that although perception and thought are distinct they are given in experience as inseparably conjoined, and one does not require a superior "intellectual intuition" to grasp necessary truths in the manner Descartes suggested.

One major difference between Husserl and James concerns James' teleological notion of essence. Their views however are not totally incompatible as some interpreters might believe. In any case, James' notion of essence is completely compatible with the view of Heidegger and the existential phenomenologist, and if they can be classified as phenomenologist with their view of essences so can James.

According to James, an essence of a thing is its most important characteristic and this cannot be understood in isolation from its relation to man's interest, needs, and purposes. In short it is a "teleological instrument." Concerning the essence of a thing, James says "It is a partial aspect of a thing which for our purpose we regard as its essential aspect, as the representation of the entire thing . . . the essence, the ground of conception, varies with the end we have in view."^73

^73Ibid., pp. 335-336.
A phenomenologist like Heidegger would have no trouble accepting this notion of essence. Heidegger in fact argues in *Being and Time* that in order to see something as something demands a circumspective concern. The essence hammerness appears only after we see an object with the intention of pounding nails with it. I don't think that Heidegger would hesitate for a moment to agree with James' statement that the essence of a thing is that one of its properties which is so important for my interest that, in comparison with it I may neglect the rest.

But would Husserl hesitate to accept James' notion of essence? Perhaps but not necessarily. Ideation seems to be more the work of transcendental ego in Husserl rather than a personal ego as in James. It should be noted however that the essence of a thing for Husserl (like James) is not something laid up in heaven, but is merely the thing's essential characteristics. Unfortunately, Husserl does not give a thorough explanation of how the essence of a thing is constituted and for him the essence is just given to pure data intuition. Concerning this Wilshire remarks, "(Husserl) gives us only a thin idea of how the essence is constituted, which is rather odd in a philosophy of constitution ... In this respect I think that James' conception of essence is more adequate than is Husserl's."
Although Husserl might balk at the idea of essence viewed as a teleological weapon, their positions here are not totally incompatible. Husserl might be upset by the relativism of James' notion of essence. We must not however overemphasize James' relativism here. As John Wild points out to see complete relativism in James' doctrine of essence is a misinterpretation. For any given purpose, certain aspects of the thing are really essential and others not. Wilshire makes the same point when he writes, "We can say that a thing's essence is given in its fringe: What we would perceive under standard conditions of observability and manipulation."

If we acknowledge their views on essences are not totally incompatible we must also admit they are not identical. Husserl regarded essences as part of a fixed structure constituted by transcendental subjectivity, in which personal needs or interests play no role. In James, on the other hand, personal interest is the apriori element in cognition.

Despite this difference between James and Husserl regarding viewing essence as a teleological instrument, there is a number of similarities between them regarding other features of essences and the relations between essences which we have already pointed out. Taking this into account and the fact that existential phenomenologists concur with James' teleological theory of essences, I believe James' views regarding essence should in no way delay his admittance into the phenomenological movement. His views on essence might cause one to think twice before classifying him directly alongside Husserl, but it shouldn't delay his being classified as an existential phenomenologist.

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77 Wild, The Radical Empiricism of William James, p. 196.

78 Wilshire, James and Phenomenology, p. 201.
VI. Intentionality

We must now examine James' relation to another essential feature of Phenomenology. One of the most important themes of the phenomenological movement is the doctrine of intentionality. Intentionality is the property of consciousness of being consciousness of, i.e., of referring to something. Husserl regarded intentionality as the central insight of his phenomenological analysis of consciousness. First put forward by Husserl in his Logical Investigations, his notion of intentionality was actually a transformation of the doctrine held by his teacher Brentano who had revised the Scholastic notion of it.

According to Husserl's doctrine of intentionality, our cogitations have the basic character of being "consciousness of" something. What appears in reflection as phenomenon is the intentional object, which I have a thought of, perception of, fear of, etc. Every experience is, thus, not only characterized by the fact that it is a consciousness, but is simultaneously determined by the intentional object whereof it is a consciousness.79

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Herbert Speigelberg was the first to point out in what sense Husserl's conception of intentionality differs from Brentano's and how this difference can be traced to the thought of William James. Husserl goes beyond Brentano's conception of intentionality of mere relatedness to an object in two ways by showing (1) that it involves the identification and objectification of "objects" which can be identically the same for a multiplicity of different acts of consciousness and that (2) it is an active and selective achievement of consciousness rather than a merely passive or static directedness to objects already constituted in their specificity independent of the acts which grasp them as "objects."

As we noted earlier, Husserl's personal copy of James' Principles contained certain chapters that were filled with marginal notes. One of those chapters was chapter twelve on Conception. In his book On The Way Toward a Phenomenological Psychology, Hans Linschoten has stated directly that "conception" is James' term for intentionality.

If one looks at James' chapter on conception one is struck by the similarity between James' views and the two ways in which Husserl went beyond Brentano's definition of Intentionality. Compare the first way with the following from James' chapter on conception.

The same matters can be thought of in successive portions of the mental stream, and some of these portions can know that they mean the same matters which the other portions meant. One might

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81 Linschoten, Phenomenological Psychology, p. 181.
put it otherwise by saying that the mind can always intend, and know when it intends, to think of the same. - This sense of sameness is the very keel and backbone of our thinking.82

These words clearly indicate a similarity between James' notion of conception and Husserl's view concerning the identifying function of intentionality.

It should also be noted that in regard to the second way in which Husserl transforms Brentano's conception of intentionality, James' influence is also apparent. Husserl's view of intentionality as an active and in fact creative achievement, rather than a passive operation has its counterpart in James' philosophy. James was also against a copy theory of knowledge and spoke of the function of cognition as a selective process, in which the mind's purpose is to take cognizance of a reality, intend it, and be about it.83 In words that anticipate Husserl, James states "... even the 'that' which we mean to point at may change from top to bottom and we be ignorant of the fact. But in our meaning itself we are not deceived; our intention is to think of the same."84 "We are masters of our meanings."85

James defines conception as the function by which we identify a numerically distinct and permanent subject of discourse. Conception applies strictly speaking to neither the "state of consciousness" nor to what it refers, but rather to the relation between the two. Conception is the relation or function of the mental state in signifying that particular thing.86

82 James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 459.
84 James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 460.
In short, "conception" is, as Linschoten points out, James' term for intentionality.

In listing the five essential characters of thought, James makes the point that it is the essence of consciousness that it deal with objects independent of itself; that is, that it is intentional in the sense of always being conscious of something. As we have shown above, James went beyond this minimum notion of intentionality which is also found in Brentano to point out that it is an active creative process and it is responsible for the character in our acts which allows different acts to have identically the same object.

The similarity between James' and Husserl's notion of intentionality is in no sense superficial. It is in fact even evident in the details of their doctrine of intentionality. Husserl's term "intentional object" is clearly anticipated in James' phrase "things intended to be thought about." James' distinction of two types of knowledge referring to the same object, the pre-predicative knowledge by acquaintance with it and the predicative knowledge about it also appear in Husserl's doctrine of intentionality. James' distinction between object and topic of thought coincides substantially with what Husserl maintains between "object which is intended" and "object as it is intended."\(^{87}\) As far as Husserl's theory of noema and noesis, Alfred Schuetz believes that it "is but the radicalized expression

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of James' statement that the object of thought is all that the thought thinks, exactly as the thought thinks it." As for Husserl's theory of a noematic nucleus or kernel in each intentional object it corresponds to James' theory of fringes revolving around a kernel or topic of thought.

Prior to Husserl, James distinguished object of thought from topic of thought. By object of thought, James means the thought's entire content or deliverance, neither more or less. "The object of every thought" says James "is neither more nor less than all that the thought thinks, exactly as the thought thinks it. . . ." The topic of thought is, however, what the thought is about, and not what is thought about it. Aron Gurwitsch has pointed out that James' distinction between object and topic of thought, when interpreted phenomenologically, motivates the attempt to account for the identical topic in terms of multiple objects or, coinciding with Husserl's terminology, to account for the identical object in terms of multiple noemata.

In the example used by James "Columbus discovered America in 1492" the topic may be designated Columbus but the object, however, is nothing short of the entire sentence. Husserl says very much the same thing although he uses different terms, in the case of the proposition "the knife lies on the

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89 James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 276.

90 Gurwitsch, The Field of Consciousness, p. 188.

91 James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 275.
Husserl also argues that the knife is not the "primary" or the complete object of the judgment, only that of the judgment's subject. Unfortunately, despite this distinction, Husserl still uses the term object to designate the knife rather than the Jamesian expression topic.

The above, however, points out an essential agreement between James and Husserl concerning their detailed analyses of concrete phenomena. This agreement and the ones mentioned earlier stem primarily from the fact that both philosophers emphasize the intentional structure of consciousness, which does not intend things in isolation but in a fringe of relationships with other objects, and with the world as the ultimate horizon.

The textual evidence clearly supports Spiegelberg's claim that James' chapter on Conception was an important directive stimulus in the transformation of the Brentano motif. But whether James had a direct influence on Husserl or not is not our primary concern in this paper. Rather we want to know whether he anticipated the main themes of phenomenology and whether he himself should be considered a phenomenologist. In regard to our goal we can say quite justly that with his theory of conception he anticipated one of the most important themes of phenomenology, intentionality, and we might add he anticipated this theme in a very Husserlian sense. This factor undoubtedly lends support to the view that James should be regarded as a member of the phenomenological movement.

92 Farber, The Foundation of Phenomenology, p. 349.
VII. The Life-World

According to Husserl, an object is always intended as in a world which serves as its horizon. Intentionality is thus closely linked to Husserl's doctrine of Lebenswelt. We must now analyze James' relation to the phenomenological notion of "Life-World."

Lebenswelt is a term used increasingly by the later Husserl and heavily emphasized by the French Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty. It can be defined as the encompassing world of our immediate experience of which the world described by science is only a derivative formulation.

Husserl's conception of the Lebenswelt was first presented in his Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentele Phanomenologie which was published after his death. During the last decade of his life, Husserl was deeply interested in the concept of life-world. Most scholars consider his concept of life-world the most fertile idea revealed in his unpublished works. The term life-world made its first appearance in print in an article by Landgrebe, a student of Husserl. After studying the unpublished writings of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty made the concept of life-world the cornerstone of his own philosophy.


The conception of the Lebenswelt did not however originate with Husserl. His former student Heidegger had given his account of in-der-Welt-Sein in Sein und Zeit prior to Husserl's writings of that section of the Krisis that dealt with the Lebenswelt. Without denying that Husserl's conception of Lebenswelt is an independent development of his own thought, it is apparent that his thought was stimulated by not only his reading of Sein und Zeit, but also by William James' the Principles of Psychology.

Husserl pointed out in his Krisis that even since Galileo the objective world of sciences has been gradually replacing the world of our common, immediate, lived experience (Lebenswelt). He argues that the ultimate explanation of the world of the sciences demands a return to the life-world to the world of the immediate evidence of our lived experience. He stresses the fact that the life-world appears to us as always present, as pre-given and as prior to and independent of any scientific activity. He notes that every phenomena that appears points to a context from which it emerged and appears within an all encompassing horizon, which we call the world. There is always a subtle consciousness of the world which permeates all one's activities and the consciousness of the world as the ultimate horizon becomes the basis on which we accomplish our activities. The life-world for Husserl is a common, inter-subjective world. It has an historical and social meaning for the life-world is essentially related to a certain community at a certain moment in history in which one's immediate lived experience takes place. Most importantly, it is in the life-world that science must discover its foundations for only here can an account of space, time and the world be given as we 'live' them.
Husserl not only speaks of the world as a universal horizon, but also as a ground; thus anticipating Merleau-Ponty's later detailed analysis of thing and world, as figure and ground. Husserl states that this world pre-scientifically is already spatio-temporal, and this has nothing to do with ideal geometrical points nor with pure straight lines and surfaces. He argues that the bodies we encounter in the life-world are real bodies but not bodies in the sense of physical science. "The structures of the Lebenswelt have the same names" says Husserl "But they do not bother, so to speak, with the theoretical ideals and hypothetical substructures of Geometry and Physics." 95 This statement is in agreement with the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty which has shown that the Lebenswelt is characterized by certain stable structures, such as being-in-the-world, and oriented space, for example, and that these structures are quite distinct from the scientific world frame, and physical space.

In the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty examines in detail the structures of the perceptual world, what Husserl calls the Lebenswelt. The life-world is described by Merleau-Ponty as the background from which all acts stand out, and it is presupposed by these acts. He declares that the world is not an object such that I have in my possession, the law of its making. According to Merleau-Ponty the world is the natural setting of, and field for, all one's thoughts and perceptions. Merleau-Ponty argues that there is no inner man, that truth inhabits, rather man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. "When I return to myself from an

95 Husserl, Krisis, p. 142.
excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science," says Merleau-Ponty, "I find not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to be in the world."96

Heidegger had pointed out previously to the work of Merleau-Ponty similar insights concerning the life-world. In Being and Time, he asserted that Being-in is the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.97 In this work, Heidegger goes to great pains to demonstrate how the theoretical constructions of the sciences are really derivative and have their ultimate source in the lived-world of circumspective concern which has the character of "ready-to-hand" rather than mere "present-at-hand."

Husserl's conception of Lebenswelt, Heidegger's theory of in-der-Welt-Sein and Merleau-Ponty's notion of the primacy of the perceptual world have all contributed to an exploration of the world of immediate lived experience. Nonetheless, it was William James who first explored the lived-world, the world of immediate experience and "practical reality," and it was probably his theory of "fringes" which influenced the development of Husserl's conception of Lebenswelt.98

Earlier in this paper we touched upon James' notion of "sub-universes" and his description of the world of sensations as the "paramount reality" upon which the other worlds or "sub-universes" are built. We took up this

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96 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. xi.
97 Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 80.
topic then in connection with Husserl's Phenomenological Reduction, but now we must explore James' notion of the world of "practical reality" in more detail to see its relation to the phenomenologist's conception of Life-World. James' world of sensations is equivalent to Merleau-Ponty's perceptual world and Husserl's Lebenswelt.

According to James we do not escape from the original reality of sensation. He is not here agreeing with Hume, however, for as we noted earlier he rejects the "sensationalistic" doctrine of experience. For James, sensations are already related to and involved in things. "Sensible objects" says James "are thus either our realities or the test of our realities." What James is asserting here is the primacy of the "Life-World." Husserl also felt that the perceptual world is the foundation for all the other worlds and held that the reality of perception characterizes, in the first place, the "ur-doxa."

For James the paramount reality is the "world of sense" that is the concretely experienced "life-world." The worlds of imagination, of dreaming, of all idealities, of mathematical and logical thought, and of science are derived from the paramount reality of the "world of sense." The primary reality is the perceptual world according not only to James but also to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and many other phenomenologists. Merleau-Ponty will later refer to this thesis as "the primacy of perception."

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100 Ibid., p. 301.
According to James, the life-world is really real but the other realms and sub-universes are not nothing. Each of these realms have a being of some kind, each in its own way. The various sub-universes need to be studied in order to determine their meaning and relationship to the life-world. We must keep in mind however that the ultimate meaning of the various sub-universes, be it the world of mathematics or dreaming, etc., is discoverable in the life-world which alone has room for all the sub-universes.

After mentioning that there are various orders of reality, James says there is a fundamental sense of the word "real". Things are believed to be real in this sense when they are thought to be in connection with "reality par excellence" -- "existence for itself, namely, or extra mentem meam." What James means by the latter he makes quite clear. It is that with which the person enters into practical relations; it is that which is believed to be sensibly at hand and to which the person turns with a will; it is all that, too, which is contained in the fringe of such believed things -- all those things believed to be related in space and time.

James states flatly that "the fons et origo of all reality . . . is thus subjective, is ourselves." James holds that our own reality, that sense of our own life which we at every moment possess constitutes the ultimate orientation for our doxic confidence.

The world of living realities as contrasted with unrealities is thus anchored in the Ego, considered as an active and emotional term. That is the hook from which the rest dangles, the absolute support . . .

101Ibid., p. 290.
102Ibid., p. 297.
103Ibid., pp. 296-297.
Whatever things have intimate and continuous connection with my life are things of whose reality I cannot doubt.\textsuperscript{104}

Some phenomenologists such as Aron Gurwitsch believe it is quite possible that Husserl's notion of "Lebenswelt" may have its historical origins in James' doctrine of fringe. The following passage from James' \textit{Psychology} seems to lend support to this claim:

The primitive impulse is to affirm immediately the reality of all that is conceived . . . when we now abstractly admit a thing to be 'real' (without perhaps going through any definite perception of its relations), it is as if we said "it belongs in the same world with those other objects." . . . All remote objects in space or time are believed in this way. When I believe that some prehistoric savage chipped this flint, for example, the reality of the savage and of his act makes no direct appeal either to my sensation, emotion or volition. What I mean by my belief in it is simply my dim sense of a continuity between the long dead savage and his doings and the present world of which the flint forms part. It is pre-eminently a case for applying our doctrine of the 'fringe'. When I think the savage with one fringe of relationship, I believe in him; when I think him without that fringe, or with another one (as, e.g., if I should class him with 'scientific vagaries' in general), I disbelieve him. The word 'real' itself is, in short, a fringe.\textsuperscript{105}

As we noted earlier in this paper, Husserl who is not known for being generous in his crediting of other philosophers, was one of the earliest to praise James for being the first to discover the doctrine of fringe. For James, as for the phenomenologists who came after him, the meaning of real is founded in the most encompassing of all fringes, the whole lived-world. James' savage is thought of as real because he is thought of in the fringe of the flint which we can now feel and hold in our hands. As Wilshire points out we hold the savage to be real because we think of him as a being

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., pp. 296-298. \\
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., pp. 319-320.
\end{flushleft}
who existed in the very same world which "stings" us with interest and affirmation now.\textsuperscript{106}

The "paramount reality" is thus the world within the reach of our senses, the world in which we have a practical and emotional involvement, a world upon which we can act and be affected by. The "paramount reality" is thus the lived-world according to James.

We may at times be concerned with the other orders of reality but even then the fringes of the "world of sense" are always around us. The other realms of being are escapable but not the perceptual world, not the life-world. We may try to lose ourselves in other realms but the sense-world is always there waiting for us when we return. The world of lived experience is primary and inescapable.

... other things, to be sure, may be real for this man or for that—things of science, abstract moral relations, things of the Christian theology, or what not. But even for the special man, these things are usually real with a less real reality than that of the things of sense. They are taken less seriously; and the very utmost that can be said for anyone's belief in them is that it is as strong as his 'belief in his own senses.'\textsuperscript{107}

Like the phenomenologist that came after him, James describes the lived-world as the ground of meaning from which all other meanings, are initially derived. James regards the lived-world as the ultimate horizon of all our acts of perception. For James we never perceive a thing without perceiving a world. An object always has its fringes and its ultimate fringe is the world. He writes: "The first sensation which an infant gets is for him the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Wilshire, James and Phenomenology, p. 179.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} James, Psychology, Vol. 2, p. 294.
\end{itemize}
Universe. And the universe which he later comes to know is nothing but an amplification of that first simple germ . . . "108

James clearly anticipated the phenomenological notion that every object of thought is always viewed within the context of the whole lived world. According to James, all objects thought about must find a place within a system or "world" if they are to be thought about in a determinate fashion at all. A leprechaun for example finds itself in the world of fantasy, and the number two exists in the world of mathematics. Each object comes with a system of objects, i.e., an order of reality which will "tolerate its presence."109 Each of these realms of being in turn derive their ultimate meaning from the world of lived experience, what James calls the paramount reality.

James' position regarding the orders of reality and the primacy of the world of concrete experience is in agreement with the later doctrine of the phenomenologist. James' theory of the primacy of lived reality makes me think that he would not hesitate to agree with Heidegger that man is understandable only as a being-in-the-world, and the world itself is understandable only if initially seen as it is ordinarily lived by a man, the Leben-swelt.

James was not only the first one to point out that there are various sub-worlds each containing their own type of being but he was also the first to point out that each of these realms are aspects and possibilities of the world of practical realities that is the lived-world which is the

108Ibid., p. 8.

109Ibid., p. 293.
ultimate horizon of all experience. In locating the primary sense of reality in perceptual consciousness he anticipates both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Much more can be said about James' contributions to what later came to be called Lebenswelt but this would lead us into a discussion of James' version of the lived-body which I shall discuss in the next chapter of this paper.

In concluding this section of my paper I will simply say that the notion of the primacy of the lived-world is present in James' chapter on "The Perception of Reality." It was there long before Husserl, Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty ever wrote their version of it. And it is still there for any careful reader who wants what may be the best English introduction to the Phenomenological concept of "Lebenswelt."
VIII. The Lived-Body

In phenomenology today a companion theme of Lebenswelt is the lived-body. The lived-body is the living human body of our immediate experience. Husserl had suggested in his Krisis that the life-world of the individual person is centered in his lived-body. Husserl, however, never completely developed his notion of the embodied self. As John Wild points out, he left his pregnant suggestions concerning "embodied I-ness" undeveloped and turned rather to his transcendental theories. It was Merleau-Ponty who fully developed "the phenomenology of the body-subject." The theory of the subjectifized body, however, predates both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and can be found in the writings of William James.

Husserl pointed out in his Krisis that my body, as I live it, is very different from a physical thing and cannot just be regarded objectively. By its way of being in the world and its motility, it helps order and constitute the world field in which it exists.

Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as the actualization of existence, as the condition for objects and as the vehicle of intentionality. Merleau-

Ponty subjectivizes the body and speaks of the body image through which one has undivided possession of the parts of his body because they mutually imply each other through an integration in a single form. He refers to this lived-body as the phenomenal body or habitual body. According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenal body has a spatiality of situation and it enters the figure-background structure as the third term always tacitly understood forming a system with the world. Merleau-Ponty says:

The word 'here' applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external co-ordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinate, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in the face of its tasks.\[^{111}\]

Merleau-Ponty describes the body as the vehicle of consciousness, its deployment in time and space, its presence to a world (incarnation) and its stabilization as habit.

Prior to the writings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, James had asserted that the core of experience is one's body. The following lengthy passage demonstrates clearly that James had anticipated the phenomenological doctrine of lived-body.

The world experienced (otherwise called the 'field of consciousness') comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest. Where the body is 'here'; when the body acts is 'now'; what the body touches is 'this'; all other things are 'there' and 'then' and 'that'. These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to a focus of action and interest which lies in the body; and the systematization is now so instinctive (was it ever not so?)

\[^{111}\]Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 100.
that no developed or active experience exists for us at all except in that ordered form. So far as 'thoughts' and 'feelings' can be active, their activity terminates in the activity of the body, and only through first arousing its activities can they begin to change those of the rest of the world. The body is the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view. The word 'I' then, is primarily a noun of position. Just like 'this' and 'here'.

As Edie points out, James is not here taking a materialistic position but rather a view similar to Sartre when he says "Without being a materialist, I have never distinguished the soul from the body." James points out that the various "selves" which we experience and which is the ground of our self-identity, all carry as a part of their meaning a reference to my body. He says, "the body, and central adjustments, which accompany the act of thinking, in the head, these are the real nucleus of our personal identity..." According to James the feeling of bodily activities is responsible for what has been called our feeling of spiritual activity.

James is not a materialist in his description of the body for he is talking not of a mere mass of matter extended in space but of the habitual body that Merleau-Ponty later investigated. Like Merleau-Ponty, James is concerned with the moving, living, conscious body which expresses our emotions and is the non-objective center of our lived experiences and of our world.

112James, Essays, p. 170.
115James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 341.
James like later phenomenologists holds that one's body can never be perceived as just another object of consciousness. We know it first of all by "direct sensible acquaintance."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. 2, p. 299.} James points out that one's lived-body is never felt as an isolated substance. "Never is the body felt all alone, but always together with other things."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} The lived-body seen as the center of consciousness is never experienced apart from the world. The lived-body is inseparably linked to the lived-world. In all this James is in agreement with the French phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty.

For James, a thing is viewed as real when it is known in a fringe of relationships, the primary one being a practical relationship to one's lived-body. When an object is fringed in this way it is seen as standing in the same world inhabited by one's body. For James, belief reveals reality by revealing the object as belonging in past, present, or future to the same spatial-temporal field as our active bodily life.

Like Merleau-Ponty, James argues that the body is felt as the vehicle of consciousness. He says that acts of thought and feeling are felt as bodily acts.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 301.} Like Merleau-Ponty he is not advocating materialism for he is not denying thought or emotion but is pointing out simply the fact that we are unable to grasp these as purely psychical, as non-bodily.

A number of phenomenologists today are crediting James with being the first to explore the structures of the lived-body. Wilshire for example has
credited James with initiating "what Merleau-Ponty calls 'the phenomenology of the body-subject'." 119 Perhaps, one of the main reasons James' contribution to this area of phenomenology has been overlooked for so long is the ambiguity of James' writings concerning the body. As Linschoten has pointed out, he often mixes his phenomenological treatment of the body with his physiological considerations. 120 This mixing of methods, we have already noted, is one of the major flaws of James' entire phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived-body does not make James' mistake because the mechanistic body of the sciences is rejected right from the start. Because of this Merleau-Ponty presents a better and more consistent phenomenology of the body-subject than James.

Nevertheless, James' contribution to the phenomenology of the lived-body should not go unnoticed. His treatment of body stands as one more indication that James was practicing what later came to be called phenomenology. Although he was not consistent in his phenomenological approach to the body, one cannot deny that James anticipated much of what phenomenologists would later say concerning the body. Like the existential phenomenologists, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, James describes the body as being at the core of experience and the origin of reality. Prior to these phenomenologists and Husserl as well, James had declared the body to be the "fons et origo of all reality." 121

119 Wilshire, James and Phenomenology, p. 133.

120 Linschoten, Phenomenological Psychology, p. 243.

IX. Phenomenological Constitution

Closely related to all the essential themes of phenomenology which we have discussed in the previous chapters is the doctrine of phenomenological constitution. We must now analyze the relationship between James and phenomenology's theory of the constitution of phenomena in consciousness.

Phenomenological constitution is the act by which an object is built up in consciousness. Phenomenological constitution is the main theme of genetic phenomenology to which Husserl began to turn in his later works. In his transcendental idealism Husserl spoke of the objects of consciousness as the "achievements" of the constituting acts of a transcendental ego.

As Spiegelberg has pointed out, the meaning of the term constitution has remained fluid amongst the members of the phenomenological movement. Most phenomenologists have rejected Husserl's theory of transcendental idealism and there are indications that even he found it unsatisfactory. One indication of this is that in his latest writings he seemed to stress the concept "Lebenswelt" which he did not always describe as the pure creation of a transcendental ego.

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As Spiegelberg has pointed out the term constitution can and often is interpreted in a less demanding sense than that used by the later Husserl. Most phenomenologists favor the reflective use of the verb according to which objects "constitute themselves" in our consciousness. In this sense, the exploring the constitution of phenomena in consciousness is practiced by all phenomenologists.

In general, constitutional studies are concerned with determining the way in which a phenomena establishes itself and takes shape in our consciousness. Its purpose is to grasp the essential structures of constitution in consciousness. It starts with the thesis that affirms that existence of an active and selective mind and rejects the copy theory of consciousness.

Husserl was quite ambiguous in his use of the term "constitution". Sometimes he uses it with a reflexive pronoun thus implying that the phenomena of consciousness constitute themselves, and at other times he seems to be saying intentional consciousness actively "achieves" the constitution. Gradually he came to favor the latter, i.e. the active constitution of a transcendental ego.

In his Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness, he tried to trace the constitution of all objectivities to the phenomena of time-consciousness. Here he introduced his retentional-protentional structure of consciousness according to which each moment has its horizon of the just past (retention) and the about to be (protention). In his Ideas, Husserl asserted:
necessarily attached to the now-consciousness is the consciousness of the just past, and this consciousness again is itself a now. Every present moment of experience has about it a fringe of experiences, which also share the primordial now-form, and as such constitute the one primordial fringe of the pure Ego, its total primordial now-consciousness.\footnote{Husserl, Ideas, Sec. 82, p. 219.}

Husserl came to feel that the constitution of the inner consciousness of time was ultimately the source of the consciousness of all other objectivities. He argues that the retentional-protentional structures of time-consciousness is responsible for the fact that a temporal object is seen as the same object from one instant to the next. In his \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, Husserl states:

\begin{quote}
If we consider the fundamental form of synthesis, namely, identification, we encounter it first of all as an all-ruling, passively flowing synthesis, in the form of the continuous consciousness of internal time.\footnote{Edmund Husserl, \textit{Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology}, tr. by D. Cairns, (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960) p. 41.}
\end{quote}

In his \textit{Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness}, Husserl argued that all objects are constituted in the stream of immanent time which is itself constituted by the absolute flux of consciousness which he identifies with absolute subjectivity. He thus traces the constitution of all objectivities to a transcendental ego.

All phenomenologists are concerned with exploring the constitution of phenomena in consciousness. Nearly all of them reject however Husserl's transcendental idealism and they see man as a being in the world that is not of his own making. All existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger take
this stand. These phenomenologists are concerned with how objects constitute themselves in our consciousness and they see man as constitutive of all meaning.

Although James never doubted that certain objects that constitute themselves in our consciousness do enjoy autonomous existence, he also never doubted that the structures of our consciousness contributed to the constitution of these phenomena in our consciousness. He recognized, for example, that it does not matter if there exists an identical object, if there does not also exist a consciousness with the sense of sameness. Without the latter, we would never be aware of the existence of identical objects.

This sense of sameness is the backbone of our consciousness according to James.\(^{125}\) We choose "the point of view of the mind's structure alone."\(^{126}\) Whether there exists any real identity in the things themselves or not, we would never notice an identity if we had no sense of sameness. The sense of sameness forms the basis of the experience of (identical) things. The notion of something that remains identical amidst the variation of impressions and is evidently independent of the impression is accomplished through the "sense-of sameness." In the continuous flux of the stream of experience, the sense of sameness is responsible for our faith in the independent existence of things we perceive.\(^{127}\) According to James, I am always able,

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\(^{126}\) Ibid.
\(^{127}\) Ibid., p. 272.
and am always aware of being able, to think about the same I thought of before since there exists a "principle of constancy in the mind's meanings." Although James does not suspend his belief in the existence of physical things, he holds that the sense of sameness is constitutive of identical objects in consciousness. According to James, we are masters of our meanings and, in this sense the world will not be completed without us.128

Like Husserl and most phenomenologists, James recognized the importance of temporality in the constitution of identical objects in consciousness. The sense of sameness would be impossible if our perception of time was simply an awareness of a succession of now points. Realizing this, James wrote about what he called the "specious present" which is quite similar to Husserl's later doctrine of the retentional-protentional structure of consciousness. Although James never saw temporality as the main factor in the constitution of the intentional object, he was one of the first to point out the retentional-protentional structures of time which Husserl later used in the development of his theory of transcendental constitution.

For James like Husserl the present moment is not a point of time; it has thickness. James states:

In short, the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were a rearward and a forward-looking end.129

129Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 609.
In the *Ideas* where Husserl says that every moment has about it a fringe of the just past and about to be,\(^{130}\) he is giving us simply his version of James' famous theory of the "specious present." James was one of the first to make theoretical room for anticipated time in his notion of the specious present. Husserl's view that "retention" and "protention" are the primary dimensions of the time-sense is a view shared by James. In his chapter on the perception of time which Husserl later studied, James writes, "These lingerings of old objects, these incomings of new, are the germs of memory and expectation, the retrospective and the prospective sense of time."\(^{131}\)

James had pointed out in his chapter on the stream of thought that the stream of experience is constantly changing and sensibly continuous. In his chapter on time these two characteristics of thought are further explained. We have a persisting stream despite the transitions because actual experience seizes upon the earlier experience which in a certain sense is thereby protracted. This continuance, on the other hand, consists in this: that the actual experiences seizes upon the next experience, just as was already done by the un-actual, past experience. Without this we would be unable to speak of a stream of experience. Husserl says very much the same thing in his *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. In fact, a phenomenologist unacquainted with James (and there are many) might mistake the following words of James for those of Husserl: "The knowledge of some other part of

\(^{130}\)Husserl, *Ideas*, Sec. 82.

the stream, past or future, near or remote, is always mixed in with our knowledge of the present thing." 132

A similar version of James' doctrine of the "specious present" can be found not only in the phenomenology of Husserl but also in that of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and, in fact, the thought of most phenomenologists. They, of course, developed their own notion of temporality that went far beyond that of James, but the central core of their theories was still the notion of the "extended now" which James was one of the first to point out.

This notion of the "extended now" played a very important role in Husserl's thought concerning the constitution of phenomena. James did not give temporality the central position in the constitution of phenomena that Husserl did. He did not, however, completely avoid this function of temporality. Like Husserl, James saw that the retrospective and prospective structure of time is the foundation of self-consciousness and reflection. According to James, actual experience cannot know about itself but only previous experience. Self-consciousness is possible only because of retrospection or what Husserl calls retention for this is our immediate link with the past that allows for the possibility of reflection upon the past stream of experience. 133

132 Ibid.

133 James, Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 341. (See also Husserl's Ideas, Sec. 77 and Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception, p. 62).
If the specious present with its fringe of the just past and the about to be is regarded by James as that which makes possible reflection and self-consciousness\textsuperscript{134} it must also be regarded as a necessary condition for James' "sense of sameness" which makes possible consciousness of objectivities.

As James accurately points out a succession of experiences is in itself not yet an experience of the succession. James recognized that the past, in order that it may be experienced as "past," must be experienced together with the present and during the present moment. The specious present makes possible the experience of an enduring identical object in the stream of experience by allowing the past to be experience together with the present and in the present which is necessary for experiencing duration and thus also for experiencing an object as an enduring object. Thus the sense of sameness which requires the experience of duration has the specious present as its foundation.

James did not make any special effort to link his doctrine of temporality with his notion of the sense of sameness. When one does link these two theories one comes up with something quite similar to Husserl's view that phenomena are constituted through the retentional-protentional structure of time-consciousness. James, however, only paved the way for the theory of constitution later adopted by Husserl.

Like Husserl, James sees the constitution of phenomena in consciousness as taking place on the pre-reflective level of the stream of experience.

\textsuperscript{134}James, \textit{Psychology}, Vol. 1, p. 401.
According to James, primordial identification, fixation and abstraction are not rational, reflective activities but are rather activities that occur on the pre-reflective unverbalized level of experience. Sense of sameness is not yet reflection, and does not yet presuppose reflection. According to James the pre-reflective properties of experience are responsible for the articulation of the stream of experience. James' position here is in complete agreement with that of Husserl and his successors.

The following crucial passage from James' *A Pluralistic Universe* seems to anticipate the views of Husserl and other phenomenologists concerning the constitution of the stream of experience. James writes;

> Pure experience is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life. . . . Only new-born babes, or men in semicoma from sleep, drugs, illness, or blows may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense. . . . Pure experience in this state is but another name for feelings or sensations. But the flux of it no sooner comes than it tends to fill itself with emphases, and these salient parts become indentified and fixed and abstracted; so that experience now flows as if shot through with adjectives and nouns and prepositions and conjuctions.135

This seems to support the claim of Linschoten who said, "James adheres firmly to the constitution of thing-experiences, or of structure-nuclei, in the stream of pure experience."136 This is the position not only of James, but of Husserl as well.

Of course Husserl went beyond this position to explain further how this articulation of the stream of experience takes place on the pre-reflective level. He argued that the protentional-retentional structure of time consciousness was responsible for the sense of sameness and hence the perception of all objectivities. James' views point in the direction taken by Husserl.

135James, Essays, p. 348.
Unfortunately the relation between the sense of sameness and temporality was never fully explored by James. Nevertheless his description of both these features of consciousness was no small contribution to the theory of phenomenological constitution. And if he did not probe as deeply as Husserl did in his exploration of constitution of objectivities in consciousness, perhaps it is because (1) he did not suspend his belief in the actual existence of physical objects or deny their existence as Husserl later did, and (2) he felt that we cannot penetrate into what lies behind experience and since what we experience always is already objectivities, we can only postulate a form of pure experience in which identification and hence objectification is achieved.\textsuperscript{137}

Nonetheless the seeds for a theory of phenomenological constitution similar to Husserl's were planted with James' doctrines of the sense of sameness and specious present.

Of course Husserl sees constitution of phenomena as ultimately the achievement of a transcendental subjectivity which generates time itself. This is not James' solution to the problem of constitution but it is also not adopted by most existential phenomenologists. In any case as Alfred Schuetz has pointed out\textsuperscript{138} James refutes the concept of a transcendental ego only within the realm of psychology, leaving open the question of its possible application to other provinces of speculation.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137}James, Psychology, Vol. 2, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{138}Schuetz, "William James' Concept of the Stream of Thought Phenomenologically Interpreted," p. 444.
\textsuperscript{139}James, Psychology, Vol. I, pp. 370-400.
If James does not reduce everything to a transcendental ego his description of the stream of consciousness does contain a number of factors later employed by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists in their constitutional studies. We have already discovered most of these factors in our discussion of intentionality, temporality, and sense of sameness. Most of these factors are related to James' doctrine of the fringe.

James was one of the first to make popular the conception of conscious life as a flowing stream. This metaphor was used extensively by Husserl and his successors. In his chapter on the stream of thought he begins his study of the mind from within, and reaches conclusions later accepted by phenomenology. Here he lists the following five characters of thought: (1) All thoughts tend to belong to a personal consciousness, (2) thought is always changing, (3) thought is sensibly continuous, (4) it deals with objects independent of itself, (5) at all times it is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects and chooses from among them.

Thus prior to Husserl, James had already pointed out that consciousness is essentially cognitive, always selective, and constantly changing yet sensibly continuous. Awareness of these traits of consciousness was of the utmost significance in the development of Husserl's theory of constitution.

James' theory of fringes was perhaps his most original contribution to the theory of phenomenological constitution. James' theory of fringes is related to a number of problems including (1) the problem of the unity of consciousness and the horizon, (2) the problem of the object and the topic of the thought, (3) the problem of so-called articulated syntheses.

It is not my intention to cover these problems here but rather to point out that Husserl's concept of horizon and Merleau-Ponty's notion of figure-
background structure, which are so significant to their theories of constitution, are not without their antecedents in James' doctrine of the fringe.

According to James each of our thoughts is surrounded by fringes of not explicitly felt relations; it has a "halo" or "horizon" of psychic overtones. For James the continuity of the stream of consciousness is possible because there exists between the emergent object of consciousness and its surrounding objects a necessary relation. An isolated object within our stream of thought is regarded by James as a myth. The stream of thought always contains substantive and transitive parts. "What we hear when thunder crashes is not thunder pure," says James, "but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it."\(^{140}\) According to James there exist feelings by which the relations between objects are revealed.\(^{141}\)

James made use of the doctrine of fringe in his version of the Lebenwelt, Intentionality, and temporality. According to James each object is always perceived with the world as its horizon or ultimate fringe. Knowledge about an object always includes knowledge of the object's relations to the rest of the world and the objects in it.\(^{142}\)

Fringe or horizon was not just a fertile concept in the thought of James. Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty make use of it extensively. Husserl speaks of a spatial and temporal horizon in a manner similar to James. He also speaks of an inner horizon which each experience has which refers to the

\(^{140}\)Ibid., p. 240.

\(^{141}\)Ibid., p. 245.

\(^{142}\)Ibid., p. 221.
"stream of different appearance-aspects" through which a thing is viewed in perception. Husserl views these horizons and especially the protentional-retentional fringe of the "now" as significant for the constitution of phenomena.

Merleau-Ponty also sees the concept of horizon as significant for the constitution of phenomena in consciousness. For him the world is always background for a thing. This figure-background structure of consciousness according to Merleau-Ponty has a power of motivation which solicits a loss of consciousness in the object which makes it possible for there to be an in-itself-for-us. Merleau-Ponty says in the Phenomenology of Perception;

> The object-horizon structure . . . is no obstacle to me when I want to see the object: for just as it is the means whereby objects are distinguished from each other, it is also the means whereby they are disclosed.\(^{143}\)

In the area of phenomenological constitution, James is perhaps even closer to Merleau-Ponty and existential phenomenology than he is to Husserl. Like existential phenomenologists he does not see the world as the pure creation of transcendental subjectivity. Professor Edie in fact says that Merleau-Ponty's controversial claim that man is the "absolute source" of the world, which seems to contradict much of what he says about the world must be interpreted in a Jamesian sense.\(^{144}\) Edie argues that Merleau-Ponty's position here would be better understood if seen as a restatement of the following words of James:

\(^{143}\)Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 68.

Reality, starting from our Ego, thus sheds itself from point to point--first, upon all objects which have an immediate sting of interest for our Ego in them, and next, upon the objects most continuously related with these . . . . These are our living realities . . . . We reach thus the important conclusion that of our own life which we at every moment possess, is the ultimate of ultimates for our belief . . . . The world of living realities as contrasted with unrealities is thus anchored in the Ego, considered as an active and emotional term.145

There are a number of similarities in the thought of James and Merleau-Ponty of which the lived-body concept is perhaps the most famous. As Edie's statement suggests, their views regarding the lived-world also contain a number of similarities. But this we have already discussed.

Like Heidegger, James sees the importance of action in the constitution of phenomena in the world. Heidegger's distinction of the merely present-at-hand from the ready-to-hand and his claim that the former is derived from the latter is similar to a position held by James.146 According to James, meaning and essence, as they emerge in thought, are determined by my active interest in the objects with which I am dealing. Here James' term 'interest' is equivalent to what Heidegger calls circumspective concern. That James would agree with Heidegger's formulation that the merely present-at-hand is based and derived from what is ready-to-hand is a view supported by a number of passages from James' Psychology. The following is one such passage:

I am always classing it (object of consciousness) under one aspect or another, I am always unjust, always partial, always exclusive. My excuse is necessity—the necessity which my finite

146Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 188-203.
and practical nature lays upon me. My thinking is first and last and always for the sake of my doing, and I can only do one thing at a time.147

In the field of phenomenological constitution, James holds much in common with Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Most of these similarities are perhaps not a result of a direct influence of James on these phenomenologists. Here we are however not primarily concerned with who influenced whom, but rather with the question: Was James practicing what later came to be called phenomenology? And in this section of our paper we have been specifically concerned with the question: Did James deal with what later was called the problem of phenomenological constitution? In other words, did James concern himself with how phenomena are constituted in consciousness in a manner that anticipated the work of Husserl and his successors?

The answer to these questions must be affirmative. It is my opinion that the textual evidence merits one saying that James made a clear and significant contribution in the area of constitution of phenomena in consciousness. That the fundamental realm of meaning in which we live is constituted by the "active syntheses" of prethematic consciousness is a view shared by James and Phenomenology.
X. Conclusion

We have examined the main themes of phenomenology as they appear in the thought of William James. In each section of this paper we have dealt with one of these themes and have demonstrated that James had dealt with each theme in a manner that was compatible and sometimes identical with the procedures and findings later adopted by the central figures of phenomenology. No section in itself demonstrates that James was a phenomenologist. Taken together, they provide an accumulative proof that James was practicing what later came to be called phenomenology. James was not a pure phenomenologist, but who was except Husserl himself? If the word phenomenology is used to embrace the thought not only of Husserl but also of such thinkers as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Scheler and Sartre, we have no right to exclude the name of William James from this list.

This paper has shown clearly that one can find in the thought of James the basic principles of phenomenology. A careful reader familiar with phenomenology can easily discover the following essential features of phenomenology in the thought of James: phenomenological description, phenomenological reduction, a phenomenological treatment of essences and their essential relationships, the concepts of intentionality, lived-world, lived-body, and phenomenological constitution.
James' treatment of these themes is often similar to Husserl and where he differs from him he does so in a manner usually compatible with the views of existential phenomenology. Both Wilshire and Wild are correct in placing James closer to "existential" than to "transcendental" phenomenology. James' thought concerning the primacy of perception and the embodiment of consciousness does put him perhaps closest to Merleau-Ponty.

The other times where he differs from Husserl stem from James' physiological and scientific considerations which he never did bracket and which resulted in much inconsistency in his thought. Despite the presence of these other considerations in his Psychology, a phenomenological approach to consciousness is clearly present in this work of James. It is also evident in his later essays where these physiological considerations are abandoned.

It is certainly true that in his Psychology James could never completely shake off the attitude of the natural scientist with his interest in causal theory. He continually mixed his descriptive psychology with his explanatory psychology. His Psychology contains heterogenous viewpoints and explanations, i.e., it exhibits a methodological pluralism. This is why James could not develop an explicit phenomenology as Husserl later did. Despite James' unsystematic approach I agree with Linschoten that "James' psychology is phenomenological by intention and in its fundamental thoughts." The similarities between James and contemporary European Phenomenology are just too striking to be overlooked. They are quite apparent in writers like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty and they are also evident to any perceptive

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reader of Husserl and Heidegger. The textual evidence presented in each section of this paper taken together along with the historical evidence mentioned earlier provides, it would seem, good reasons for considering James one of the initial founders of the phenomenological movement.

But, we have not just been arguing here that James should be given a new tag. What we hope for is a new interest and a new approach to James' thought. He could hold the key to the further growth of phenomenology in this country. Using James as an introduction to the difficult European works in phenomenology may create an atmosphere in this country more favorable to the growth of phenomenology.

The reader cannot but conclude with Professor Edie's evaluation:

But, reading James today is a refreshing experience. His philosophy, no less than Husserl's was a return to experience, a turning from the abstract and derived categories of scientific constructions to the life-world in which they are rooted. Insofar as pragmatism as a philosophy of experience (in all its complexity and richness) is a living current in American thought, there remains the hope that William James, in death as in life, may bridge the impassable gulf that separates European from British-American philosophy.150

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150James Edie's introduction to Thevenaz's What is Phenomenology?, p. 35.
Bibliography


The thesis submitted by James Joseph Mullane has been read and approved by members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

May 21, 1973

Signature of Advisor