

Cognitive-System Phenomenology — A Critique of Husserl (Part Fourteen)

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We continue our discussion of positing meanings (Legitimation). In the preceding sections, we mentioned that objects possess various kinds of meanings. Among these, the most extensive system of meanings consists of all the *super-existential* meanings of an object. Naturally, what we discussed earlier was primarily the *content meanings* of an object, and content meanings are themselves a subset of super-existential meanings. In the next few sections, we will examine another relatively common kind of super-existential meaning aside from content meaning. I call this *sensory meaning*, a meaning obtained through the operation of the sensory organs upon an object. What we posit here is precisely the sensory meaning of an object.

We see an object through the intuitive operation of the eyes; we touch an object through the hands; we hear sounds through the ears; we smell odors through the nose; we taste flavors through the mouth. The sensory impact of an object thus arises through the eye, nose, mouth, ears, and hands.

Through the operation of the senses, we are able to discover more properties of an object, and in this way we may gain a deeper understanding of it. In this section we focus mainly on the contribution of visual intuition to our apprehension of an object. We observe that the intuitive operation of the eyes not only provides us with content meanings, but also yields other sensory meanings—namely, the sensory meanings derived from intuition.

The Intuitive Operation of the Eye — The Size Meaning of an Object

In our earlier discussion, we primarily relied on the intuitive operation of the eyes. Content meaning is largely derived from visual intuition (though of course we also cited some examples in which intuition alone cannot yield content meaning for certain things). But through visual intuition, we can obtain not only the content meaning of an object, but also other sensory meanings, such as color, size, and shape.

“This is a very large apple”: here *apple* is the content meaning of the object, while *very large* is an evaluation of its size, a kind of sensory meaning. Yet “very large” or “very small” is relative, and this relativity is tied to the transcendental ego’s cognitive system. “Very large,” strictly speaking, is relative to the usual size of apples, rather than to the apple’s actual physical magnitude. And to judge relative to the usual size of apples, the transcendental ego must possess knowledge of “how large apples generally are.” Without such knowledge, it cannot reach the conclusion that “this apple is very large.”

To illustrate relative size: consider “a very large apple.” Although this apple may indeed be huge relative to ordinary apples, its actual size may not be large at all. Likewise, consider “a very

small watermelon.” Although this watermelon is extremely small relative to ordinary watermelons, its actual magnitude is not necessarily small. In fact, the actual size of “a very small watermelon” may be far greater than that of “a very large apple.”

Thus, when we see an apple and assert something about its size, we must first possess knowledge of the general size of apples; this knowledge is part of our cognitive system. Otherwise we may reach erroneous conclusions. In short, we see that not only the positing of content meaning requires a cognitive system—other sensory meanings also require it.

Of course, in addition to relative size, we may also consider the *absolute* size of an object. Absolute size is not defined relative to items of the same kind, but to objects in general. Absolute size is typically tied to unified systems of measurement. For example, to consider the absolute size of an apple, we might consider the length of its radius—something that clearly involves measurement.

The Intuitive Operation of the Eye — The Color Meaning of an Object

Likewise, we may obtain the color meaning of an object through intuition, as in “This apple is red.” This positing is a further description based on the content meaning—it is a positing of its color. Naturally, such positings can also be fallible, and they depend on the transcendental ego’s cognitive system. If the transcendental ego does not know what “red” is, then any color-positing it makes must be erroneous.

We previously discussed that if an apple is placed before us and we posit “This is an apple,” that positing contains no error. Notice that saying the positing contains no error is relative to *content* meaning. But if we relax the restriction and move beyond content meaning, then “This is an apple” does contain a positing error. For if we consider the apple’s color, then “This is an apple” fails to express this further characteristic. We should instead say “This is a red apple.” Thus whether a positing error exists is *relative*. Within the framework of content meaning, “This is an apple” contains no error; but when extended to other super-existential meanings (in this example, color), a positing error arises.

Indeed, because objects possess myriad super-existential meanings, in an absolute sense *any* positing we make will involve some error, for some super-existential meaning will always be left unconsidered. The more super-existential meanings we uncover about an object, the more complete our understanding of it becomes.

Sometimes an object may not possess just one color; it may have variegated patterns, or it may have different sides with different colors. In such cases, our positing becomes more complex, and we must posit the color of each surface.

The Intuitive Operation of the Eye — The Shape Meaning of an Object

The shape of an object may likewise be obtained through intuition. Consider the cube we discussed earlier. If we posit “This is a cube,” the positing is both a content positing and a shape positing. If we see a basketball and posit “This is a basketball,” the *ball* component of the term refers to its shape, whereas “basketball” refers to its content meaning. Thus “This is a basketball” includes both content positing and shape positing.

Some objects, however, do not have regular shapes; we may then rely on resemblance to posit their shapes. We may use expressions such as “somewhat similar to” or “a bit like” to posit meaning. If there is an apple before us that is not perfectly round but somewhat like a sphere, we may posit: “This is an apple, and its shape is somewhat like a sphere.” “This is an apple” is the content positing; “its shape is somewhat like a sphere” is the shape positing. In other cases the object’s shape may resemble nothing in particular, so we may divide it into parts: “Its upper part resembles a cylinder, and its lower part resembles a sphere,” or “Its head resembles a human head, while its body resembles that of a lion.”

Earlier, when discussing the direction of positing, we mentioned three main types: affirmative positing, negative positing, and possibility positing. We might now add a fourth direction: *resemblance positing*. This resembles possibility positing, but strictly speaking is not the same. For example, suppose the transcendental ego *X* faces an apple. If *X* posits “This is somewhat like an apple,” the implicit meaning is “It is not an apple,” which is not the same as “It may be an apple.” Resemblance positing refers to a kind of similarity, mainly in outward appearance. Using the apple as an example: “This is somewhat like an apple” means its shape and external characteristics resemble those of an apple, whereas “This may be an apple” concerns whether it could *actually* be an apple. If we place a stone inside a box and close the lid, then “The thing in the box may be an apple” is a true statement, for we cannot see the object inside. But “It is somewhat like an apple” is not a true statement, because we cannot see its shape at all—we cannot speak of resemblance.

The Intuitive Operation of the Eye — Other Possibilities

Above we primarily discussed the intuitive operation of the eyes, which can yield content meaning, color meaning, size meaning, and shape meaning—each a type of super-existential meaning of an object.

Let us consider another example. If the transcendental ego *X* sees a rose, then in addition to recognizing it as a rose, he may say: “This rose is beautiful.” Our experience of beauty is also something obtained through intuition. Intuition reveals that the thing is beautiful. Beauty, too, is a super-existential meaning of an object. “This rose is beautiful” is a positing of the object’s quality of beauty.

Beauty is most frequently applied not to objects but to women. How is the intuition of beauty achieved? How do we perceive beauty in a thing? How do we perceive that one woman is beautiful while another is not?

Obviously, the characteristics of beauty are not quite like size, color, or shape, for we often lack any applicable concrete standard. Yet we can certainly sense beauty in a beautiful woman. How is this to be explained? How do we come to apprehend beauty in the appearance of a beautiful woman?

We leave this intriguing question to the reader.

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