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## Positive Account of Protention and its Implications for Internal Time-Consciousness

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## Positive Account of Protention and its Implications for Internal Time-Consciousness

### Abstract

One of fifteen original essays by an international team of expert contributors that together represent a cross-section of Husserl Studies today. The collection manifests the extent to which single themes in Husserl's corpus cannot be isolated, but must be considered in relation to their overlap with each other. Many of the accepted views of Husserl's philosophy are currently in a state of flux, with positions that once seemed incontestable now finding themselves relegated to the status of one particular school of thought.

In this chapter, DeRoo sheds light upon one area of phenomenology, which is Edmund Husserl's positive account of protention.

### Keywords

phenomenology, Husserl, regress, retention, consciousness

### Disciplines

Philosophy | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

### Comments

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# 1 A Positive Account of Protention and its Implications for Internal Time-

## 2 Consciousness

3

4 Neal DeRoo

5

6 Protention is often understood as being equivalent to retention but functioning in the  
7 other (future) direction. This, I would argue, has prevented a full appreciation of protention's  
8 importance to phenomenological scholarship. In this paper, I will elucidate Husserl's positive  
9 account of protention. I will argue that the view that protention is like retention, but in the other  
10 direction, is insufficient. Abandoning this negative view, I will explain what is unique about  
11 protention, and how it helps make sense of such key phenomenological concepts as fulfillment,  
12 passive intentionality, and self-constitution.

13 I will begin by briefly sketching out Husserl's broad position on internal time-  
14 consciousness, thereby showing how protention *can* be understood as an inverse retention  
15 (Section I). Next, I will move to a closer examination of the concept of retention, in order to  
16 begin to understand what it would mean for protention to be an inverse retention. In this  
17 examination, it will become clear that retention enables Husserl to escape the content-  
18 apprehension schema, and the problems that result therefrom (especially the problem of infinite  
19 regress), via the twofold intentionality of retention and its relation to absolute consciousness  
20 (Section II). Alongside this advance will emerge the question of *how* retention is able to foster  
21 such a double-intentionality. The distinction between general and particular fulfillment will  
22 begin to solve this problem of the constitution of the double-intentionality. In doing so, it will  
23 suggest that the concept of protention might be a more fruitful area of analysis than is retention

24 for trying to determine the possibility of the constitution of the double-intentionality of absolute  
 25 consciousness (Section III). I will then take up this suggestion, and note how the “striving”  
 26 character of protention, and the two distinct modes (i.e., clarifying and confirming) of bringing to  
 27 intuition that protention makes possible, are both unique to protention and necessary for the  
 28 constitution of the double-intentionality of absolute consciousness, thereby finally confirming  
 29 that protention is more than an inverse retention (Section IV). I will end by drawing out the  
 30 implications of this positive account of protention for our understanding of retention and its  
 31 relationship to absolute consciousness. This conclusion will suggest that several other key  
 32 aspects of phenomenological thought should also be re-evaluated in light of this positive account  
 33 of protention, and that such a re-evaluation will have consequences for fields as diverse as ethics,  
 34 politics and psychology.

35

### 36 I. Husserl on Time

37

38 In *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (Hua X),<sup>1</sup> Husserl  
 39 develops a notion of the “internal” time of the constituting ego. In discussing the immanent time  
 40 of the flow of consciousness, Husserl expounds a three-fold notion of time as primary  
 41 impression, retention, and protention.<sup>2</sup> On this model, immanent time begins with primary

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Hua X are taken from Husserl 1991.

<sup>2</sup> It is not until the time of Texts n. 50 and 51 (dated by Rudolf Bernet between October of 1908 and Summer of 1909) that Husserl replaces his initial talk of “primary memory” with language of “retention.” For simplicity’s sake, I have stayed with retention throughout the essay. For more

42 sensation. These primary sensations then “remain” briefly in consciousness, in the mode of a  
 43 “running-off” (Hua X, 27ff.), and are constantly modified in this running-off: as I am confronted  
 44 with new sensations in every instant,<sup>3</sup> the immediately previous sensations are not removed from  
 45 consciousness, but remain, albeit in modified form—no longer conceived as present, but as just-  
 46 past. This aspect of consciousness’ ability to retain the immediately previous sensations is  
 47 deemed “retention.” Protention emerges here as the correlate of retention, that which works like  
 48 retention but in the other, future, direction (Hua X, 55; see also Hua III/1, § 77 and § 81). In  
 49 protention, rather than retaining a past instant, I protend or “anticipate”<sup>4</sup> what will be sensed in  
 50 immediately future instants. If, at time D, I have a sensation of D and a retention of C, Dc, then I  
 51 will also have a protention of E, `E, that anticipates the next instant E as not-yet-in-the-now (Hua  
 52 X, 77, 373), such that at the next instant, E, I will sense E, have a retention of D, Ed, and a

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on the change of terminology and how it relates to the development of Husserl’s account of time-  
 consciousness in Hua X, see Brough 1972, 314-15.

<sup>3</sup>The instant is what Husserl calls the “now-point”: it exists only as the phase of a continuum, and  
 “is conceivable only as the limit of a continuum of retentions, just as every retentional phase is  
 itself conceivable only as a point belonging to such a continuum; and this is true of every now of  
 time-consciousness” (Hua X, 33). Even as a limit, the now is only an “ideal limit” (Hua X, 40).

We will see that as the analysis of protention deepens in the later works, this concept of the  
 “now-point” is de-emphasized.

<sup>4</sup> Though this must be kept distinct from actively anticipating a future event, which would be the  
 intentional act of anticipation, rather than the protentional modification of the intentional act of  
 perception. The same goes for retention, which must be kept distinct from the intentional act of  
 reproducing or recollecting (see Hua X, §§ 14-19, especially § 19).

53 secondary retention of C, Ec,<sup>5</sup> along with a protention of F, `F, and so on (see Hua X, 28; Zahavi  
54 1999, 66).

55         This “temporality” of consciousness is metaphorically called “flow” (Hua X, 75).<sup>6</sup>  
56 Within this flow, protention is understood as retention “turned upside down” (Hua X, 55-56),  
57 that is, retention in the other direction. Thought in terms of the movement of the flow relative to  
58 the now-point of the primal impression, this is perhaps understandable. But is it correct? To  
59 answer this, we must turn to a more in-depth study of the individual acts that make up Husserl’s  
60 theory of time, and specifically, in line with the aim of this paper, to protention. However, while  
61 Husserl discusses primary impression and retention at length, protention does not get much more  
62 than a few passing mentions in these lectures. Given that protention is claimed to be like  
63 retention but in the other direction, this might not prove to be too problematic, if we can get an  
64 adequate understanding of retention. Therefore, let us turn first to retention.

65

## 66 II. Retention and Absolute Consciousness

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<sup>5</sup> That is, a retention (Ec) of the retention (Dc) of C.

<sup>6</sup>William James uses the metaphor of a rainbow before a waterfall to illustrate the flow: while the rainbow remains constant, the material that makes up the rainbow, the individual particles of water that reflect sunlight and hence give off the appearance of the rainbow, are constantly changing, constantly moving, as the water continues to flow; see James 1981, 593. For a more thorough explanation of the relation between Husserl’s and James’ theories of time-consciousness, see Cobb-Stevens 1998.

67           Initially, Husserl thought that retention enabled consciousness to keep past moments in  
 68 the present consciousness,<sup>7</sup> and he struggled with the question of *how* retention was able to  
 69 achieve this. In lecture notes from 1904-1905 that make up the bulk of the first portion of  
 70 Husserliana X, Husserl still believed that retention functioned on the model of content and  
 71 apprehension: the shading-off or adumbration functions as the content that is apprehended by the  
 72 present consciousness as just past. However, Husserl would soon realize that this model of  
 73 retention is unsatisfactory, as apprehension-content can be the content for only one apprehension,  
 74 and therefore the content that is present to consciousness at A can only be used to apprehend the  
 75 now-phase of A. In order for a retention to be understood as a retention of a past moment, it must  
 76 already be modified. In being aware of the past *as past*, therefore, retention is a modifying  
 77 consciousness, that is, a consciousness through and through.<sup>8</sup>

78           The danger here, of course, is an infinite regress: if retention is already a constituted  
 79 consciousness, then there must be some other level of consciousness that constitutes that level,  
 80 and so on, *ad infinitum*. Husserl's notion of absolute consciousness (Hua XXIV, 245) is meant to  
 81 answer this problem of infinite regress. To avoid infinite regress, absolute consciousness must be  
 82 self-constituting (Hua X, 378-379). It can be so because of what Husserl calls the double  
 83 intentionality of retention: retentional intentionality is both a transverse [*Querintentionalität*] and

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<sup>7</sup>This was necessary, according to the prevalent view during Husserl's time. Meinong was the major proponent of this view, which stated that temporally distributed objects can only be presented by temporally undistributed presentations; see Meinong 1978 and Kortooms 2002, 39-43.

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, it is similar to the phantasm of phantasy-consciousness; see Hua XXIV, 260 note 1.

84 an horizontal intentionality [*Längsintentionalität*] (Hua X, 380). The first intentionality makes  
85 possible the presentation of objects to consciousness. The second makes possible the (self-)  
86 presentation of the stream of absolute consciousness in which the perception of temporality is  
87 possible, and makes it possible because, by way of this horizontal intentionality, absolute  
88 consciousness “constitutes itself as a phenomenon in itself” (Hua X, 381). What this double-  
89 intentionality makes possible, then, is that one act (retention) constitutes both the immanent  
90 objects of consciousness, and the consciousness of the different temporal modes of givenness of  
91 that object over time.

92

### 93 III. Fulfillment and Protention as (more than) Inverse Retention

94

95         However, Husserl himself raises questions about retention’s ability to achieve this  
96 double-intentionality. In trying to make sense of the role that retentions play in constituting the  
97 “unitary stream of experience,” Husserl claims that we must take into account the fact that every  
98 retention “contains expectation-intentions whose fulfillment leads to the present” (Hua X, 52).  
99 Hence, it is the concept of fulfillment that is able to “tie” retentions to the present of the stream  
100 of consciousness, and this because of the presence of protention: “Every process that constitutes  
101 its object originally is animated by protentions that emptily constitute what is coming as coming,  
102 that catch it and bring it toward fulfillment” (52). It is the fulfillment of these emptily constituted  
103 protentions that we are made aware of in retention (52).



104           Unfortunately, Husserl does not develop this intriguing notion in any more detail in Hua  
 105 X. He does, however, develop it in more detail in other texts of this time (c. 1917).<sup>9</sup> In  
 106 addressing it, Husserl starts to move away from the notion of protention as merely an inverse  
 107 retention, and begins to develop a positive account of protention. In the “Bernau Manuscripts” of  
 108 1917-1918, Husserl begins to realize that protention, in its capacity for fulfillment, promises to  
 109 be a more fertile ground for a phenomenological analysis of absolute consciousness (Hua  
 110 XXXIII, 225-226).<sup>10</sup> The notion of fulfillment gives Husserl a stronger account of how absolute  
 111 consciousness is self-constituting, one that answers how we can come to know the self-  
 112 constituting character of absolute consciousness. In order to fulfill a protention, an act must be  
 113 aware, not just of the constitution of the present object, but also of the constitution of the  
 114 preceding act anticipating fulfillment. Hence, there is a two-fold coincidence between protended  
 115 and present moments: first, there is a coincidence between the previous protentional intention  
 116 and the primal presentation (Hua XXXIII, 25); second, there is a coincidence between that  
 117 toward which both the protention and the primal presentation are directed. The first of these  
 118 Husserl describes under the rubric of “general fulfillment,” and the second under “particular  
 119 fulfillment” (Hua XXXIII, 29-30). General fulfillment plays a role in the self-constitution of the  
 120 primal stream, thought along the lines of the stream’s “self-relatedness” (*Selbstbezogenheit*, Hua  
 121 XXXIII, 207). Particular fulfillment plays a role in the constitution of the immanent temporal

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<sup>9</sup> § 24, from which the above quotes from Hua X, 52 were taken, was composed at a later date than most of the rest of the first portion of Hua X. In being written specifically for the compiled edition prepared by Edith Stein, § 24 was written in 1917; see Boehm’s note on Hua X, 52; Husserl 1991, 54 note 36.

<sup>10</sup>All translations from this volume are from Kortoos 2002, unless otherwise noted.

122 objects.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the notion of fulfillment is able to explain why the double-intentionality needed  
 123 to make absolute consciousness self-constituting is united in protention in way that could not be  
 124 so easily explained in retention. Let us examine this idea of fulfillment in more detail.

125

#### 126 A. General Fulfillment

127

128           General fulfillment provides Husserl with a way of conceiving the constitution of the  
 129 primal stream of absolute consciousness: because every moment is the fulfillment of a previous  
 130 protention, every moment can be connected to the previous moment via this general fulfillment.  
 131 In describing this general fulfillment by claiming that “fulfillment contains in itself retention of  
 132 the previous intention” (Hua XXXIII, 25), Husserl indicates that every protention has a  
 133 retentional aspect, and every retention a protentional aspect (Hua XXXIII, 21-22). Every  
 134 protention grows out of a retentional horizon.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, every point of any momentary phase

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<sup>11</sup>One must be careful to distinguish the immanent temporal objects that appear pre-phenomenally in the primal stream of absolute consciousness from the immanent temporal objects of intentional acts. This difference is marked in Husserl by the designation of the former objects as being constituted by a “passive intentionality,” vis-à-vis the “active intentionality” of the second level of consciousness (Hua XI, § 18). The issue of the status of what I am here calling the immanent temporal objects has been disputed recently (see Zahavi 1999, 69-75; Zahavi 2000; Zahavi 2004). There is not time to get into this debate here. Those interested in knowing more are invited to consult the cited texts.

<sup>12</sup> “The style of the past becomes projected into the future” (Ms. L I 15, p. 32b [THIS PASSAGE IS NOW IN HUA 33. Give references. THE PASSAGES CAN BE TRACED IN THE

135 of consciousness has an essentially protentional aspect, in that every point is directed towards its  
 136 fulfillment in the corresponding point of the following momentary phase of consciousness.<sup>13</sup> As

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“NACHWEIS DER ORIGINALSEITEN” in the back of the vol.]) I would prefer to maintain reference to the L manuscripts and to Mensch’s specific translation of it in Mensch 1999 for the reasons given in this note; I would be willing to add reference to Hua XXXIII in addition to this. However, I currently have no lending privileges at my university [my contract does not begin again until September], so am unable to access the volume there. If you have easy access to the volume, would you be able to find these references for me? If not, let me know soon, and I will try to borrow a colleague’s card and see if I can get my hands on the volume that way. Sorry for this inconvenience], translated in Mensch 1999, 43, 57 note 7. The “L” Manuscripts form the textual basis of Hua XXXIII. Some of the research on Husserl’s concept of protention precedes the publication of Hua XXXIII. For accuracy’s sake, I have maintained the reference to the L manuscript when using translations of this material that pre-date Hua XXXIII. Some later scholars (e.g., Rodemeyer 2003) have persisted in using the L manuscripts rather than Hua XXXIII. Though the reason for their decision is not explained, I have chosen to again maintain reference to the L Manuscripts rather than Hua XXXIII when using translations from those scholars, in keeping with their own preference for the L manuscripts.

<sup>13</sup>To go back to our above example: if a moment E contains an impression of E, a retention of D, Ed, a secondary retention of C, Ec, and a protention of F, `F, then we must understand each of these moments, and not just `F, as protentional: just as `F protends its givenness in the next instant as F, so too E protends its givenness in the next instant as Fe, Ed protends its givenness as Fd, and Ec as Fc; see Hua XXXIII, 21-22; Kortooms 2002, 160; and Zahavi 1999, 66. Husserl revises his earlier diagram on internal time-consciousness (Hua X, 28) with more complex

137 such, all points along the vertical line of each instant can be viewed as protentions, and not just  
 138 those that we originally called protentions (indicated in our example by the `). Further, it is only  
 139 because of these implicit protentions that we can speak of retentions as retaining anything at all:  
 140 it is the character of fulfillment that entails that the previous instant has been retained (see Hua  
 141 X, 52), and this is true for every point of a momentary phase of consciousness, not just that point  
 142 which is a primal impression (F) of what had immediately prior been the primal protention (`F).

143         It is because of the coincidence entailed in this notion of fulfillment that Husserl is able to  
 144 posit the self-relatedness that characterizes the stream of absolute consciousness and enables it to  
 145 avoid the problem of infinite regress: because this coincidence happens *in the very fulfillment*,  
 146 there is no need of another act beyond the coincidence to unite the past to the future (Hua  
 147 XXXIII, 27). While the sixth *Logical Investigation* seems to indicate that consciousness of  
 148 fulfillment requires three elements (namely a consciousness that must be fulfilled, a  
 149 consciousness that fulfills, and a synthesizing consciousness that ties the first two together such  
 150 that one can be conscious of the fulfillment), the position that Husserl describes in the Bernau  
 151 Manuscripts is that, because of the essential role of protention, this third element (which quickly  
 152 would lead to a problem of infinite regress) is no longer necessary. As Kortooms describes it: the  
 153 “consciousness that fulfills is at the same time conscious of itself as being a consciousness that  
 154 fulfills. Such self-consciousness is possible because the consciousness that fulfills itself retains  
 155 the protentional directedness toward fulfillment that belonged to the preceding phase of  
 156 consciousness” (Kortooms 2002, 162). Husserl is thereby able to avoid the problem of infinite  
 157 regress, as there is no longer recourse to an ‘external’ synthesizing consciousness beyond the

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descriptions of retention in Hua XXXIII, 34-35; these are drawn out in diagram form in

Kortooms 2002, 167, 168.

158 fulfillment.<sup>14</sup> This self-related fulfillment is continuously occurring in general fulfillment, in  
 159 which protention protends the mode of givenness of what is to come: E protends its being given  
 160 in the next instant as a retention, Fe, Ed protends its being given in the next instant as a  
 161 secondary retention, Fd, and `F protends its being given in the next instant as F. But again, the  
 162 mutual implication of protention and retention is at work, as, conversely, Fe retains the  
 163 protentional directedness of E as well as its fulfillment, F retains the protentional directedness of  
 164 `F and its fulfillment, and Fd retains the protentional directedness of Ed and its fulfillment (as  
 165 well as the protentional directedness of D and its fulfillment in Ed, etc.). This complex  
 166 relationship between protention and retention is able to do away with talk of primal impression:<sup>15</sup>  
 167 rather than protending or retaining a particular sensation-content, protentions protend retentions,  
 168 and retentions retain protentions (as well as the retention of previous protentions).<sup>16</sup> As Husserl  
 169 puts it:

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<sup>14</sup> As was the case in the early accounts of internal time consciousness (e.g., when Husserl was still employing the content-apprehension schema; see above), and as would be the case if he maintained the notion of fulfillment introduced in the sixth of the *Logical Investigations*.

<sup>15</sup> That it is able to do away with such talk does not mean that Husserl always consistently does so. The talk of primal impression will remain intermittently throughout the middle and later writings. Lanei Rodemeyer would prefer to replace talk of primal impression with that of “moment of actualization,” which she claims is less likely to reify the idea of a “now-point,” which has always been an idealized abstraction for Husserl (see Hua X, 40; and above, note 3); see Rodemeyer 2003, 131 ff. and 150 note 11.

<sup>16</sup> This constitutes an advance, of sorts, on Husserl’s earlier claims that retentions retain retentions (Hua X, 81).

170

171 That which came before as such is retained in a new retentional consciousness and this  
 172 consciousness is, on the one hand, characterized in itself as fulfillment of what was  
 173 earlier, and on the other, as retention of what was earlier... The earlier consciousness is  
 174 protention (i.e., an intention “directed” at what comes later) and the following retention  
 175 would then be retention of the earlier retention that is characterized at the same time as  
 176 [its] protention. This newly arriving retention thus reproduces the earlier retention with  
 177 its protentional tendency and at the same time fulfills it, but it fulfills it in such a way that  
 178 going through this fulfillment is a protention of the next phase (Ms. L I 15, 24a-b; as  
 179 translated in Rodemeyer 2003, 131).

180

181 All this makes Husserl able to say that the “now is constituted through the form of protentional  
 182 fulfillment, and the past through a retentional modification of this fulfillment” (Ms. L I 16, 9a; as  
 183 translated in Rodemeyer 2003, 138).

184

## 185 B. Particular Fulfillment

186

187 The emphasis on the “form” or structure of the flow as made up of the movements of  
 188 protention and retention marks the fundamental difference between general and particular  
 189 fulfillment. It also entails that, no matter what comes, consciousness remains *structurally* open to  
 190 a future that remains yet to come.<sup>17</sup> This structural openness is infinite, as every moment would

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<sup>17</sup> The structural openness to the future is present already in Hua X: “But there is an essential difference between protention, which leaves open the way in which what is coming may exist

191 contain a protention, `F, of the next instant, F, which itself would pretend its givenness in the  
 192 following moment as Gf, etc., as well as the protention, ``G, of that next instant's protention, `G,  
 193 of the instant, G, that comes immediately after that, and so on, *ad infinitum*.<sup>18</sup> To avoid a new  
 194 problem of infinite regress, Husserl employs the idea of particular fulfillment. If protention, via  
 195 general fulfillment, constitutes the self-relatedness of absolute consciousness, thereby avoiding  
 196 the old problem of infinite regress, protention also, via particular fulfillment, constitutes the  
 197 immanent object, thereby avoiding the new problem of infinite regress.

198         In particular fulfillment, fulfillment occurs gradually, as reflected in the modes of  
 199 givenness of the temporal object as they differ according to degrees of fullness. The nearer the  
 200 object gets to me (physically and temporally), the fuller is the intuition I am able to have of it.  
 201 The givenness of the object, then, tends toward a culmination (Hua XXXIII, 30) or saturation  
 202 point (Hua XXXIII, 39) of greatest fullness, which is also the point of minimal evacuation (Hua  
 203 XXXIII, 30). This point is the primal impression, which functions as the *terminus ad quem* of  
 204 protentions and the *terminus a quo* of retentions (Hua XXXIII, 38).

205         The culmination point applies only to what Husserl calls the "domain of intuition." This  
 206 domain is distinct from the domain of non-intuitive differentiation, which is characterized by a  
 207 certain empty, non-intuitive potential for differentiating the points of an immanent temporal

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and whether or not the duration of the object may cease and when it may cease, and retention,  
 which is bound" (Husserl's marginal note added to Hua X, 297; Husserl 1991, 309 note 42).

<sup>18</sup> The retention of previous retentions and protentions would also border on infinite. However,  
 the openness of protention marks an essential difference from the necessarily "bound" nature of  
 retention (see note on Hua X, 297, and note 17 above). This will be discussed in greater detail in  
 Section IV below.

208 object.<sup>19</sup> The limit of the intuitive domain is what Husserl calls the zero of intuition (Hua  
 209 XXXIII, 227). This limit prevents the problem of infinite regress because of the finite nature of  
 210 intuition: we cannot intuit an infinite number of things. In the domain of non-intuitive  
 211 differentiation, however, we can theoretically distinguish an infinite number of different points,  
 212 that is, an infinite number of potential protentions and retentions attaching to every momentary  
 213 phase of consciousness. This domain is limited again by the point at which consciousness falls  
 214 away, a second zero. Here, however, the limit is an open point without differences (Hua XXXIII,  
 215 227-228), that is, the point in which there exists, theoretically, an infinite number of points that  
 216 consciousness cannot practically differentiate (e.g., all the future protentions mentioned above).  
 217 There is, then, a certain potential infinity in both the protentional and retentional directions.  
 218 However, this potential infinity does not succumb to the problem of infinite regress because no  
 219 one, and certainly not Husserl, has claimed that consciousness can retain or protend over an  
 220 infinite span of time. Indeed, quite the opposite—the period of retention and protention is  
 221 severely limited, tied, as it is, to the “primal impression.”<sup>20</sup> This, I would argue, avoids the

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<sup>19</sup> This distinction is called for by the double meaning of retention and protention implied by the striving character that marks fulfillment. This double meaning implies that the same retentional instant can be simultaneously seen as a fulfillment (of the protentional directedness of the previous instant) and as a de-filling (*Entfüllung*; see Hua XXXIII, 30) with regard to the fullness of the object’s givenness.

<sup>20</sup> See our earlier discussion of general fulfillment, above.



222 problem of infinite regress in its most damaging guise, while still leaving consciousness  
 223 necessarily open in the direction of protention and retention.<sup>21</sup>

224

#### 225 IV. Differentiating protention and retention

226

227         The difference in direction highlights what has, up to now, been the main (perhaps only)  
 228 difference between protention and retention: one deals with the future, the other with the past.  
 229 Even the act of fulfillment, in itself, does not favor protention over retention, as both are  
 230 necessary for fulfillment to occur (Hua XXXIII, 46).

231         But it is not accidental that the discussion of fulfillment occurs at the same time as  
 232 Husserl increases his focus on protention. There is something essentially different about  
 233 protention that gives it a unique function in fulfillment, and hence a unique function in absolute  
 234 consciousness and everything this makes possible in phenomenology. What makes protention  
 235 intrinsically different from retention is the “striving” character of protention (Hua XI, 73).  
 236 Husserl makes clear that the striving characteristic of protention is a passive directedness, a  
 237 “passive intentionality” (Hua XI, 76), with which the ego has no active involvement (Hua XI,  
 238 86). This “striving” character, Husserl claims, belongs intrinsically to protention, and protention  
 239 alone: while retention may acquire this striving character, it does not intrinsically possess it. In  
 240 other words, though we *can* “cast a backward turning glance” toward the past, this is a  
 241 subsequent act which is distinct from retention, and we must “clearly differentiate between the  
 242 direction of the egoic regard, and the direction in perception itself that already takes place prior

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<sup>21</sup> Kortooms gives a much more in-depth discussion of this new problem of infinite regress and its potential solutions than is needed for this paper in Kortooms 2002, 169-174.

243 to the apprehending regard” (Hua XI, 74).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Husserl seems to say that an intentionally-  
 244 directed retention ceases to be retention; rather, once “awakened” by a directed consciousness, it  
 245 “should already be characterized as a remembering” (Hua XI, 80) rather than as a retaining.<sup>23</sup> To  
 246 be directed toward the past, then, is to be remembering, not retaining. Retention retains the past  
 247 in a temporality that is in the present, always moving toward the future. Hence, retention is not  
 248 directed toward the past.

249         Because it is not directed, then, retention does not bear the same necessary relation to  
 250 intentionality as does protention. Protention, and protention alone, becomes a necessary aspect of  
 251 intentionality: without protention, there would be no intentionality.<sup>24</sup> The openness to  
 252 temporality that goes beyond its own fulfillment which is constitutive of protention is the same  
 253 directedness beyond immediate fulfillment that characterizes intentionality. In fact, Husserl will  
 254 say that intentions and expectations “are two sides of one and the same thing” (Ms. L I 16, 5b; as  
 255 translated in Rodemeyer 2003, 137). The directedness of protention, then, is a necessary aspect

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<sup>22</sup> All quotations from this volume are from Husserl 2001b.

<sup>23</sup> This seems to be in line with some of the later texts from Hua X, e.g., Text n. 54 (which is dated no earlier than the end of 1911): “We rather call it the *retention of the earlier primal sensation*, when it is a question of a consciousness in the original flow of the modifications of sensation; otherwise we call it a *reproduction of the earlier sensation*. We must adhere to this distinction consistently” (Hua X, 377).

<sup>24</sup> For more on the relationship between the directedness of protention and intentionality, see Hua XI, 74-78 and the L Manuscripts (L I 16, 4a); see also Mensch 1999, 45-52 and Rodemeyer 2003, 137-139.

256 of intentionality.<sup>25</sup> It also makes possible the apperception, and hence the constitution, of objects.  
 257 The movement beyond the (fulfilled) presence at work in protention opens up to me the  
 258 possibility of other perspectives that are not my own, enables me to move beyond the merely  
 259 present to apperceive objects in their combination of presence and absence (Hua XI, 190).<sup>26</sup>

260 Fulfillment is “a unity of consciousness... that carries out a new constitutive  
 261 accomplishment” (Hua XI, 75), and as such can be characterized as an associative synthesis (Hua  
 262 XI, 76). Specifically, fulfillment is the unity between the full presentation of confirmation and  
 263 the empty protentional presentation that makes possible the self-relatedness of the primal stream  
 264 of absolute consciousness. This associative character obviates the need for a third “synthesizing”  
 265 consciousness (Hua XI, 77), hence enabling the self-constituting nature that we have earlier seen

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<sup>25</sup> See the following manuscript by Eugen Fink, in his role as Husserl’s assistant: “Directedness, tending-to, is the fundamental character of consciousness-of in its most original essential composition” (Eugen-Fink-Archiv B-II 307), which is a (slight) modification of Husserl-Archiv L I 15, 35a. As translated in Bruzina 1993, 369 and 382 note 51.

<sup>26</sup> In terms of the previous section, we here see the “directedness” of protention as bearing on fulfillment in both its general and its particular functions. This “directedness” alone is not enough for apperception, however. A more complete account of apperception would need to augment our current analysis of protention with an analysis of expectation as it occurs in passive syntheses such as association. The relationship between protention and expectation would then need to be explained. For our current purpose of distinguishing protention from retention, however, such an augmentation is not necessary.

266 is necessary for absolute consciousness.<sup>27</sup> This unity is possible because of a distinction in  
 267 modes of bringing to intuition that marks the second essential difference between protention and  
 268 retention. In protention, there are two distinct modes of bringing to intuition: the clarifying  
 269 (picturing) mode, and the confirming (fulfilling) mode (Hua XI, 79-80). The first of these modes  
 270 seeks to clarify, picture, or pre-figure the intended objective sense: because the “generality of  
 271 expectation is always relatively determinate or indeterminate” (Hua XI, 79), it is necessary to  
 272 determine more closely (Hua XI, 80) the field of possibility for the intended and expected object.  
 273 Protention, then, enables expectation<sup>28</sup> to clarify the intended object (specifically, its objective  
 274 sense), and in this way it can be considered “disclosive” (Hua XI, 79). Here, expectation fills  
 275 some of the emptiness of the intended object so that the intended object can coincide with a

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<sup>27</sup>Husserl is adamant that retention does not arise on the basis of such an associative awakening that proceeds from the primal impression (Hua XI, 77). Though retentions may be able to acquire the associative awakening that belongs intrinsically to protention, this happens only occasionally, and only subsequently, that is, secondarily—it is not intrinsic to retention (Hua XI, 77). While this may seem to make Husserl’s position similar to that of Brentano, whom Husserl critiques in §§ 3-6 of Hua X (see also Kortooms 2002, 28-38), Husserl clearly claims that his position is distinct from, and does not succumb to the critiques that he himself leveled against, the position of Brentano; see Hua XI, 77 ff.

<sup>28</sup> On the distinction between protention and expectation, see Hua XI, 125-129. Briefly, protention is a “synthetically constituted form in which all other possible syntheses must participate” (Hua XI, 125). Association is one of these other possible syntheses. What protention is to internal time-consciousness, expectation is to association and passive constitution: the subject’s mode of relating to the future within that specific type of constituting consciousness.

276 confirming-fulfilling intuition in a synthesis. The second mode of bringing to intuition, then, is  
 277 “the specific fulfillment of intuition” that is the “synthesis with an appropriate perception” (79).  
 278 Here, “the merely expected object is identified with the actually arriving object, as fulfilling the  
 279 expectation” (79). Hence, these two modes of bringing to intuition help us see even more clearly  
 280 how the type of fulfillment necessary for the self-constitution of the absolute stream of  
 281 consciousness is possible.

282         Husserl is again adamant, though, that these two modes of bringing to intuition occur  
 283 only in protention. In retention, the problem is twofold. First, “retentions taking place  
 284 *originally*... remain non-intuitive and sink into the undifferentiated general horizon of  
 285 forgetfulness... Thus, only directed retentions, namely, retentions that have become intentions by  
 286 such an [associative] awakening are at issue for a synthesis of bringing to intuition” (Hua XI,  
 287 80).<sup>29</sup> We have already seen, though, that for Husserl these “awakened” retentions are not, in  
 288 essence, retentions. And even if we agree to take these modified and “awakened” retentions as  
 289 the subject of our analysis, “we will realize immediately that the process of bringing to intuition  
 290 as a clarifying process, and the process of bringing to intuition as a confirming one, are not  
 291 sharply distinguished here, as is the case with protentions” (80). In the case of retentions, the  
 292 synthesis that clarifies the sense of the intended object is simultaneously the synthesis that  
 293 confirms the object as the fulfillment of the clarified intention. Though remembering *can* be a  
 294 “picturing” or clarifying, “it cannot merely be a picturing; rather it is simultaneously and  
 295 necessarily self-giving and thus fulfilling-confirming” (Hua XI, 81). This, perhaps, is another  
 296 way of marking the “essential difference” that Husserl finds between protention and retention

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<sup>29</sup> This quote calls to mind again the distinction discussed earlier between the domain of intuition and the domain of non-intuitive differentiation; see Hua XXXIII, 227 ff., and Section III above.

297 already in (marginal additions to) *On the phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*:  
298 protention “leaves open the way in which what is coming may exist and whether or not the  
299 duration of the object may cease and when it may cease,” while retention “is bound” (Hua X,  
300 297; see Husserl 1991, 309 note 42). In short, unlike retention, protention can remain essentially  
301 open.

302         We can see, then, that protention is, and must be, distinct from retention. It is *not* merely  
303 an inverse retention, but is instead characterized by essential differences that help explain the  
304 possibility of the self-constitution of the stream of absolute consciousness. Protention, and  
305 protention alone, is necessarily directed (and thereby intentional) and able to bring to intuition  
306 both a clarifying and a confirming synthesis (and thereby make possible the knowledge of  
307 fulfillment). Hence, not only is protention essentially different from retention, but protention has  
308 a key role to play in phenomenology.

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## 310 **V. Conclusion: Re-evaluating Retention in Light of a Positive Account of** 311 **Protention**

312

313         Fully developing the implications of this positive account of protention for  
314 phenomenology is a new task called for by the conclusions of this paper. Though this task  
315 outweighs the present project, I would here briefly like to draw out the implications of a positive  
316 account of protention for Husserl’s account of time-consciousness, and especially for the concept  
317 of retention internal to that account. Doing so will help us begin to see the importance that this  
318 new account of protention will have in phenomenology.

319           As discussed in sections I and II above, Husserl’s account of internal time-consciousness  
 320 is necessary to establish what Husserl will call “absolute consciousness,” and hence avoid  
 321 problems of infinite regress that plagued the earlier accounts of time-consciousness put forward  
 322 by Meinong and others. Retention was the key to establishing absolute consciousness, as its  
 323 double-intentionality enabled one act to be simultaneously self-constituting and constitutive of  
 324 objects. However, our new account of protention gives us reason to question this move.  
 325 Specifically, it causes us to question to what extent retention can be described as “intentional” at  
 326 all, let alone doubly-intentional.

327           The problem arises from the lack of directedness or striving that marks one of the  
 328 essential differences between retention and protention. If retention is not directed, if it does not  
 329 strive in the way that protention does, it is then difficult to conceive of how it can be intentional,  
 330 as an essential aspect of intentionality is its being necessarily directed.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is difficult  
 331 to conceive of how retention can be intentional, a problem that Husserl himself noticed:  
 332 “retentions, as they arise in their originality, have no intentional character” (Hua XI, 77) though,  
 333 as discussed earlier, this “does not rule out that in certain circumstances and in their own way  
 334 they can assume this intentional character later” (Hua XI, 77). But if retentions are not  
 335 intentional, as Husserl himself says, then surely they cannot be doubly intentional, as Husserl  
 336 also states.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the double-intentionality of retention was key to establishing the need for, and

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<sup>30</sup> See Fink’s citation of Husserl in note 25 above.

<sup>31</sup> My thanks to Osborne Wiggins for pointing this inconsistency out to me, and to the participants of the 38<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the International Husserl Circle, whose comments on an earlier draft of this paper were very helpful in developing the conclusions that I am now putting forth.

337 viability of, Husserl's account of absolute consciousness. Hence, if one denies that (double)  
 338 intentionality, one seems to lose the justification for Husserl's discussion of absolute  
 339 consciousness, and the possibility of transcendental phenomenology itself is called into question.

340 But this extreme conclusion need not be reached. Rather, a clarification of our terms at  
 341 this point helps us avoid this damning consequence while at the same time deepening our  
 342 understanding of internal time-consciousness, in general, and retention, more specifically. This  
 343 can be done by paying close attention to the "fundamental stratification" of cognitive life (Hua  
 344 XI, 64). The key distinction at work in this stratification is that between "modal modifications of  
 345 passive *doxa*, of passive intentions of expectation, their inhibitions passively accruing to them,  
 346 and the like" (Hua XI, 52), on the one hand, and, on the other, the "spontaneous activity of the  
 347 ego (the activity of *intellectus agens*) that puts into play the peculiar accomplishments of the  
 348 ego" (Hua XI, 64), for example in judicative decisions. Husserl is clear that the latter position-  
 349 taking of the ego presuppose the passive *doxa* of the first level (Hua XI, 53). For our purposes,  
 350 this stratification enables us to distinguish between conscious acts comprising the active level of  
 351 the ego, and that which passively constitutes those conscious acts.<sup>32</sup> Retention and protention  
 352 belong properly in the passive group, and as such cannot be considered acts, properly speaking.  
 353 Therefore, retention cannot possibly be the act that is doubly-intentional. Rather, retention and  
 354 protention (that is, internal time-consciousness) make it possible that acts can be doubly-

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<sup>32</sup> This "passive" level of constitution can itself be divided into two distinct realms of constitution: the "lawful regularity of immanent genesis that constantly belongs to consciousness in general" (Hua XI, 117), of which association is the prime example; and, the "universal, formal framework... in which all other possible syntheses must participate" (Hua XI, 125) that is internal time-consciousness.



355 intentional; retention and protention are necessary constitutive factors of the acts of  
 356 consciousness, which themselves constitute the objects of our experience.

357         This clarification helps us adequately understand the place of internal time consciousness  
 358 in Husserl's thought. It also helps us understand that retention—which is not yet an act—cannot  
 359 possibly be intentional in the standard sense, namely as consciousness of (an object).<sup>33</sup> Rather, it  
 360 is more accurate to say that conscious acts are able to be intentional because of retention and  
 361 protention, that is, because of internal time-consciousness. Within internal time-consciousness, it  
 362 is protention that strives for fulfillment,<sup>34</sup> and hence protention is more easily connected with  
 363 intentionality, including the double-intentionality that makes possible absolute consciousness. As  
 364 such, we can now fully appreciate Husserl's suggestion in *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das*  
 365 *Zeitbewusstsein (1917/1918)* that protention might prove to be a more fruitful area of analysis for  
 366 a phenomenological inquiry into absolute consciousness than is retention (Hua XXXIII, 225-6).

367         The implications of the above are twofold:

368 1. *Retention and protention are not something we do*: because they are not acts, but are  
 369 constitutive of acts, retention and protention are not something that we consciously “do.” It is,  
 370 therefore, difficult, at best, and inaccurate, at worst, to talk of retaining, e.g., a perception of the  
 371 color red. Rather, we *perceive* the color red, and are able to do so because of protention and  
 372 retention. What exactly is retained, then, becomes difficult to discuss, as it is all too easy to

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<sup>33</sup> There can be no object on the level of passive constitution, as only the categorial object is an object according to Husserl; see Husserl 1948, p. 81 note 1, and Ryan 1977, 43.

<sup>34</sup> J.N. Mohanty describes intentionality as “a directedness towards a fulfillment”; Mohanty 1972, 124. Given the discussion of protention and its relationship to fulfillment in Section IV above, this helps us see the inherent connection between protention and intentionality.

373 conflate the retained and the perceived, though, properly speaking, what we can talk of as  
374 perceived cannot be that which is retained, as that which is retained is necessary for perception to  
375 occur. With this caveat in place, it would seem that *both* the hyletic datum of “red-ness” and the  
376 protentional directedness of each impression, directed again both to the object (special  
377 fulfillment) and to the different modes of that object’s being given to consciousness (general  
378 fulfillment), are retained. They are retained, not in the act of retention, but in the act of  
379 perception (here, specifically, the perception of something red). This distinction between acts of  
380 consciousness and that which constitutes those acts (including internal time-consciousness) must  
381 be rigorously maintained.

382 *2. It is especially, though not exclusively, because of protention that our acts can be doubly-*  
383 *intentional:* This conclusion runs contrary to Husserl’s claims that retention is doubly intentional  
384 (see Hua X, 380-381). As such, we should not affirm it too quickly. Protention and retention,  
385 taken together as internal time-consciousness, enable us to both perceive objects and conceive of  
386 ourselves as conscious of objects.<sup>35</sup> Hence, internal time-consciousness enables us to be doubly-  
387 intentional in the way necessary for absolute consciousness. However, within internal time-  
388 consciousness, we can see that it is protention that strives for fulfillment, both because it is  
389 inherently directed and because it differentiates between clarifying and confirming modes of  
390 bringing to intuition. Hence, it is protention that is tied more closely to intentionality in general  
391 and, by extension, to double-intentionality as well. Of course, this is not to say that retention has  
392 no role to play in intentionality, as retention and protention necessarily refer to and employ each  
393 other, as discussed above. It is merely to say that protention bears some necessary relationship to

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<sup>35</sup> For more on the implications of Husserl’s account of absolute consciousness for discussion of identity and self-consciousness, see Zahavi 1999; Zahavi 2000; and Zahavi 2003.

394 intentionality that requires further analysis before any investigation into intentionality—single or  
395 double—can be said to be complete.

396         Given these two implications, it is misleading to speak of retention as doubly-intentional.  
397 If one means by this that retention is the doubly-intentional act called for by Husserl to avoid  
398 infinite regress and thereby ground absolute consciousness, we see immediately that this runs  
399 contrary to the first implication of our analysis of protention which shows that retention and  
400 protention are not acts, but are constitutive of acts. On the other hand, if one wants to use the  
401 term “act” loosely here, and thereby mean only that retention is that which enables our  
402 consciousness to be doubly-intentional (even if it is, properly speaking, other acts that have this  
403 doubly-intentional character), we see that this too is not quite correct, as it runs contrary to the  
404 second implication of our analysis of protention. In fact, if one wanted to speak loosely and  
405 thereby attribute double-intentionality to either retention or protention, we see now that it seems  
406 more accurate, if one is forced to choose between the two, to ascribe this doubly-intentional  
407 characteristic to protention, rather than retention.

408         We can see, then, that the positive account of protention discussed in this paper helps us  
409 to clarify internal time-consciousness, in general, and retention in particular. I contend that this is  
410 but one area of phenomenology in which the positive account of protention would yield new  
411 insights. At the very least, as this discussion has already alluded to, the analysis of the different  
412 levels of consciousness, and hence the relationship between absolute consciousness and  
413 empirical experience, is also affected by this account of protention. The resulting influences of  
414 this would be felt in later phenomenological work, and could ripple out to such diverse fields as  
415 epistemology (via Husserl’s work on logic and experience), ethics (via the work of Levinas),

416 politics (via the work of Derrida) and psychology (via the work of Merleau-Ponty), to name a  
 417 few. All this follows from the fact that protention is more than just an inverse retention.<sup>36</sup>

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