2010

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

Neal DeRoo

Dordt College, neal.deroo@dordt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work

Part of the Philosophy Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/312

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Work: Comprehensive List by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.
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
- This version is a pre-copyedited version of the chapter and is not to be cited
- Print version available at http://www.bloomsbury.com

This book chapter is available at Digital Collections @ Dordt: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/312
Protention is often understood as being equivalent to retention but functioning in the other (future) direction. This, I would argue, has prevented a full appreciation of protention’s importance to phenomenological scholarship. In this paper, I will elucidate Husserl’s positive account of protention. I will argue that the view that protention is like retention, but in the other direction, is insufficient. Abandoning this negative view, I will explain what is unique about protention, and how it helps make sense of such key phenomenological concepts as fulfillment, passive intentionality, and self-constitution.

I will begin by briefly sketching out Husserl’s broad position on internal time-consciousness, thereby showing how protention can be understood as an inverse retention (Section I). Next, I will move to a closer examination of the concept of retention, in order to begin to understand what it would mean for protention to be an inverse retention. In this examination, it will become clear that retention enables Husserl to escape the content-apprehension schema, and the problems that result therefrom (especially the problem of infinite regress), via the twofold intentionality of retention and its relation to absolute consciousness (Section II). Alongside this advance will emerge the question of how retention is able to foster such a double-intentionality. The distinction between general and particular fulfillment will begin to solve this problem of the constitution of the double-intentionality. In doing so, it will suggest that the concept of protention might be a more fruitful area of analysis than is retention.
for trying to determine the possibility of the constitution of the double-intentionality of absolute consciousness (Section III). I will then take up this suggestion, and note how the “striving” character of protention, and the two distinct modes (i.e., clarifying and confirming) of bringing to intuition that protention makes possible, are both unique to protention and necessary for the constitution of the double-intentionality of absolute consciousness, thereby finally confirming that protention is more than an inverse retention (Section IV). I will end by drawing out the implications of this positive account of protention for our understanding of retention and its relationship to absolute consciousness. This conclusion will suggest that several other key aspects of phenomenological thought should also be re-evaluated in light of this positive account of protention, and that such a re-evaluation will have consequences for fields as diverse as ethics, politics and psychology.

I. Husserl on Time

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

---

1 All quotations from Hua X are taken from Husserl 1991.

2 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
sensation. These primary sensations then “remain” briefly in consciousness, in the mode of a “running-off” (Hua X, 27ff.), and are constantly modified in this running-off: as I am confronted with new sensations in every instant, the immediately previous sensations are not removed from consciousness, but remain, albeit in modified form—no longer conceived as present, but as just-past. This aspect of consciousness’ ability to retain the immediately previous sensations is deemed “retention.” Protention emerges here as the correlate of retention, that which works like retention but in the other, future, direction (Hua X, 55; see also Hua III/1, § 77 and § 81). In protention, rather than retaining a past instant, I pretend or “anticipate” what will be sensed in immediately future instants. If, at time D, I have a sensation of D and a retention of C, Dc, then I will also have a protention of E, `E, that anticipates the next instant E as not-yet-in-the-now (Hua X, 77, 373), such that at the next instant, E, I will sense E, have a retention of D, Ed, and a

---

3 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.

4 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).
secondary retention of C, Ec,⁵ along with a protention of F, `F, and so on (see Hua X, 28; Zahavi
1999, 66).

This “temporality” of consciousness is metaphorically called “flow” (Hua X, 75).⁶

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

II. Retention and Absolute Consciousness

⁵ That is, a retention (Ec) of the retention (Dc) of C.

⁶William 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.
Initially, Husserl thought that retention enabled consciousness to keep past moments in the present consciousness, and he struggled with the question of how retention was able to achieve this. In lecture notes from 1904-1905 that make up the bulk of the first portion of Husserliana X, Husserl still believed that retention functioned on the model of content and apprehension: the shading-off or adumbration functions as the content that is apprehended by the present consciousness as just past. However, Husserl would soon realize that this model of retention is unsatisfactory, as apprehension-content can be the content for only one apprehension, and therefore the content that is present to consciousness at A can only be used to apprehend the now-phase of A. In order for a retention to be understood as a retention of a past moment, it must already be modified. In being aware of the past as past, therefore, retention is a modifying consciousness, that is, a consciousness through and through.

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

---

7 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.

8 In this regard, it is similar to the phantasm of phantasy-consciousness; see Hua XXIV, 260 note 1.
an horizontal intentionality [Längsintentionalität] (Hua X, 380). The first intentionality makes possible the presentation of objects to consciousness. The second makes possible the (self-) presentation of the stream of absolute consciousness in which the perception of temporality is possible, and makes it possible because, by way of this horizontal intentionality, absolute consciousness “constitutes itself as a phenomenon in itself” (Hua X, 381). What this double-intentionality makes possible, then, is that one act (retention) constitutes both the immanent objects of consciousness, and the consciousness of the different temporal modes of givenness of that object over time.

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

However, Husserl himself raises questions about retention’s ability to achieve this double-intentionality. In trying to make sense of the role that retentions play in constituting the “unitary stream of experience,” Husserl claims that we must take into account the fact that every retention “contains expectation-intentions whose fulfillment leads to the present” (Hua X, 52). Hence, it is the concept of fulfillment that is able to “tie” retentions to the present of the stream of consciousness, and this because of the presence of protention: “Every process that constitutes its object originally is animated by protentions that emptily constitute what is coming as coming, that catch it and bring it toward fulfillment” (52). It is the fulfillment of these emptily constituted protentions that we are made aware of in retention (52).
Unfortunately, Husserl does not develop this intriguing notion in any more detail in Hua X. He does, however, develop it in more detail in other texts of this time (c. 1917). In addressing it, Husserl starts to move away from the notion of protention as merely an inverse retention, and begins to develop a positive account of protention. In the “Bernau Manuscripts” of 1917-1918, Husserl begins to realize that protention, in its capacity for fulfillment, promises to be a more fertile ground for a phenomenological analysis of absolute consciousness (Hua XXXIII, 225-226). The notion of fulfillment gives Husserl a stronger account of how absolute consciousness is self-constituting, one that answers how we can come to know the self-constituting character of absolute consciousness. In order to fulfill a protention, an act must be aware, not just of the constitution of the present object, but also of the constitution of the preceding act anticipating fulfillment. Hence, there is a two-fold coincidence between protended and present moments: first, there is a coincidence between the previous protentional intention and the primal presentation (Hua XXXIII, 25); second, there is a coincidence between that toward which both the protention and the primal presentation are directed. The first of these Husserl describes under the rubric of “general fulfillment,” and the second under “particular fulfillment” (Hua XXXIII, 29-30). General fulfillment plays a role in the self-constitution of the primal stream, thought along the lines of the stream’s “self-relatedness” (Selbstbezogenheit, Hua XXXIII, 207). Particular fulfillment plays a role in the constitution of the immanent temporal

---

9 § 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.

10 All translations from this volume are from Kortooms 2002, unless otherwise noted.
Hence, the notion of fulfillment is able to explain why the double-intentionality needed to make absolute consciousness self-constituting is united in protention in a way that could not be so easily explained in retention. Let us examine this idea of fulfillment in more detail.

A. General Fulfillment

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

---

11 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.

12 “The style of the past becomes projected into the future” (Ms. L I 15, p. 32b)
of consciousness has an essentially protentional aspect, in that every point is directed towards its fulfillment in the corresponding point of the following momentary phase of consciousness.¹³ As

“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.

¹³To 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
such, all points along the vertical line of each instant can be viewed as protentions, and not just those that we originally called protentions (indicated in our example by the ‘`). Further, it is only because of these implicit protentions that we can speak of retentions as retaining anything at all: it is the character of fulfillment that entails that the previous instant has been retained (see Hua X, 52), and this is true for every point of a momentary phase of consciousness, not just that point which is a primal impression (F) of what had immediately prior been the primal protention (’F).

It is because of the coincidence entailed in this notion of fulfillment that Husserl is able to posit the self-relatedness that characterizes the stream of absolute consciousness and enables it to avoid the problem of infinite regress: because this coincidence happens *in the very fulfillment*, there is no need of another act beyond the coincidence to unite the past to the future (Hua XXXIII, 27). While the sixth *Logical Investigation* seems to indicate that consciousness of fulfillment requires three elements (namely a consciousness that must be fulfilled, a consciousness that fulfills, and a synthesizing consciousness that ties the first two together such that one can be conscious of the fulfillment), the position that Husserl describes in the Bernau Manuscripts is that, because of the essential role of protention, this third element (which quickly would lead to a problem of infinite regress) is no longer necessary. As Kortooms describes it: the “consciousness that fulfills is at the same time conscious of itself as being a consciousness that fulfills. Such self-consciousness is possible because the consciousness that fulfills itself retains the protentional directedness toward fulfillment that belonged to the preceding phase of consciousness” (Kortooms 2002, 162). Husserl is thereby able to avoid the problem of infinite regress, as there is no longer recourse to an ‘external’ synthesizing consciousness beyond the descriptions of retention in Hua XXXIII, 34-35; these are drawn out in diagram form in Kortooms 2002, 167, 168.
fulfillment. This self-related fulfillment is continuously occurring in general fulfillment, in which protention protends the mode of givenness of what is to come: $E$ protends its being given in the next instant as a retention, $Fe$, $Ed$ protends its being given in the next instant as a secondary retention, $Fd$, and $`F$ protends its being given in the next instant as $F$. But again, the mutual implication of protention and retention is at work, as, conversely, $Fe$ retains the protentional directedness of $E$ as well as its fulfillment, $F$ retains the protentional directedness of $`F$ and its fulfillment, and $Fd$ retains the protentional directedness of $Ed$ and its fulfillment (as well as the protentional directedness of $D$ and its fulfillment in $Ed$, etc.). This complex relationship between protention and retention is able to do away with talk of primal impression: rather than protending or retaining a particular sensation-content, protentions protend retentions, and retentions retain protentions (as well as the retention of previous protentions). As Husserl puts it:

14 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.

15 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.

16 This constitutes an advance, of sorts, on Husserl’s earlier claims that retentions retain retentions (Hua X, 81).
That which came before as such is retained in a new retentional consciousness and this consciousness is, on the one hand, characterized in itself as fulfillment of what was earlier, and on the other, as retention of what was earlier... The earlier consciousness is protention (i.e., an intention “directed” at what comes later) and the following retention would then be retention of the earlier retention that is characterized at the same time as [its] protention. This newly arriving retention thus reproduces the earlier retention with its protentional tendency and at the same time fulfills it, but it fulfills it in such a way that going through this fulfillment is a protention of the next phase (Ms. L I 15, 24a-b; as translated in Rodemeyer 2003, 131).

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

B. Particular Fulfillment

The emphasis on the “form” or structure of the flow as made up of the movements of protention and retention marks the fundamental difference between general and particular fulfillment. It also entails that, no matter what comes, consciousness remains structurally open to a future that remains yet to come.\(^\text{17}\) This structural openness is infinite, as every moment would

\(^{17}\) 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
contain a protention, \( F \), of the next instant, \( F \), which itself would protend its givenness in the following moment as \( Gf \), etc., as well as the protention, \( \text{``} G \text{''} \), of that next instant’s protention, \( G \), of the instant, \( G \), that comes immediately after that, and so on, \textit{ad infinitum}.\(^{18}\) To avoid a new problem of infinite regress, Husserl employs the idea of particular fulfillment. If protention, via general fulfillment, constitutes the self-relatedness of absolute consciousness, thereby avoiding the old problem of infinite regress, protention also, via particular fulfillment, constitutes the immanent object, thereby avoiding the new problem of infinite regress.

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

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

\(^{18}\) 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.
The limit of the intuitive domain is what Husserl calls the zero of intuition (Hua XXXIII, 227). This limit prevents the problem of infinite regress because of the finite nature of intuition: we cannot intuit an infinite number of things. In the domain of non-intuitive differentiation, however, we can theoretically distinguish an infinite number of different points, that is, an infinite number of potential protentions and retentions attaching to every momentary phase of consciousness. This domain is limited again by the point at which consciousness falls away, a second zero. Here, however, the limit is an open point without differences (Hua XXXIII, 227-228), that is, the point in which there exists, theoretically, an infinite number of points that consciousness cannot practically differentiate (e.g., all the future protentions mentioned above). There is, then, a certain potential infinity in both the protentional and retentional directions. However, this potential infinity does not succumb to the problem of infinite regress because no one, and certainly not Husserl, has claimed that consciousness can retain or protend over an infinite span of time. Indeed, quite the opposite—the period of retention and protention is severely limited, tied, as it is, to the “primal impression.” This, I would argue, avoids the

---

19 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.

20 See our earlier discussion of general fulfillment, above.
problem of infinite regress in its most damaging guise, while still leaving consciousness necessarily open in the direction of protention and retention.  

IV. Differentiating protention and retention

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

But it is not accidental that the discussion of fulfillment occurs at the same time as Husserl increases his focus on protention. There is something essentially different about protention that gives it a unique function in fulfillment, and hence a unique function in absolute consciousness and everything this makes possible in phenomenology. What makes protention intrinsically different from retention is the “striving” character of protention (Hua XI, 73).

Husserl makes clear that the striving characteristic of protention is a passive directedness, a “passive intentionality” (Hua XI, 76), with which the ego has no active involvement (Hua XI, 86). This “striving” character, Husserl claims, belongs intrinsically to protention, and protention alone: while retention may acquire this striving character, it does not intrinsically possess it. In other words, though we can “cast a backward turning glance” toward the past, this is a subsequent act which is distinct from retention, and we must “clearly differentiate between the direction of the egoic regard, and the direction in perception itself that already takes place prior

---

21 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.
to the apprehending regard” (Hua XI, 74). Indeed, Husserl seems to say that an intentionally-directed retention ceases to be retention; rather, once “awakened” by a directed consciousness, it “should already be characterized as a remembering” (Hua XI, 80) rather than as a retaining. To be directed toward the past, then, is to be remembering, not retaining. Retention retains the past in a temporality that is in the present, always moving toward the future. Hence, retention is not directed toward the past.

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

22 All quotations from this volume are from Husserl 2001b.

23 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).

24 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.
of intentionality. It also makes possible the apperception, and hence the constitution, of objects. The movement beyond the (fulfilled) presence at work in protention opens up to me the possibility of other perspectives that are not my own, enables me to move beyond the merely present to apperceive objects in their combination of presence and absence (Hua XI, 190).

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

---

25 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.

26 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.
is necessary for absolute consciousness.\footnote{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.}{27} This unity is possible because of a distinction in modes of bringing to intuition that marks the second essential difference between protention and retention. In protention, there are two distinct modes of bringing to intuition: the clarifying (picturing) mode, and the confirming (fulfilling) mode (Hua XI, 79-80). The first of these modes seeks to clarify, picture, or pre-figure the intended objective sense: because the “generality of expectation is always relatively determinate or indeterminate” (Hua XI, 79), it is necessary to determine more closely (Hua XI, 80) the field of possibility for the intended and expected object. Protention, then, enables expectation\footnote{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.}{28} to clarify the intended object (specifically, its objective sense), and in this way it can be considered “disclosive” (Hua XI, 79). Here, expectation fills some of the emptiness of the intended object so that the intended object can coincide with a...
confirming-fulfilling intuition in a synthesis. The second mode of bringing to intuition, then, is
“the specific fulfillment of intuition” that is the “synthesis with an appropriate perception” (79).
Here, “the merely expected object is identified with the actually arriving object, as fulfilling the
expectation” (79). Hence, these two modes of bringing to intuition help us see even more clearly
how the type of fulfillment necessary for the self-constitution of the absolute stream of
consciousness is possible.

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

29 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.
already in (marginal additions to) *On the phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*:

protention “leaves open the way in which what is coming may exist and whether or not the
duration of the object may cease and when it may cease,” while retention “is bound” (Hua X,
297; see Husserl 1991, 309 note 42). In short, unlike retention, protention can remain essentially
open.

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

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

Fully developing the implications of this positive account of protention for
phenomenology is a new task called for by the conclusions of this paper. Though this task
outweighs the present project, I would here briefly like to draw out the implications of a positive
account of protention for Husserl’s account of time-consciousness, and especially for the concept
of retention internal to that account. Doing so will help us begin to see the importance that this
new account of protention will have in phenomenology.
As discussed in sections I and II above, Husserl’s account of internal time-consciousness is necessary to establish what Husserl will call “absolute consciousness,” and hence avoid problems of infinite regress that plagued the earlier accounts of time-consciousness put forward by Meinong and others. Retention was the key to establishing absolute consciousness, as its double-intentionality enabled one act to be simultaneously self-constituting and constitutive of objects. However, our new account of protention gives us reason to question this move. Specifically, it causes us to question to what extent retention can be described as “intentional” at all, let alone doubly-intentional.

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

---

30 See Fink’s citation of Husserl in note 25 above.

31 My thanks to Osborne Wiggins for pointing this inconsistency out to me, and to the participants of the 38th 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.
viability of, Husserl’s account of absolute consciousness. Hence, if one denies that (double) intentionality, one seems to lose the justification for Husserl’s discussion of absolute consciousness, and the possibility of transcendental phenomenology itself is called into question.

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

\(^{32}\) 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.
intentional; retention and protention are necessary constitutive factors of the acts of
consciousness, which themselves constitute the objects of our experience.

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

The implications of the above are twofold:

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

33 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.

34 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.
conflate the retained and the perceived, though, properly speaking, what we can talk of as perceived cannot be that which is retained, as that which is retained is necessary for perception to occur. With this caveat in place, it would seem that both the hyletic datum of “red-ness” and the protentional directedness of each impression, directed again both to the object (special fulfillment) and to the different modes of that object’s being given to consciousness (general fulfillment), are retained. They are retained, not in the act of retention, but in the act of perception (here, specifically, the perception of something red). This distinction between acts of consciousness and that which constitutes those acts (including internal time-consciousness) must be rigorously maintained.

2. It is especially, though not exclusively, because of protention that our acts can be doubly-intentional: This conclusion runs contrary to Husserl’s claims that retention is doubly intentional (see Hua X, 380-381). As such, we should not affirm it too quickly. Protention and retention, taken together as internal time-consciousness, enable us to both perceive objects and conceive of ourselves as conscious of objects. Hence, internal time-consciousness enables us to be doubly-intentional in the way necessary for absolute consciousness. However, within internal time-consciousness, we can see that it is protention that strives for fulfillment, both because it is inherently directed and because it differentiates between clarifying and confirming modes of bringing to intuition. Hence, it is protention that is tied more closely to intentionality in general and, by extension, to double-intentionality as well. Of course, this is not to say that retention has no role to play in intentionality, as retention and protention necessarily refer to and employ each other, as discussed above. It is merely to say that protention bears some necessary relationship to...
intentionality that requires further analysis before any investigation into intentionality—single or
double—can be said to be complete.

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

We can see, then, that the positive account of protention discussed in this paper helps us
to clarify internal time-consciousness, in general, and retention in particular. I contend that this is
but one area of phenomenology in which the positive account of protention would yield new
insights. At the very least, as this discussion has already alluded to, the analysis of the different
levels of consciousness, and hence the relationship between absolute consciousness and
empirical experience, is also affected by this account of protention. The resulting influences of
this would be felt in later phenomenological work, and could ripple out to such diverse fields as
epistemology (via Husserl’s work on logic and experience), ethics (via the work of Levinas),
politics (via the work of Derrida) and psychology (via the work of Merleau-Ponty), to name a few. All this follows from the fact that protention is more than just an inverse retention.  

Bibliography


---

36 Research for this paper was made possible in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, whose support is herein gratefully acknowledged.


______. 2003. “Phenomenology of Self” in Tilo Kircher and Anthony S. David, (eds.), The