



The Future Matters: Protention as more than Inverse Retention

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Abstract This paper seeks to show that understanding protention as functioning like retention but in the other direction yields an incorrect account of internal time-consciousness. The paper begins by exploring the place of retention in Husserl's broader theory of internal time-consciousness, and then showing that protention cannot be phenomenologically experienced in such a manner. Through an in-depth analysis of the concept of fulfillment, this paper then begins to show how, at the heart of Husserl's account of internal time-consciousness, indeed, at the heart even of his account of retention, we find protention functioning in a unique and distinctive way. By tracing the importance of protention's inherent directedness and its ability to distinguish between clarifying and confirming modes of intuition to Husserl's account of fulfillment, this paper's penultimate section shows once and for all what makes protention distinct from retention. The difference is not one merely of direction, but of essential function. Finally, the paper ends by arguing that failing to acknowledge the unique role of protention risks not only an incorrect understanding of protention, but a misguided account of retention as well, one that fails to appreciate exactly what is novel in Husserl's analysis of internal time-consciousness.

Not enough attention is paid to the importance of the future in phenomenology. Correcting this oversight is too large a project to be fully undertaken in this paper. Here, I will but begin to undertake this project by addressing one of the most egregious places in which this oversight manifests itself: Husserl's account of internal time-consciousness. Almost everyone who comments on this account mentions protention, but then spends the

majority of their time explicating internal time-consciousness by focusing on the relationship between retention and the present: protention, it is assumed, is just like retention, but going in the other direction. This account of time-consciousness is perhaps understandable, as Husserl does the same thing in the early lectures on time.¹ However, Husserl later remedies this problem, not by changing his earlier account, but by paying close attention to the distinctiveness of protention within that account. Doing so, we will see, enables Husserl to escape certain problems that plague his retention-based account, while clearly rooting key phenomenological notions (such as fulfillment and intuition) in protention.

In this paper, then, I will seek to show that the view that protention is like retention but in the other direction is insufficient, and that protention plays a unique and distinct role in internal time-consciousness. Without properly taking account of this unique role, our understanding of internal time-consciousness risks missing precisely what is novel in Husserl's account. I will begin by 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 (Section II). Having clarified retention, I will then expand on a Husserlian example to illustrate the difficulty in conceiving of protention as an inverse retention (Section III). I will then begin to explicate an alternative account of protention by focusing on the role of fulfillment in internal time-consciousness. In doing so, we will come to agree with Husserl that 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 IV). Finally, I will show 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

¹ These lectures are collected in Edmund Husserl, *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time (1893-1917)*. Trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic, 1991). This work is a translation of *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*. Ed. Rudolf Boehm. *Husserliana*, vol. X. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966. Hereafter, cited in text as Hua X. The most clear example of the suggestion that protention is an inverse retention occurs at Hua X, 55.

inverse retention (Section V). I will conclude by suggesting how this can help us re-evaluate our understandings of retention and of internal time-consciousness.

I. Husserl on Time

In *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time*, Husserl develops a notion of the “internal” time of the constituting ego. In doing so, Husserl is interested in understanding how we can perceive, e.g., duration, when all we sense is a series of temporal adumbrations. To answer this problem, Husserl expounds a three-fold notion of time as primary impression, retention, and protention.¹ On this model, immanent time begins with primary sensation. These primary sensations then “remain” briefly in consciousness, in the mode of a “running-off” (Hua X, 27 ff.), and are constantly modified in this running-off: as I am confronted with new sensations in every instant,² 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).³ In protention, rather than retaining a past instant, I protend or “anticipate”⁴ what will be sensed in

¹ It is not until the time of Texts no. 50 and 51 (dated by R. 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 on the development of Husserl’s account of time-consciousness in Hua X, cf. John Brough, “The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl’s Early Writings on Time-Consciousness,” *Man and World* vol. 5 (1972), 298-326; for the change in terminology, cf. *Ibid.*, 314-15.

² 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.

³ Husserl makes similar claims in § 77 and § 81 of *Ideen zu einer Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Ed. Karl Schuhmann. *Husserliana* vol. III/1.

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

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 secondary retention of C, Ec,¹ along with a protention of F, `F, and so on.²

By using the notions of retention and protention, Husserl claims to be able to say that we can *perceive* duration (or succession; Hua X, 42). We don't merely make up duration, or organize our sensation into an enduring thing; rather, duration is something "in the world" that we are able to perceive. In speaking of our ability to perceive duration (or succession), Husserl, as both Meinong and Stern before him, must confront the problem that duration of perception is not perception of duration.³ To circumvent this issue, Husserl claims that our perception of an object's duration itself has some level of temporality that remains distinct from the temporality of the object. Husserl outlines three different levels of constitution in regard to time: 1) "the thing of empirical experience in objective time"; 2) "the constituting multiplicities of appearance belonging to different levels, the immanent unities in pre-empirical time"; and 3) the "absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness" (Hua X, 73). While the exact nature of the relation between the second and third levels remains a matter of debate,⁴

of the intentional act of perception. The same goes for retention, which must be kept distinct from the intentional act of reproducing or recollecting (cf. Hua X, §§ 14-19, especially § 19).

¹ That is, a retention (Ec) of the retention (Dc) of C.

² The inspiration for the preceding comes from Hua X, 28. The actual terminology, however, is based on a diagram by Dan Zahavi in *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 66.

³ For Husserl's discussions of Meinong and Stern, consult Hua X, "Supplementary Texts" no. 29, 30, 33, and 31.

⁴ The debate concerning the relationship between intentional acts and the absolute flow of consciousness is discussed at length in the fifth chapter of Zahavi's *Self-Awareness and Identity*. There, Zahavi pits his conception of this relationship against the standard view supported by J.B. Brough and Robert Sokolowski. For an explanation of the Brough/Sokolowski position, see Brough's introduction to *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time*, esp. xviii-lv. At the heart of the debate is Brough's characterization of the relationship between intentional acts and the absolute flow of consciousness in the following manner: "[Primary impression, retention and protention] are no longer taken to be names for moments belonging to a *perceptual* act; they are rather moments of the ultimate level of consciousness through which one is aware of the perceptual act—and of any other

at the very least the distinction between the first and the third level remains clear: on the one hand, you have the “clock” time by which we temporally measure objects in the world, and on the other hand, you have the flow of consciousness, which cannot be arrested, timed, or temporally measured. This “temporality” of consciousness is metaphorically called “flow” (Hua X, 75).¹ Though we cannot talk about the temporality of this flow without doing so in conformity with the time of objects (Ibid.), that is, by using language of succession, of nows, pasts, and futures, etc., Husserl is adamant that the flow is a distinct level, and has a distinct temporality, from that of constituted objects.²

In its functioning, then, we know that the flow operates on a model of primary impression, retention, and protention. We can see that retention and protention seem to make possible a temporality of perception, but what is not immediately clear is how they make possible the perception of temporality. In order to understand this, and thereby to understand the importance of Husserl’s study of time, we must turn now to a study of the individual acts

act or content—as an immanent temporal object” (ITC, xlix). Zahavi, on the other hand, does not want to distinguish so sharply between intentional acts and the absolute flow of consciousness, instead mapping the second and third levels on to Husserl’s distinction between thematized and functioning subjectivity, respectively (Zahavi, *Self-Awareness*, 71). It is not immediately clear to me that Brough/Sokolowski do not also make the same move, although Zahavi clearly thinks that they do not.

¹ William James, who seems to have a similar model of the time of consciousness and the consciousness of time, 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. Cf. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 593. For a more thorough explanation of the relation between Husserl’s and James’ theories of time-consciousness, see Richard Cobb-Stevens, “James and Husserl: Time-consciousness and the Intentionality of Presence and Absence,” in Dan Zahavi (ed.), *Self-Awareness, Temporality and Alterity: Central Topics in Phenomenology* (Dordrecht/Boston/ London: Kluwer Academic, 1998), 41-57.

² The importance of this flow for the overall phenomenological project cannot be overestimated. Husserl explicitly equates this flow with absolute subjectivity (Hua X, 75). As such, it would seem to be central to the project of a phenomenological study of “transcendental subjectivity,” as put forward, e.g., in Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* trans. Dorothy Cairns (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic, 1999).

that make up Husserl's theory of time; we must turn to retention, primary impression, and protention. While Husserl discusses primary impression and retention at length, protention does not get much more than a few passing mentions. Given that protention is, apparently, just like retention, but in the other direction, this might not prove to be too problematic, if we can first get an adequate understanding of retention. Therefore, let us turn first to retention.

II. Retention and Absolute Consciousness

We have already seen, in brief, what retention is. It is that which enables consciousness to keep present that which has the temporal mode of a running-off. What is not yet clear, and what we will turn to now, is how retention is able to do this. In answering this question, we will begin to see how the retention-primal impression-protention model attempts to answer the problem of perceiving temporality.¹

So far, it has been established that retention enables consciousness to keep past moments in the present consciousness. This is the first step in moving from temporality of perception to perception of temporality, at least according to the view current in Husserl's time, which necessitated that all past moments must be in the present moment of consciousness if that consciousness was able to perceive temporality.² The question of how retention is able to achieve this is one that Husserl struggled with for a long time. Early in *Husserliana X*, Husserl still believed that retention functioned on the model of content and apprehension: the previously mentioned running-off functions as the content that is apprehended by the present consciousness as just past. However, Husserl would soon realize that this

¹ Throughout the paper, I shall use the phrase "perceiving temporality" as shorthand for "perceiving duration and/or succession."

² Meinong was the major proponent of the view that temporally distributed objects can only be presented by temporally undistributed presentations; cf. A. Meinong, "Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, Band 21 (1899): 182-172; translated as "On Objects of Higher Order and Their Relationship to Internal Perception" in M.-L. Schubert Kalsi, *Alexius Meinong. On Objects of Higher Order And Husserl's Phenomenology* (The Hague/Boston/ London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 137-208. Cf. also Toine Kortooms, *Phenomenology of Time: Edmund Husserl's Analysis of Time-Consciousness* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic, 2002), 39-43.

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 my retention of A' to be understood as a retention of a past moment, it must already be apprehended, that is modified: "A' is a modification analogous to phantasm (A), and it is itself consciousness of the past of A."¹ Retention, then, is a modifying consciousness, that is, a consciousness through and through.

The change in the idea of retention that is highlighted here seems to be the change from conceiving of retention as being part of mere experiential consciousness to conceiving of retention as an intentional consciousness.² This, however, is not quite true: while retention is not to be split apart into a sensed tone and an apprehension as memory (Hua X, 312), this does not entail that retention is other than primal consciousness. Rather, the shift in retention here is a shift away from the schema content-apprehension toward an account in which even "mere experience" is already a constituted consciousness.

The danger here, of course, is an infinite regress: if the first level of consciousness is already constituted, then there must be some other level of consciousness that constitutes that level, and another one again to constitute that level, *ad infinitum*. This is precisely why Husserl employs his notion of absolute consciousness (Hua XXIV, 245). 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 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

¹ Husserl, *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie. Vorlesungen 1906/1907* Husserliana Band XXIV, U. Melle Hrsg. (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 260 footnote 1. The translation is from Kortooms, "Phenomenology of Time," 95.

² For more on these distinctions between "types" of consciousness, cf. Hua XXIV, 244-249.

consciousness of the different temporal modes of givenness of that object over time.

III. Protention as Inverse Retention

We have seen, then, that retention makes possible two essential characteristics of absolute consciousness: in the first place, it makes consciousness conscious through and through by making possible the elimination of the schema content-apprehension; in the second place, it enables consciousness to be self-constituting, and thereby avoid the problem of infinite regress that plagued the earlier theories of time-consciousness, e.g., those of Meinong and Stern. From this we can safely conclude that retention has an integral role to play in absolute consciousness. If protention is really just retention in the other direction, then it should function equivalently to retention. Unlike retention, however, protention is not easily phenomenologically identifiable. Using Husserl's example of hearing a symphony, one can easily conceive of how the preceding note is retained in consciousness, such that I hear the next note differently because it followed the first note than I would hear it if it was played alone. This difference does not affect the tonal quality of the note, but rather its givenness: I hear the next note as following the former, in some kind of unity (e.g., a symphony). This concept of retention, and its impact on my perception of temporality, is thereby easily understood. Less immediately evident is how my hearing of the present note is affected by protention. The traditional claim of protention would be that, like retention but operating in the other direction, in hearing the current note something of the just-future note pre-figures itself, such that I hear the current note differently because of the note that is to follow it. How this would be the case is not immediately clear: can I really hear the difference between two identical notes played at the same time by different musicians, given that one note will be followed by a second note, while the other note will be followed by silence? It does not strike me as evident that the playing of the next note would, in this case, affect my hearing of the current note, either in its tone or in its mode of temporal givenness (i.e., as preceding a future note). Yet something like this affect must occur if protention is to function as an inverse retention.

One could suggest that, in hearing a familiar melody, I hear the current note in part in anticipation of the next note that I know (from past experience) is to follow it. Even if this possibility is granted, it does not strike me as relevant: what is being described in this scenario, while phenomenologically identifiable, is not protention, but is the act of anticipa-

tion. Protention, if it is to make any sense at all, must operate in every situation of perception of temporality, and not just those situations in which past experience yields a certain familiarity that enables me to anticipate what is to come next. Just as retention must be kept separate from recollection (Hua X, § 19), so, too, must protention be understood as distinct from anticipation. But, understood merely as retention in the other direction, it is not immediately clear how protention can be understood as distinct from anticipation.¹

IV. Fulfillment and Protention as More than Inverse Retention

In trying to understand protention, then, we are forced to look beyond an inverse retention. In doing so, we will see that the notion of retention itself is re-evaluated when one accounts for protention. Earlier, we said that retention functions, by way of a double intentionality, as one act that simultaneously constitutes objects and constitutes the absolute consciousness that makes possible the perception of temporality. In order to ascertain how retention is able to enact this double-intentionality, 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.

But this is the case only 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” (Ibid.). Though Husserl does not develop this intriguing notion in any more detail in Hua X, he does develop it in more detail in other texts of this time (c. 1917).² 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 “Bernauer Manuscripts” of 1917-1918,

¹ Indeed, this could indicate why Husserl says little about protention in his early analyses of time-consciousness—because he does not know what to say about it, given the framework he was then using. As we will see, when Husserl begins to develop a positive account of protention, he abandons the earlier model of protention as inverse retention.

² § 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 edited by Edith Stein, § 24 was written in 1917; cf. Boehm’s note on Hua X, 52; in Brough’s translation, cf. p. 54 n.36.

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.¹

The notion of fulfillment gives Husserl a strong 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 objects. 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 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

¹ Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/1918)* Husserliana Band XXXIII, R. Bernet and D. Lohmar Hrsg. (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 225-226. Hereafter cited in text as Hua XXXIII. All translations from this volume are by Toine Kortooms.

horizon.¹ Conversely, every point of any momentary phase 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.² As 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 (cf. 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 investigation of the *Logical Investigations* 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

¹ “The style of the past becomes projected into the future” (Ms. L I 15, p. 32b). Translated by James R. Mensch in “Husserl’s Concept of the Future,” *Husserl Studies* 16 (1999), 41-64; 43, 57n.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 (2001). 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; cf. note 22 below) 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.

² 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; cf. Hua XXXIII, 21-22; Kortooms, 160; and Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 66. Husserl revises his earlier diagram on internal time-consciousness (Hua X, 28) with more complex diagrams of retention, drawn out by Kortooms in *Phenomenology of Time*, pp. 167, 168, based on Husserl’s descriptions in Hua XXXIII, 34-35.

can be conscious of the fulfillment), the position that Husserl describes in the Bernauer 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. Husserl is thereby able to avoid the problem of infinite regress, as there is no longer recourse to an ‘external’ synthesizing consciousness beyond the fulfillment.¹ 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:² rather than protending or retaining a particular sensation-content, protentions protend retentions, and retentions retain protentions (as well as the retention of previous protentions).³ As Husserl puts it:

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

¹ As was the case in the early accounts of internal time consciousness (e.g., when Husserl was still employing the content-apprehension schema; cf. above), and as would be the case if he maintained the notion of fulfillment introduced in the sixth of the *Logical Investigations*.

² 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 (cf. Hua X, 40; and above, n.3); cf. Lanei Rodemeyer, “Developments in the Theory of Time-Consciousness: An Analysis of Protention” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader* edited by Donn Welton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 125-154; pp. 131 ff., and 150n.11

³ This constitutes an advance, of sorts, on Husserl’s earlier claims that retentions retain retentions (Hua X, 81).

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.¹

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.”²

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. This structural openness is infinite, as every moment would contain a protention, \hat{F} , of the next instant, F , which itself would protend its givenness in the following moment as G_f , etc., as well as the protention, \hat{G} , of that next instant’s protention, \hat{G} , of the instant, G , that comes immediately after that, and so on, *ad infinitum*.³ 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 im-

¹ Ms. L I 15, 24a-b; as translated by Rodemeyer in “Developments in the Theory of Time-Consciousness,” 131.

² Ms. L I 16, 9a; as translated by Rodemeyer in “Developments in the Theory of Time-Consciousness,” 138.

³ 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 (cf. note on Hua X, 297). This will be discussed in greater detail below.

pression, which functions as the *terminus ad quem* of protentions and the *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 an empty, non-intuitive potential for differentiating the points of an immanent temporal object.¹ 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 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.”² This, I would argue, avoids the problem of infinite regress in its most damaging guise, while still leaving consciousness necessarily open in the direction of protention and retention.³

V. 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

¹ 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 (*Entfällung*, Hua XXXIII, 30) with regard to the fullness of the object’s givenness.

² Cf. our earlier discussion of general fulfillment, above.

³ 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 *Phenomenology of Time*, 169-174.

the future, the other with the past. Even the act of fulfillment, in itself, does not favour 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. 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 intentional character, Husserl claims, belongs intrinsically to protention, and protention alone: while retention may acquire intentionality, it does not intrinsically possess it (Hua XI, 77). 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 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.¹ 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.

The other side of this directedness is fulfillment. 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 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

¹ This seems to be in line with some of the later texts from Hua X, e.g., Text no. 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).

(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. Here, protention enables expectation¹ to fill 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” (Ibid.). Here, “the merely expected object is identified with the actually arriving object, as fulfilling the expectation” (Ibid.).²

Husserl is again adamant, though, that these two modes of bringing to intuition occur only in protention. In retention, 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 (Hua XI, 80). 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 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; cf. Brough’s English translation, 309n.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

¹ On the distinction between protention and expectation, cf. 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. The positive account of protention gives us the resources to differentiate protention from other modes of relating to the future (e.g., expectation or anticipation) in a way that the account of protention as inverse retention was not able to do.

² 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.

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 absolute consciousness.

Conclusion

Having clearly shown that protention is more than just an inverse retention, let us now go back and examine how this affects our understanding of internal time-consciousness. In Section III above, we noted the fact that there was no immediately identifiable “experience” of protention. At the time, this suggested to us that protention could not function as an inverse retention.¹ However, now that we have a better understanding of protention, we can see that this earlier difficulty was caused, not only by our lack of a proper conception of protention, but by an incorrect understanding of retention also. Contra our earlier example, retention does not influence *how* we hear the next note, but *that* we hear the next note precisely as the *next* note, that is, a further note that is distinct from the previous note but remains part of a greater unity (i.e., a symphony). Though we alluded to this distinction earlier when we distinguished between the tonal quality of the note and its givenness, we were not then in a position to fully understand the implications of this distinction. Now, we see that it is not proper to say that we retain the note. Rather, we *perceive* the note (and the symphony) as temporal, that is, we perceive the temporality of the note and the symphony.

This returns us to precisely the problem that Husserl was attempting to solve: the problem of the perception of temporality. We see that Husserl’s three-fold notion of time does, in fact, solve this problem. But we have learned that ignoring the distinctiveness of protention (as many traditional explanations of Husserl’s theory of internal time-consciousness do) can lead to a subtle but important misunderstanding: by ignoring the directedness of protention, and the ability to distinguish between clarifying and confirming

¹ I suspect that this is also the root of the not uncommon complaint that retention and protention are metaphysical imports into phenomenology, and hence Husserl’s account of internal time-consciousness, though perhaps intellectually interesting, is not rigorously phenomenological.

modes of bringing to intuition that protention makes possible, we fail to adequately appreciate the precise nature of retention. By ascribing to retention the role of keeping the past in consciousness, we precisely miss Husserl's abandonment of Meinong's failed attempts to explain the perception of temporality. Though many commentators on this issue will agree that retention does not keep the past in consciousness, their subsequent explanations of retention's relationship to the present tend to undercut this assertion. It is only by paying close attention to the role of fulfillment that we can adequately understand retention's relationship to the present. In doing this, however, we must acknowledge the vital role played by protention in fulfillment. Hence, protention and retention are not a similar function operating in different directions, but essentially different functions. If this is acknowledged, no account of Husserl's theory of internal time-consciousness can fail to speak at length about protention.¹

¹ 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.