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Husserl on Human Subjects as Sense-Givers and Sense-Apprehenders in a World of Significance

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Phenomenology begins from the recognition that human awareness is intentional, directed beyond itself at “objects” and “states of affairs” that it both intends as meaningful and encounters as already meaningful. Intentionality has too often been misconstrued as the manner in which external objects are represented in the mind (or, in the cognitive sciences, in the “brain”) or as the problem of the kind of *relation* that can hold between minds and things that do not even exist, are imaginary or even impossible. I contend that much of this discussion concerning the intentional relation misses the point of Husserl’s breakthrough analyses. Instead of beginning with a concept of mental representation taking place “inside the head”, it is more constructive to think of “sense”, “meaning”, or “significance” (*Sinn*, *Bedeutung*) as emerging from human intersubjective interaction or “comportment” (*Verhalten*) constituting a world of significance within which objects and subjects find their sense. I contend that Husserlian phenomenology really proposes that human beings are meaning-apprehenders and meaning bestowers in a world that is encountered as already laden with significances that humans both uncover and, in a certain sense, invent.