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INTRODUCTION TO HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY AS A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Epoche, Essence, Reflective Consciousness, Pre-Supposition, Eidetic Reduction.</i>	Phenomenology is a philosophical movement which was established at the end of 19 th and in early 20 th century. The approach of phenomenology is not easy understand. In this article I tried to explain it in simple language for those who are the beginners to the phenomenological study. Edmund Husserl's phenomenology represents a decisive shift in modern philosophy by establishing a rigorous method for the investigation of consciousness and the structures of lived experience. This article introduces Husserl's phenomenology as a new philosophical perspective, examining its fundamental concepts, methodological foundations, and philosophical significance. It provides a concise exposition of Husserl's theory of essences, emphasizing the role of phenomenological description in uncovering the essential structures of experience through the suspension of presuppositions. The study further explores the intellectual influences of philosophers such as René Descartes, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, demonstrating how Husserl appropriated, revised, and transcended their philosophical insights. Particular attention is given to the distinctive features of Husserl's phenomenology in contrast to earlier philosophical traditions, especially with regard to consciousness, intentionality, and the phenomenological method. By situating Husserl's thought within its



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	historical and philosophical context, the article argues that phenomenology offers a distinctive and enduring approach to philosophical inquiry, one that has profoundly shaped twentieth-century continental philosophy and continues to inform contemporary research in philosophy and the human sciences.
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Phenomenology is a recent movement in Western philosophy. It is not a school or system of philosophy. Phenomenology is mostly inspired by Descartes subjectivism and his analysis of the self and its activities; Kant's analysis of the phenomenal world, and by Hegel's phenomenology of mind.¹ But phenomenology cannot be said to be completely realistic or idealistic. It cannot be doubted that for its method and analysis of experience phenomenology depends on idealism. Again it also develops realistic tendencies which are derived from Platonism in its epistemological and metaphysical doctrines. Therefore it cannot be said to be completely realistic or idealistic. Phenomenology can be said to be a movement which is mainly related with the problems of philosophy like nature of knowledge, truth and meaning, the nature of subjectivity and consciousness; the nature and value of scientific explanation; the nature of object and objectivity etc.

Phenomenology uses special way of studying philosophical problems, called an analytical approach. This approach differs from the general philosophical attitude in respect of method and result. It carefully examines and describes our experiences instead of making assumptions or giving abstract theories. Phenomenology seeks to provide a mode of its own in approaching and treating different problems of philosophy from a new perspective. This method is different from the traditional way of doing philosophy, which often depends on speculation, logic, or scientific explanations.

With the help of an example we can see how General Philosophical Approach differs from phenomenological approach.

Suppose a philosopher asks: **"What is a tree?"**

A general philosopher may answer:

A tree is a living organism.

It belongs to the plant kingdom.

It has roots, trunk, branches, and leaves.

Science and metaphysics may explain its existence.

The emphasis is on **what a tree objectively is**. But in phenomenological approach,

A phenomenologist asks:

"How is the tree experienced by a person?"

The answer may be:



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I see its green leaves moving in the wind.

It gives me a feeling of peace.

I experience it as providing shade.

My consciousness is directed toward the tree as a meaningful object.

The emphasis is on **how the tree appears in lived experience**, not on its scientific or metaphysical nature.

Husserl adopted a **descriptive method** in philosophy, but he believed that mere description was not enough. His aim was to make the method more complete by uncovering the **essential structures** of experience and the objects that appear in experience. Instead of simply describing what we experience, he wanted to explain how those experiences and their objects are constituted in consciousness.

For this reason, Husserl sought to clarify the fundamental principles of knowledge by tracing everything back to **pure consciousness**. By *pure consciousness*, he meant consciousness that is free from all assumptions about the independent or external existence of things. In other words, before asking whether an object really exists in the external world, Husserl wanted to examine how that object is given or appears to consciousness.

Therefore, Husserl insisted that philosophy should begin without any **presuppositions**. This means that the philosopher should not take anything for granted at the outset, such as the existence of the physical world, scientific theories, religious beliefs, or metaphysical doctrines. His goal was to establish a completely rigorous and radical philosophical method based only on what is directly evident in conscious experience.

However, as the philosopher Marvin Farber points out, the word "**presupposition**" is itself ambiguous. Literally, it means something that is assumed or accepted as already existing or true before an inquiry begins. In its broadest sense, a presupposition may refer to any prior assumption, whether it concerns the material world, an ideal realm, a particular kind of experience, or even an entire system of knowledge. Husserl's phenomenological method attempts to suspend such assumptions so that the essential features of consciousness can be examined without prejudice.

What is the essential structure of our experience for Husserl?

For Edmund Husserl, the **essential structure is the universal and necessary features of an experience or an object that make it what it is**. These are not accidental or changing characteristics but the features without which the experience or object would no longer be what it is.

Accidental features are- the characteristics that can change without changing the identity of the object.

Example: A book may be red, blue, thick, or thin. These are accidental features.



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Essential features are – the characteristics that make the object what it is. For example,

A book must be something that can contain meaningful written content. If it lacked this essential feature, it would not be a book. Phenomenology seeks to discover these **essential structures** (or **essences**) through careful reflection on experience. **Phenomenology uses special way of studying philosophical problems**, called an **analytical approach**.

Eidetic reduction is the process of discovering the **essential or universal features** of something by ignoring its accidental or changing characteristics. In other words, Husserl asks us to look beyond the particular details of an object or experience and ask:

What are the essential characteristics because of which they are as they are? What are the essential, and which are merely accidental?"

For example, we can imagine a **chair**. Chairs can be made of wood, plastic, or metal. They can be red, blue, large, or small. These features can change (they are the accidental characteristics) but the object remains a chair and it is possible because of the essential characteristics. Through eidetic reduction, we set aside these accidental features and identify the essential feature: **a chair is something designed for sitting**. This essential feature is called its **essence (eidos)**.

Similarly, if we consider the experience of **remembering**, the particular event remembered may differ from person to person. However, the essential structure of remembering remains the same: it is an act of consciousness directed toward a past event. Eidetic reduction helps us discover this universal structure.

Question may arise about the difference between phenomenological and eidetic reduction. Difference between them is such that- in **phenomenological reduction** individual *ignores the question of whether the object really exists and examine only how it appears to consciousness*. Whereas in **eidetic reduction** *after examining the experience, identify the universal and necessary essence of that experience by separating essential features from accidental ones*.

Husserl was interested not only in the essence of objects but also in the **structure of consciousness itself**. Every conscious experience has certain essential features.

For example, when you see a tree:

1. **There is a subject** (an individual, the conscious experiencer).
2. **There is an object** (the tree as it appears to him).
1. **Consciousness is always directed toward something**. This is called **intentionality**.

This is why Husserl believed phenomenology could become a **rigorous science**: it studies not changing facts but the **essential structures of consciousness and the objects as they are experienced**.



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Although different phenomenologists explain phenomenology in different ways, they all share one common attitude. They believe that philosophy should begin with **our direct, lived experience** and should describe things **as they appear to consciousness**, without adding personal opinions or preconceived ideas.

Different philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau- Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre developed phenomenology in different directions. Each focused on different philosophical issues, but they all used the phenomenological method of carefully examining experience.

Phenomenology is basically a European movement. The phenomenological thinking has been playing vital roles in western thought since as early as the second decade of this century. Phenomenology comes out as a result of dissatisfaction with speculative metaphysics and scientific materialism of the 19th century. In simple words, this movement developed as a reaction against two dominant trends of the nineteenth century: **speculative metaphysics**, which relied on abstract theories about reality, and **scientific materialism**, which explained everything only in terms of physical matter and science.

In this connection, we can throw light on the fact that though modern phenomenology is influenced by Hegel's phenomenology of mind for its method and analysis of experience; Husserl was unsympathetic towards Hegelianism. In order to understand this, we must throw some light on how Hegel used the word *phenomenology*. Is it in the same sense as Husserl used the word?

Though modern phenomenology was influenced by Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially in its method of examining human experience, Edmund Husserl did not accept Hegel's philosophical system. Husserl believed that Hegel's idealism was too speculative and wanted phenomenology to be a rigorous and descriptive study of conscious experience.

Hegel used phenomenology to describe the historical and developmental journey of consciousness toward absolute knowledge. In contrast, Husserl used phenomenology as a method for carefully describing conscious experience as it is directly experienced, without making speculative assumptions about the external world.

Hegel first systematically used the word phenomenology in his work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*². He starts with essentially spiritual and he refers estrangement primarily to the mind. Man as a spiritual being, or in Hegel's language, the mind produces culture and civilization. Man's own creations works of art, religions, philosophies, science, law and the state become members of the new realms of the objective or of the absolute mind. Or we can say Hegel conceives the human being as essentially a spiritual entity and, accordingly, interprets estrangement primarily as a phenomenon of the mind. In his philosophy, the mind (Geist) is the creative force responsible for the development of culture and civilization. Through its creative activity, the human spirit gives rise to art, religion, philosophy, science, law, and the state. These human creations gradually attain an objective existence and constitute the realms of the Objective Spirit and the Absolute Spirit. Thus, what begins



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as the expression of the human spirit ultimately confronts individuals as an objective reality, reflecting the progressive development of Geist.

In the natural science the word phenomenon is used to indicate direct observation by the senses. This meaning is much narrower than the one which phenomenologists give to the word for two reasons. Firstly it is not necessary to be able to observe the phenomenon with the senses. Secondly, it need not be a process. Phenomenologists can also investigate processes. They deal mainly with structures³ (p.65, From logic to metaphysics) Even if Hegel also deals with phenomena or appearances, Husserl's phenomenology is different from that of Hegel.

Hegel understood the phenomena to be the appearances of the Absolute Mind which constitute the different stages of universal consciousness. Hegel's interest was mainly ontological, but Husserl's interest was mainly in the problem of epistemology. For Husserl, phenomena are the appearances through which a thing is presented to us. These appearances are fundamentally different from the Hegelian appearances because Hegel's appearances are not transparent through a thing presented to us. In Husserl's philosophy appearances are studied in a systematic way to explain the possibility of true knowledge in the field of science, mathematics, philosophy, etc. Phenomenology tries to make a reform in philosophy. Husserl like Descartes tried to make philosophy a strict science. In his essay, "Philosophy as strict science" (1911), Husserl found that it is necessary to establish philosophy as a rigorous science which should rest on absolutely certain principles and as such be universally valid and evident and with expectation that philosophy as a science to be the highest and strictest of all science which can claim true and absolute knowledge. But since at that time there was no such development in philosophy to be regarded as a strict science; for Husserl it became necessary to lay the foundation of a truly philosophical science. Questioning himself on the foundation of mathematics, he was sent back to logic, then epistemology, then ontology, and even to the philosophy of history by an irrepressible movement of perpetually going beyond. This is one the most striking characteristics of phenomenology which is the philosophy of intentional dynamism of consciousness. But his goal is identical where he moves from the *Logische Untersuchungen* (Logical Investigation) searching "the new foundation of pure logic and epistemology" (I, vi) to *the Cartesian Meditations*, preoccupying himself with "giving the sciences an absolute foundation"⁴

In his book, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl says that the aim of philosophy is to be the universally and apodictically founded on science; so that the answers to the philosophical issues can be definite.⁵ But very quickly Husserl recognizes that the sciences in spite of the fact that their actual results are always approximate and imperfect are oriented in intention, towards an absolute objectivity. There lies the meaning of science and it is from this perspective that any inquiry into the foundations of science must begin. Therefore the intentionality of consciousness is the intention of the scientists and it must be analyzed. Thus we have seen that phenomenology concerned with both a search for an absolutely objective foundation and at the same time an analysis of the subjectivity of consciousness.



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Since in the 19th century analysis of consciousness was psychological due to the predominance of psychology and much emphasis was given on subjectivity. It is evident that psychology is incapable of founding and clarifying the absolute objectivity inherent in the idea of science. Every psychological explanation tends to destroy this absolute and to dissolve objectivity in a relational subjectivism.

Husserl therefore tries to make an attempt to open up a new direction in the analysis of consciousness. This new direction aims essentially at answering the epistemological problem of the absolute foundation of logic and science. The phenomenological analysis is distinct from logical or psychological analysis. The mathematician manipulates ideal values or essences without verifying whether they correspond to factual reality. In the same way the phenomenologist does not like the logician, study the conditions of a true judgment; nor like the scientist, nor like the psychologist study what effectively goes on in consciousness. But he studies what is the meaning of what we have in mind when we judge, affirm, dream, live, etc....? Phenomenology is never an investigation of external or internal facts. Phenomenology emphasizes on the reality in consciousness, on the objects which are intended by consciousness.

Theory of Essence:

In Husserl's word phenomenology emphasizes on ideal essences or the "phenomena". Phenomenology silences experience, leaves the question of real content aside in order to know the reality in consciousness or "*phenomena*". For Husserl, phenomenology is the study of **ideal essences** or **phenomena**—things as they appear in consciousness. It sets aside questions about the actual existence or external reality of objects in order to examine how they are experienced in consciousness. The aim is not to study merely subjective mental images, which would reduce phenomenology to psychology, nor to speculate about abstract realities beyond experience, which would turn it into metaphysics. Instead, phenomenology seeks to describe the essential structures of conscious experience as they present themselves. It is not merely the subjective representations which may leave us on the plane of psychology, nor ideal realities which may put us on the level of metaphysics.

In order to have a complete understanding of Husserl's ideal essences or the "*phenomena*", we should know the distinction between Kant's phenomenon and Husserl's phenomenon. Because according to phenomenology what is given are the phenomena of the act of consciousness, while according to phenomenalism what is given are the objects of this act. So we have to forget about the Kantian opposition between phenomenon (what is given) and noumenon (thing in itself). Phenomenology puts *reality in itself* in parentheses, it cannot conceive the phenomenon in relation to an in-itself, as a reality of the second order, for us. The phenomenon here is used in the sense that it manifests itself immediately in consciousness. It is grasped in an intuition which precedes any judgment or reflection. The phenomenon shows itself, manifests itself; and gives itself. In the phenomenological method the object of knowledge and the content of knowledge neglects what



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alone counts for philosophers and scientists, namely, their value, their reality or unreality. Phenomenology consists mainly in describing the objects such as they give themselves, as pure and simple intentions of consciousness, as meanings, to render them visible as such. According to phenomenology the essence is neither ideal reality nor psychological reality, but ideal intention, intentional object of consciousness.⁶ **Husserl's view of essence will become clear if we analyze the influences of other philosophers on him and his differences from them.** These influences can be said to be the background of German phenomenology.

Influence of Descartes: Husserl was mostly influenced by Descartes. The Husserlian idea of radical beginning of philosophy is to be established on scientific basis like mathematics is essentially Cartesian. He was interested in solving the problems relating to the foundation of mathematical science. Due to this emphasis on mathematics he tried to discuss the problems of logic, the theory of knowledge, philosophy proper from the point of view of mathematics. His idea of rigorous philosophical science based on evidence and the philosophy which is based on mathematical certainty; Cartesian influence is found. The Cartesian influence is pre-eminently present in his program reform philosophy as scientific as mathematics, as a rigorous science.

Husserl accepted the Cartesian methodology in explain the ground of true knowledge about the nature of object. He accepted doubt –that is, the suspension of belief in order to gain the certain ground of philosophical knowledge. Husserl mainly accepted the attitude of ‘theoretic doubt’ directly from Descartes. But Husserl discovered a deeper ‘transcendental’ motive in the central Cartesian principle of ‘Ego-cogito’. In Descartes ‘Ego-cogito’ is the source of all our knowledge of the world. On the basis of the self-conscious ego different kinds of existences are deduced. Lastly he deduced the existence from self-conscious ego. In Cartesian doubt, the reality of the world is provisionally denied. But in Husserl's doubt we have not to deny the existence of the factual world. Therefore, though Husserl accepted Descartes' doubt he applied in a new way so that we can know the essential nature of things.

Husserl says- the Cartesian doubt aims at the universal denial. What is essentially involved in intentional experience and explain the meaning of the world by clarifying the transcendental origin of the world. In Husserl's doubt everything is reduced to the subjective experiences of the individual. That is why it is called psychological reduction by Husserl.

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accepted Descartes' doubt and he applied in a new way so that we can know the essential nature of things. Husserl says- the Cartesian doubt aims at the Universal denial. But the **epoche** implies merely the setting aside of the thesis of the natural standpoint. In it we may concentrate on the analysis of what is essentially involved in intentional experience and explain the meaning of the transcendental origin of the world. In Husserl's doubt everything is reduced to the subjective experiences of the individual. That is why it is called psychological reduction by Husserl.

Influence of Hume:

Husserl was influenced by Hume's philosophy. Even if there was some implicit contradictions and paradoxes in the conclusion of Humian skepticism, Husserl found in it prior model of his own phenomenological philosophy. The main aim of phenomenology is to find out the 'general objects'. They are the essence or the **eidos**. Phenomenology is the enquiry of the essence. According to Husserl when we say that 'Man is rational animals', and that 'All men are rational animals', the meaning of these two propositions is not same. 'All man' and 'Men' denote two different kinds of generality. They are different from each other both grammatically and logically. But if there are different kinds of generality then how can we have a satisfactory account of generality which phenomenological investigation aims at. According to Husserl, 'nominalism' (which generally characterizes British Empirical philosophy- particularly since Hume) is unable to explain all this⁷.

According to the Nominalist, logical laws and the laws of natural science are nothing but empirical and inductive generalizations. The universal is reducible to a mere schematic representation of sense-particulars- to a construction in thought. Husserl tries to show in his **Logical Investigations** that the laws of logic are in no way to be considered as only rules regulating the processes of our thinking. Logic, for him, cannot be treated as a normative science, although it provides the foundations for a normative doctrine.

Hume says that a general term is a word which points to certain objects, events, actions etc. with which we are associated in our ordinary life. But for Husserl a general term cannot depend on any particular idea that we may or may not have in our mind. He says that we do not have any particular image in our mind in order to use a given word correctly. Therefore it is clear that meaning is not the representation of some ideas by others, (For Berkeley all ideas but we can reach generality by taking one such concrete idea and regarding it as a representative of its class). For Hume, ideas are always concrete. It is only through reflection upon them we can form some kind of abstract ideas by distinguishing and classifying the various resemblances between them.

The nominalistic move in empiricist thinking leads itself towards "Psychologism". According to the psychologistic interpretation, logic would only be a branch of psychology. In the **Logical Investigations** Husserl presents his famous critique of psychologism. The deficiency of psychologism can be observed from two perspectives according to Husserl. First, the laws of logic cannot be derived, as psychologism contends, from psychological generalizations. Because the psychological generalizations are relatively vague and probable, they presuppose the existence of



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psychological facts. But the logical laws are ideal, a-priori laws. Secondly, psychology cannot provide a correct interpretation of the meaning of logical laws.

According to similarity or resemblance theory, in reality, there are only similar countless particulars which have common properties. But in these countless particulars, common properties are not equally present. These discernible (distinguishable) similarities are sufficient to include them all under the same concept. In the concept of 'blueness' we find that blue things are not identical, in color. Because there are countless shades of blue, no two shades are same but in spite of that all blue things are similar to one another in color and because of this similarity we call them all 'blue'.⁸

According to Hume it is only through reflection upon the concrete and particular ideas, we can form some kind of abstract notion by distinguishing and classifying the various resemblances between them. For example- we have globes of marble, one black and one white and a cube of white marble. We can classify these three objects in different ways on the basis of resemblances. If we select these three objects on the basis of shape, the two globes will go together and if we select them on the basis of color, the white globe and the white cube will come under one group even if they are different in their shape. Therefore it is clear that the classification will clearly depend on the aspect under which we consider the given objects but the objects remain the same as before. But according to Husserl since Hume based his analysis of general term on the relation of similarity, he fails to realize the importance of objectifying intentional acts.

The intentional distinction between appearance and what appears in appearances is more fundamental than the relation of similarity. For Husserl a perception and what is appeared in perception are different i.e. the 'idea' and the intentional objects are different. Hume allowed that the appearance and what appears in appearance merge in to one and at this point he made a great mistake. Husserl says that the 'globe-appearance' and the 'appearing globe' are different. Here appearing globe is the intentional object. To find out this distinction is necessary even if the globe were imaginary. The intentional object should not be confused with the physical object. The question about the existence of real object is not affected by this distinction. But in spite of the dis-satisfaction with Hume's explanation of universal it can be said that Husserl is influenced by Hume in that Hume's skepticism was a radical attempt to shake off the foundations of 'dogmatic objectivism'. The sensationalistic subjectivism of Hume makes for a pure 'immanent' philosophy, reducing the known world to impressions and ideas. Even if Hume's sensationism involves inner contradiction since it attacks all sciences of facts, while it itself is admittedly identified with universal psychology- and to that extent remains a science of facts; Hume's theory of knowledge anticipated and accepted a genuinely intuition-oriented philosophy of immanent consciousness which phenomenology emphasizes.

Influence of Kant:

Husserl was inspired by the Kantian idea of an enquiry in to the pre suppositions and conditions of knowledge. Kant's 'theoretic' philosophy, a critique of experience was directly adopted by Husserl.



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Kant said that the constitution of objectivity is not empirical but transcendental. We can know the appearances of objects but we cannot know what these objects are in themselves. We can have the knowledge of the phenomena through senses by applying 'a-priori' forms of knowing. Since there are no ways of knowing the things in-themselves, we cannot know the things in themselves. For Kant things in themselves are unknown and unknowable. He holds that we know appearance or phenomenon through perception, and things in themselves or reality through reason or rational knowledge. Rational knowledge is not true knowledge since in Kant we can know the existence of things in-themselves by presuppositions. But Kant's philosophy is mainly based on his unknown and unknowable noumena.

The critical philosophy of Kant was the model of truly 'transcendental' philosophy. Husserl agreed with Kant on the fundamental interest in philosophical enquiry. He wanted to bring out the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and experience and he came to the idea of 'transcendental subjectivity' from the study of Kant's philosophy. In Kantianism Husserl recognized the knowing subjectivity as "the ground of the objective formations of meaning and validities of being".

According to Thevenaz, it cannot be denied that in his final period Husserl restricted himself to the analysis of fully reflexive consciousness, to the 'cogito' in the Cartesian, in the Kantian sense. Husserl neglected the pre-conceptual, pre-reflexive substructure of consciousness. Husserlian transcendentalism is distinct from Kant. Husserl became gradually aware of the 'idealistic' flavor of some of the formulations of his philosophy during his 'middle period' when he called phenomenology a 'transcendental idealism'. But the 'transcendentalism' of phenomenology is not that of Kant, though their fundamental intention (their motive force) is very similar. Though Kantian system represents for Husserl the first effective attempt towards a really universal transcendental philosophy, mean as strict science and Husserl found most of the significant turning point in modern philosophy towards transcendentalism, yet Husserl criticizes Kantian theory of knowledge. He criticizes Kant's theory Synthetic judgment a-priori as involving 'anthropologism' and relativism.

The ultimate 'transcendental' in Husserl's phenomenology is Lebenswelt, the Life-World as the correlate of constituting consciousness. Kant limited himself to the analysis of the formal structures of consciousness, particularly to the transcendental a priori categories of sensation and judgment. For Kant the transcendental categories of judgment constitute the a-priori condition of the possibility of any 'scientific' judgment.⁹ Kant holds that knowledge is possible through science, and metaphysics is not a science in true sense because it (metaphysics) cannot yield synthetic 'a-priori' judgments. A science can do so when it can combine sense experience with the categories of understanding through the 'a priori' forms of intuition that is space and time.

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