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# SEE CLEARLY TO ACT WELL. POSSIBLE LEVELS OF INTENTIONALITY

*abstract*

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*Is it possible to speak of levels of intentionality? What does this mean? Further: it is possible to stratify this very sense of intentionality with other properties directly related to it, as, for instance, the fact that some acts are objectivant and that some others are “egological”?* Starting with these main topics, within a discussion directly related to *The Phenomenological Mind* and some of the main phenomenological works, it is my aim to establish whether a possible solution to the problem of the possible levels of intentionality can be found out. I also want to understand if and why some acts can be grounded on other acts, and what kinds of acts come prior to others.

*A way in which to understand the very relationship between cognitive and axiological acts, and to re-write some aspects of the phenomenological concept of experience.*

*keywords*

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*Intentionality (levels of); experience; gemütsbewegungen; foundation; objectivant (and non objectivant) acts*

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1. **A realistic approach** What is reality? We can provide many answers to this apparently simple question, even if, in one way or another, we are forced to admit that reality is whatever comes before us and asks us to be taken into account.

If one then subscribes to philosophical realism, one is moreover led to believe (and to demonstrate) both that reality actually exists, and that it involves a specific ontological structure which is not dependant on those who know it and are interacting with it at a given moment.

Arising at the very beginning of the past Century as an answer for all those wishing to make Philosophy a “rigorous science (*sterne Wissenschaft*)”, the Phenomenological Movement firmly subscribes to a realistic point of view.

According to Edmund Husserl and Adolf Reinach, it does not make sense to argue that things hide an intrinsically secret level which should constitute them and which would lack in the way they appear: no distinctions between phenomena and noumena, but a direct relationship between what things are and what they reveal to one’s consciousness.

Thus interpreted, Phenomenology has become a matter of vision – it is, a method conceived to make things appear clearly and to enable people to see them in a coherent and complete way.

According to Adolf Reinach’s *Über Phaenomenologie*, it is often the case that we persons fail to really perceive the reality around us as well as our inner lived experiences. If it is difficult for us to really understand what objects, state of affairs and people surrounding us are, it becomes even more difficult to turn to all «*Akte und Erlebnisse*» directly involved with whatever we aim to do with ourselves. As persons, we seem to be as short-sighted as we are long-sighted. It is extremely difficult for us to experience reality in an objective way. We are not directly expected to make a coherent, personal and unique experience of our being-within-the-world (Reinach 1951). This experience is something we have to *gain*.

2. **The very concept of experience** To describe and define what (our) experience is constitutes not a secondary aspect of what Husserl, Reinach and many others phenomenologists tell us. It is the very aim of the Phenomenologist – a major contribution

Phenomenology can give to contemporary philosophical theories.

As Shaun Ghallagher and Dan Zahavi stress in *The Phenomenological Mind*, phenomenologists are persuaded that many things can be revealed by experience. Besides, it is untrue that Phenomenology seeks to tell something about experience interpreted as *yours or mine*: Phenomenology is on the contrary supposed to encompass all unchanging structures of whatever a personal experience should be. It argues how it is possible for every human being to experience this unique world, common to all people sharing it from a different historical and existential perspective (Ghallagher & Zahavi 2008).

It is not because instant by instant we breath air, that analysing this air ceases to be interesting for us – as well as it is not because we fail to pay attention to the fact we breathe air that it is possible to declare that we do not do it.

For the phenomenological thought, exactly the same occurs: it becomes of the greatest importance to pay attention to whatever makes us persons, starting from those aspects of our lives that we normally do not refer to.

It is exactly at this point that a second question arises. If it is true – as Reinach tells us – that to be deeply plunged in reality does not necessarily coincide with the skill to make an effective experience of it, it then becomes of the greatest importance to “see clearly”. Moreover: to “see clearly to act well”.

**3. Main kinds of acts** To know and to act are mutually related. A proper acquaintance with the world makes us capable to interact with it, just as living and acting in the world permits us to know this world better and better.

From its very beginning, Phenomenology demonstrates a specific way to start by a logical/epistemological/theoretical approach, and to reach an anthropological/ethical/moral side.

As Husserl starts as a logician and reaches an impressive ethical-moral theory in the latest period of his life, so the entire Phenomenology created by him affirms the will to relate both to the necessity of seeing clearly and to the effort of acting well. Phenomenology argues that the very property of we persons to be intentional (it is, to live in a strong world-oriented way) must be enriched by a second statement:

“Intentionality is not just a property of we persons and of our acts (*Akte*). Intentionality has a certain number of levels – being in fact capable to relate into the deepest unity the different aspects and forms of our unitary and unique experience.”

Just to tell it in a third way:

“Intentionality is not a mere predicate. It is a dynamic property. There are levels of intentionality as well as specific ways these levels interact.”

But what about these levels, which seem to involve different ways of “clearly seeing to act well”?

Starting from Brentano on, “Phenomenology” in its broader sense has intercepted a certain number of intentionally lived experiences and a certain range of properties related to them.

*(Re)presentations* allow us to see: we are then aware of something that is external to ourselves; we perceive it; we work out an abstract representation of it.

*Judgments* allow us to take a position: something is true or false, nice or ugly, pleasant or unpleasant, useful or harmful, and so on. To judge is both a way to assert how things really are, and to declare how we perceive them.

*Hearth dispositions* allow us to feel and want. It is on this level that emotions, feelings, volitions take place, and that human beings “experience” what makes them really human.

We know reality; we take a position before it; we are also moved by it. These are three complementary ways to certify that kind of rationality being capable of distinguishing us as “rational beings who are socially oriented to one another”, as the majority of philosophers beginning with Aristotle have asserted.

Being in the world as feeling-willing-thinking-acting beings, we all deal with a certain number of intentionally lived experiences; we enhance certain experiences and we do not enhance other experiences according both to the circumstances we are plunged into and our own cognitive strategies.

In Brentano, for instance, a logical entailment between representation, judgement and hearth dispositions seems to exist.

It is clear that we cannot judge a situation without knowing it. Of course we can hurriedly or mistakenly judge; and we can judge with regard only to what is important *for us*. But all these bad ways of judging are nevertheless possible because they just say something about things which exist and that are known by us. So (re)presentation seems to precede judgement and makes it possible. Similarly, having experienced something as true/false or as good/bad for me

involves a certain kind of reacting hearth disposition (“*Gemütsbewegungen*”). But is this last statement really true?

**4.**  
**How do acts**  
**(*Akte*) interact**  
**with their**  
**author?**

In order to answer this question, Phenomenology starts integrating a definition of what “acts” (*Akte*) are, with a description of those properties they do or do not share: intentionality, objectivity and egologicity.

First of all, acts are supposed to be intentional, if and only if they help establish a relationship between me and the world.

Acts are supposed to be objective, if and only if (technical definition) they are capable of giving themselves their proper object – it is as if they are epistemologically independent of other kinds of lived experiences.

Finally, acts are supposed to be egological if and only if they train our Self-constitution and if, by accomplishing them, we do not only make something happen in the external world, but we allow ourselves to make things change within (Zanet 2009).

First of all, it is possible to assert that intentionality is a property of all acts: representations, judgements and hearth dispositions are intentionally lived experiences: they are ways in which to experience the world, starting with a specific way to relate to it.

If one takes egologicity into account, he has to admit that every human act is capable of changing whoever accomplishes it. This very act is signed by myself/yourself, and has the power to modify me/you. Every act exercises a constitutional impact upon me.

Perceptions and representations help us act in the world.

Through judgment, we both assert how things are “*an sich*” and declare what they are in relationship to us. And the hearth dispositions? These acts seem to be both “constitutive” and “egological” in the very sense of the term. In feeling and in wanting, it is I who am the real (even if indirect) object. In a much higher degree than in (re)presentations and judgments, what I experience through my own hearth dispositions runs through and goes past me. Warts and all, it has a crucial impact on me.

If I fall in a perceptual illusion, I take cognizance of it and I reform. If someone tells me that, through judgment, I’ve made a mistake, I become aware of that and change my point of view. Should we make a mistake in

perception, we will change in very little time. Should we go the wrong way in judging, a change, even if perhaps difficult, is always possible. Should we make a mistake in our feeling and wishing, in our wanting and deciding: to adjust the state of affairs means to correct ourselves. Feeling and wanting are not only acts we accomplish, but rather are what we are and what constitutes our own life (Zanet 2010).

Last but not least: the property of (some? all?) acts to be objectivant. Edmund Husserl looks upon two different perspectives, and (subscribes) them respectively in the *Logische Untersuchungen* and from *Ideen* on. Every act (and every kind of act) is either objectivant or grounded on an objectivant act. All which cannot provide itself a content (non objectivant act), has to derive it from an objectivant act.

**5. A “time without time”** Thus interpreted, the property of all acts either to be objectivant (or to ground themselves on other objectivant acts) is quite different from intentionality. It is – dare I say it – intentionality seen from another perspective and understood in a different way. It is intentionality as interpreted by the side of acts, and not by the side of their author; it is intentionality re-interpreted in relationship to the kind of power some acts exercise on other acts. If intentionality seems to live in something like an “eternal present” (I open my eyes and see, but things are already in front of me and it isn’t necessary to start looking for them and seeking them), “objectivity” introduces a sort of row and sequence. It adds a “time without time”; a “becoming” out of history similar to logical entailment; an arrow capable of reminding us that in order to accomplish some kinds of acts and actions it is firstly necessary to have accomplished some other things, acts and actions. According to two different perspectives.

**6. Two different perspectives** In his *Logical investigations*, the so-called “first Husserl” declares that only strictly speaking cognitive acts are objectivant: thinking, perceiving etc. From *Ideas* onwards, the so-called “second Husserl” (it is the one directly involved with ethical and not just logical writings and investigations) recognizes that all kinds of acts may potentially possess the property to be objectivant.

Feeling and wanting, emotions, free wills, and so on, can give themselves a proper content, out of the essential, constitutive mediation of the strictly speaking cognitive acts. What could previously be experienced overstepping a complex, stratified hierarchy, can up to now be considered a real objectivant act: as an act capable of giving itself a proper object, not deriving it from other acts leaning against. Thus, it becomes a primal, essential way of directly

experiencing the world and its values, people and their relevance, things and their usefulness for us. Consequently, it becomes a primal way to make experience, without being always related to cognitive acts which come “first”.

Experience acquires this property through its very unity: it is, the fact of being *one*, actually constituted by inclusion and entanglement of a set of different acts, all pertaining to the same, unique person.

If not every act is objectivant, a representation leads to a judgment leading to a feeling/wanting structure.

If all acts, hearth dispositions included, are objectivant, the feeling and/or the will play a role into personal experience, without cognitive acts and judgements being necessarily presupposed by them.

But what does this change involve with regard to our personal experience and the “phenomenological mind”?

People rendering feeling and willing acts as non-objectivant, will hold as evident that something has to be “theoretically” known to be felt and/or wanted. If a massive cognitive structure isn’t involved, it is hard for them to detect axiological aspects of reality. On the contrary, people rendering all kinds of intentional *Gemütsbewegungen* objectivant will try to raise a different argument by suggesting that every “cognitive” perception is related to an axiological perception, and that it is already in perceiving that things appear good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant and beautiful or ugly.

The two main solutions phenomenology has suggested might even look contradictory. They cannot stay the one with the other.

If literarily considered, they both seem to assume something not involved with the richness and complexity of a human being that *knows in acting, and acts in knowing*. However, if seen as frames through which some authors have tried to portray a dynamic process, they can tell us many things.

Intentionality is a property of each kind of act: a main feature which is present or absent, and which we cannot modulate. A way for us all to be “thinking and knowing” people; a way Phenomenology has to distinguish psychical from physical phenomena.

Objectivity can be present or absent: it follows an all/nothing, open/close, in/

out logic. We can recognize or disown it, affirm or refuse it.

Egologicity is a noun for our being-unique-persons. Every act can do this, but not everyone can do it in the same way and at a common rank. Perception, intuition, representation “are” “egological”; but in quite different ways from both judgements and *Gemütsbewegungen*.

It is perhaps not by chance that, as Husserl starts working on ethics, he also starts recognizing that the third group of acts possess the property to be objectivant as well as egological. In fact, it is not possible to maintain and to assume that some acts “make us persons”, if we are not allowed to say that they are able to disclose us sets of experience – and to do it in a quite “independent” way, being primary ways of our lived experiences. What constitutes us must enjoy of a certain kind of independence. It must be capable of offering us experience in a new, rich and coherent way.

If perception is seen not only as an “act of perception” (or as a perception *stricto sensu*), but as an image of all theoretical and cognitive acts (or as a perception *lato sensu*), it is then deeply involved with feeling and wanting. As Husserl’s *Prolegomena* often remembers, the normative dimension is always grounded on a descriptive one. And as the *Lectures on ethics* (1908-1914) recognizes, this foundation entails a complex plot: every will presupposes both a representation of what is wanted and a frame of background representations that the belief is added to (Husserl 1988).

Reality has to be present, for a position (*Stellungnahme*) can be taken in its regards. We cannot enjoy of a neutral knowing, even if a certain kind of epoché is of the greatest importance. Cognitive acts arise at the same time as axiological acts. To start to see clearly and to begin exercising a correct theoretical attitude has a lot to do with the way in which a state of affairs is judged. To feel well and to train our feelings are already ways to influence and shape our behaviour. And to judge correctly, is to adopt such attitudes and bearings directly involved with a thoughtful, effective decision.

7. **See clearly to act well** “See clearly to act well” is then something more than a saying. It refers to the very structure of our conscious and experienced life. It is directly concerned with the way our complex experience is and evolves in time. And it is capable of remembering the tight links which bind our ordinary lives and their eidetic view. As Husserl remembers in a private note dated 1906, “to develop a theory of reason” (or a theory of what we do and what we think) is absolutely essential for he who wishes to be called a “philosopher”. Husserl often stresses the idea



that human beings are “rational” in any instant of their lives, because to each one of them pertains a distinction of what is right and what is not.

If it is clearly impossible to separate “*Vorstellung*”, “*Urteil*” and “*Gemütsbewegungen*”, it is also impossible to separate intentionality, objectivity and egology of our acts. It must be recognized that our feelings on the one side, and our wanting, feeling, and deciding on the other, constitute us and make us persons. But it must also be recognized that the way we have to see the world, to contemplate it and to describe it, is directly related to the way we behave with it.

The *Fundierung-logik* running through Phenomenology from its very beginning onwards, leads us to a coherent portrait of what we individuals are as subjects of an every-day enriching experience. It helps us to understand the links and boundaries of what we have to do think and do. It definitely allows us to avoid making the mistake of separating what can only be distinguished. Furthermore it helps us appreciate the importance of seeing clearly and judging wisely to act well.

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