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HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF VALIDITY

abstract

What is a practical intention, particularly an evaluating intention? Are values representational states that work differently from epistemological truths? Are our perceptual experiences representational states? To simplify the inquiry, I will theoretically divide the questions into two groups: the former concerning the distinction between signitive and practical intention and the latter pertaining to the objectivity of a value. The texts I will refer to are Husserl's Ideas and Analysis.

keywords

Intentionality, active and passive synthesis, signitive acts, value and teleology

1. Introduction

What is a practical intention, particularly an evaluating intention? Are values representational states that work differently from epistemological truths? Are our perceptual experiences representational states? How can we explain an instinctive evaluation that is performed without the support of any reflection? I would like to begin my analysis with a story whose protagonist is a *kouros*, a statue bought by an art dealer, Gianfranco Becchina. Federico Zeri, the well-known art critic, was called to make an evaluation concerning the authenticity of the statue. Although the other members of Becchina's trustee board had already acknowledged the high value of the *kouros*, Zeri denied its authenticity in the blink of an eye. He looked at the *kouros* and felt 'an intuitive repulsion'. Later on, other tests confirmed what Zeri felt (Gladwell 2005, 3-8).

I use this story to display the sense of my research. In fact, it seems possible to claim that on certain occasions an evaluating intention can be brought out via 'an intuitive repulsion'. For this reason, my aim here is to describe the moments of this kind of intention. The questions that might arise from this challenging topic are several: Wow does the intentional structure of this 'intuitive repulsion' look like? Is the value a bodily concept which comes before the representation of the object itself? Is it possible to appreciate the value of a melody without consciously listening to it? If we come in a room and our attention is completely focused on another object, are we able to appreciate the value of the melody spread in the room as well?

To simplify the inquiry, I will divide the questions into two groups: the former concerning the distinction between signitive (or largely meant epistemological) and practical intention and the latter pertaining to the objectivity of a value itself. I would like to understand if a practical intention can be independent from any signitive or epistemological basis and, accordingly, if values might be described independently from the objects holding a value. The texts I will refer to are Husserl's works of *Ideas I* (1913) and *Analysis Concerning Active and Passive Synthesis* (1917-18) which casts light on Husserl's idea of intentionality after the transcendental and genetic turn. These texts can be taken as a reference point to explain the analysis of validity from a static to a genetic viewpoint. In this way we could get an overall phenomenological definition of validity pointing out its differences respect to a signitive acts and showing its *in fieri* nature.

As for the critics, Husserl scholars seem to be divided on this issue:

Schuhmann as well as Melle maintain that this debate can only lead to an aporetic conclusion. Drummond and Rinofner-Kreidl consider the possibility of carrying out a two level analysis of evaluative acts as intentional acts where it is possible to distinguish the experience of a valuable object from the corresponding values themselves. In contrast to Liangkang, who retains evaluating acts unable to constitute their own noema, Crowell considers the so-called emotive 'target' as a phenomenologically 'normal' *object* (which he calls 'objectivity') that can have worth as a proper value. Finally, Smith (but naturally there are many other scholars involved in this debate) construes the object of values as a universal object grasped by the categorical experience of the universal. Seemingly Husserl's theory of values, as Rinofner-Kreidl and Crowell noted, presents some deficiencies that cannot be solved or accepted. In this paper I would like to expound these deficiencies focusing on practical intentionality and the meaning of value.

2.
Hierarchy of
Intentions in
Ideas I

As already mentioned, the meaning of 'value' in itself can be understood by the analysis of Husserl's idea of intentionality. Indeed, a value is defined by Husserl as the content or *noema* of an intentional act of evaluation. The issue here is to examine which kind of intentionality, if any, belongs to evaluating acts. As these acts are commonly considered instinctive and spontaneous, their intentionality is problematic because they seemingly arise without any proper *intentio* (Husserl, 1970,107-112). They simply mean their own objects in the absence of any 'aware' intention. For instance, when I enter a room, a melody makes me feel well, though I may not be listening to it attentively. This means that I (or my body) can evaluate it positively while I am doing something else. In this case the evaluating act functions without a proper intention and (probably) a proper object. Something happens (listening to a melody) and I recognize it with a feeling but my aware intention is addressed toward another actual object (talking to another person, for instance).

In paragraph 97 of *Ideas I* Husserl explains the moments that constitute a simple act through the following example. "We are looking at a tree over there which is now motionless and then appears blown by the wind and which is also presented in greatly different modes of appearance as we, during our continuing observation, change our spatial position relative to the tree"(Husserl 1983, 236, 201). This observation encompasses a plentitude of information that is given in the unity of *one* perception. Yet if we want to exclude the natural attitude which provides phenomenal and mutable information of the tree in order to describe the act just from

a phenomenological point of view, we should stay focused on what remains of the former sensuous perception, that is, on the “inherent component of the pure mental process” (Husserl, 1983, 237). In fact, seen phenomenologically, the tree becomes that mental phenomenon by means of which I perceive the tree. Phenomenological analysis focuses on what affects the perception as a pure mental object.

According to *Ideas I* the act of perception can be divided into two components: noesis and noema. Noesis is the ‘subjective’ side of an act and noema the ‘objective’ side. Noesis is the field of constituting multiplicities and noema is the field of constituted unities. From a phenomenological point of view the noesis is not the colour of the tree which changes according to the intensity of the light, but the colour itself as we perceive it. On the other hand, the noema of a colour corresponds to the “sensed colour”. This latter is an identical and unchangeable unit encompassing all the data pertaining to the perception of colour as they are grasped by the noesis.

Husserl holds that we have different kinds of noeses and noemata that are displayed within a specific hierarchy (Husserl 1983, 246, 249, 255). “There are presentations *simpliciter*, modifications *simpliciter* of perceptions. But there are also presentations of a second, third and essentially of any level whatever” (Husserl 1983, 246). It is possible to intend an object in different ways (phantasy, memory, representation), but all these ways can be figured out and collocated in a specific order. To every way of perceiving objects there belongs a characteristic of reflection: “with respect to remembered things at the second level of rememberings, there are reflections on perceivings of just these things belonging to the same level” (Husserl 1983, 247). For instance, we cannot seize upon the object-tree by memory if we have not represented it yet. The various noeses by which an object can be given are all built up on signitive or doxic acts, that is, on acts capable of performing the representation of the sensed object. “The being-characteristic *simpliciter* is the primal form from which all being modalities are derived” (Husserl 1983, 251). We can perceive the tree and reflect on its properties only after we have recognized it as an object, as something which stands in front of us. Therefore, I can have an overall idea of the tree thanks to the mixture of different levels of my perception. Each noematic level is “an ‘objectivation’ of the data of the following level” (Husserl 1983, 247, 249). I can draw a pleasant feeling from the sight of the tree because this feeling generally arises after I have seen the tree standing before me and have instantly processed this representation.

Hence evaluating objectivations are possible only on the basis of signitive

or positing acts. "A perceiving, fantasizing, judging, or the like, founds a stratum which overlays it completely we have different noemata or senses in the stratified whole which is called a concrete mental process of valuing by being designated according to the highest level within it" (Husserl 1983, 231). Every evaluating act which appears just like a second kind of act is based on the signitive stratum of perception, judgement and fantasy (Husserl 1983, 232). Consequently, an evaluative act does not seem to hold its own object as it always requires the representations of a signitive act in order to evaluate something. The value seems to be a different kind of signitive noema. For example, if I enter a room and I listen to a melody, the process of evaluating this melody is probably grounded on the realization that a melody is being played and then I can evaluate it. The melody is a signitive object that is predicatively given to the act of evaluation. The actual object of the evaluating act is a "Value-Objectiveness" (Husserl 1983, 232) (*Wertkobjectivität*), that is, a state of affairs (*Sachlage*) founded on the predicative form of the object that holds a value.

Nevertheless, in every value there must lie a distinction between the valuable object (i.e., the predicatively given object I am evaluating) and the value-objects (Husserl 1983, 232). The former is the noema of a signitive act by which I know what I am experiencing and the latter is a noematic modification of what I am experiencing. Accordingly the noema of an evaluating act is an intentional object in a twofold sense. "We shall speak of the mere thing which is valuable which has value characteristic which has value quality; in contradistinction we speak of concrete value itself or the value-objectiveness (*Wertobjectivitaet*). [...] The value objectiveness involves its mere materially determinate thing (*Sache*). It introduces a new objective stratum, the value quality" (Husserl 1983, 232, 198). As a matter of fact, any value is an actual and axiological object, that is, the thing as valuable, with its value-characteristics and value-qualities, and the concrete value in itself, which should be considered as a value-objectiveness and a mere predicatively formed value-complex.

For this reason in §37 Husserl mentions the expression 'evaluative perception' (*Wertnehmung*) as the first step on which the noema of value is built up as a "value-objectiveness", namely the object as it is vaguely perceived. Hence, on this first founding act, another process of objectivation takes place. Accordingly, the concrete value in itself, as opposed to the thing as valuable, seems to hold a peculiar intention and its own "Setzungscharaktere", namely its own way of positing an object and taking a position with respect to it.

3. Passive and Active Intentionality: the Blink of Validity

In his *Analysis Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Husserl makes a distinction between passive and active intention. This distinction can be helpful to understand the 'object' of a plain perception (*Wahrnehmung*) as opposed to the one of a value perception (*Wertnehmung*). This distinction should be conducive to form a whole idea of the lived experience as something static that is taken in itself and in that moment as a unit which is always *in fieri* since it is experienced by a living subject.

The first layer of a passive intention is mainly a perception (Husserl 2001, 92). Within a passive perception, noesis consists in an act of uninhibited intentions and the noema is the free fulfillment of several modes of being. Since in this correlation there is no hierarchy, consciousness can be directed wherever it likes without being regulated by any kind of knowledge. To use the example given before, while I am staring at the tree, probably a lot of intentions impinge upon my staring. I can be compelled to touch the tree's trunk or just to like its shape. All these stimuli are simultaneous and force my consciousness toward different directions. It is likely that my consciousness can only knowingly follow a part of these, and only a few uninhibited intentions can become real (active or actual) intentions. The hierarchy, as it was displayed in *Ideas I*, comes into action only when consciousness decides to choose among the interwoven, uninhibited intentions through an active acceptance.

The active acceptance corresponds to the ego taking a position as a decision 'for or against' the uninhibited intentions. In this case we have an active intentionality where, as stated before with *Ideas I*, the doxic or signitive act holds a primal position. In the hierarchy the noesis there is a 'Yes or No', and its noema is what has been judged as 'Yes or No' with respect to the perceived content.

"The noetic Yes and No [...] arises from taking a position specifically as judging. As with every mode of consciousness, we have a noematic correlate. Here, of course, this correlate is the noematic valid and invalid arising in the objective sense" (Husserl 2001, 134).

The first step of an active intention is the process of validation as confirmation (*Bewahrheitung*) or verification (*Bewahrung*) of the perceptual concordance (Husserl 2001, 143). The perceptual concordance is exactly that balance between what is given to consciousness as self-giving and the presentation of what is expected to be presented to consciousness. In that sense the confirmation that lies behind the very first step of an active intention seems to be essentially a normative act of regulation by which the first balance can be restored (Husserl 2001, 150).

Here something more is added to *Ideas I*. In this hierarchy the former act of an active intentionality is still a signitive one but, in contrast to *Ideas I*, it springs from a validation act. According to Husserl passive intentionality turns into an active one by a judgment of acceptance and its first noema ends up being what is accepted as valid or invalid. Let us take the previous example: Mary is staring at a tree absentmindedly. After a while her passive intention is translated into the decision to do something. Whatever this doing is about, it always passes through a decision and a judgment. She decides to see its shape or rejoice over its sight or evaluate its beauty. What ignited the motor of this decision to accept a very specific intention among many others?

When someone is absentmindedly staring at a tree, she is exposed to a free horizon of expectations where all uninhibited intentions are possible. Then, the ego actively takes up a position of judging (or talking, or fantasizing etc.) and “appropriates what is now concordantly given as being *simpliciter*. Active acceptance is what carries out a peculiar appropriation, determination, thereby establishing this being as valid for me from now on”. (Husserl 2001, 95) To understand this acceptance, it is necessary to go through its moments as they appear in the flow of time. In fact the analysis of perception is also “an analysis of temporal modes of givenness” (Husserl 2001, 150). The moments of this unit are always made up of time. As Husserl writes “We have the stream of givennesses in lived-experience, givennesses that are strung together temporally” (Husserl 2001, 148). Every moment is made up of impression, protension and retention. Impression represents the presentification of a temporal being, that is what is given to the subject, in that moment by shadows and uncertain forms. Protention is the expectation of the future. It “designates the second aspect of genetic primordial lawfulness that strictly governs the life of consciousness” (Husserl 2001, 739). It represents what we could see or expect to see. It constitutes a kind of norm or rule about what we are experiencing. In fact, while we are experiencing the surrounding, we build up an idea of what we are perceiving and expectations are precisely the presentifications of the idea we have created from the former glimpses. Finally, retention is the empty presentation of what we have already felt. It is the passive law built on the memories just collected in our mind (Husserl 2001, 114). This empty representation can be fulfilled by the contents given with evidence. “The objects found in such a retention are disclosed through a process of bringing them to intuition [...] They are disclosed in the synthetic transition to an appropriate intuition in the consciousness of them. This is obviously a

synthesis of confirmation” (Husserl 2001, 150).

Therefore, the decision made by the ego is mainly determined by these phases. The confirmation granted by the unit of continual concordance allows the ego to go ahead with its intentions following the proper hierarchy. This is the way in which the consistency of empty presentations, presentifications and expectations can be achieved. The noema of validity can be acquired because “the perceptual lived-experience is continuously being fulfilled” in this temporal flow. (Husserl 2001, 107)

Perception appears as a process “of streaming from phase to phase [...]. In each phase we have primordial impression, retention and protention and unity arises in this progression by the protention of each phase being fulfilled by the primordial impression [...]. When this concordance is ruptured [...] we no longer have a perception in the normal sense” (Husserl 2001, 107).

These moments bring a lawfulness to the act of perception which allows the stream to flow. “The original confirmation, in which a presenting object is fulfilled in a synthesis of the intended object and the corresponding object in itself“, occurs exactly in the present relationship between what I expect to see and all that I have presented before. If the expectation is fulfilled by the actual presentation, the confirmation is possible and the noema is valid. In a word, the expectation seems to be the main stimulus of an active acceptance and the acceptance is what gives validity to the noema of a passive uninhibited intention. The idea of validity seems to be embedded in this temporal structure, especially in the expectations which give the norm of what has to be fulfilled. These seem to be the moments grasped by the very first *Wertnehmung*. “Every belief directed to the future has its truth or its falsity prefigured in advance and once and for all” (Husserl 2001, 151). The validity of this truth consists in this expectation.

- 4. Conclusion** Coming back to the questions I raised in the first paragraph concerning the difference between a practical and an epistemological intentionality, it is now possible to state that there is a strong interweaving of the two. Indeed, Husserl compares both (along with their noemata, namely, truth and value) also when he talks about mathematics. This probably happens because, as Crowell noted, “Husserl equates the normative with the rational” (Crowell, 2005, 15). Here in fact Husserl writes: “To elucidate the structure of the *truth or validity* is to elucidate <the decision> in itself [...] drawing a parallel to the mathematical in itself where it is easiest to detect the peculiar trait of validity in itself” (Husserl 2001, 150). In this excerpt

it is quite difficult to make a distinction between truth and validity. They seem rather to be strung together in analogy with mathematical truths. Logical rationality is validity and vice-versa. In this overlapping, validity seems to be a quality belonging both to a mathematical and a theoretical truth. "There are affective motives that also orient and reorient the regard in this direction". The ego resists the inclination of will and "ego responds by dismissing it, by declaring [the latter intention] invalid"(Husserl 2001, 96, 56). Validity is what the ego 'declares' to be true. It appears to be that temporal shadow which overlays a logical act. "The negating act carried out by the ego is a process of striking down validity (*Ausser-Geltung-Setzen*)" (Husserl 2001, 96,56). Therefore, Husserl characterized "deciding-in-favor-of" by taking-possession-of, appropriation, as being henceforth valid, as settled for me from now on. "Deciding-against means that such a validity, which was somehow expected of us and possibly taken up by us earlier, is rejected" (Husserl 2001, 97, 56). In addition to being the valuable object and the value-object, the value is the noema of what has been recognized as valid and it is the content toward which the signitive act is addressed. In this sense truth and validity as well as their intentions are interwoven because validity is in a certain sense the norm which regulates the acquisition of truth, e.g., the concordance gained between what I perceived and what is given. Taking the example of the tree, the truth lies in the consistency between what I expected to see and what has been effectively perceived by touching or seeing it, while the value lies in the acceptance of this consistency.¹ The transition from a static to a genetic viewpoint helps to show all the layers of the validity as something that is already given to the subject (as signitive act) and as a whole that is *in fieri* and can never be enclosed in just one lived experience. It remains an open question how this validity is recognized as consistent and true. Husserl talks about the *sentiment of evidence*, defined as an *adequatio rei ac intellectus* between what the ego expects to do and what is done (Husserl 2001,117, 143, 103), but this is the topic of another article.

1 Ibid., p. 277: "As long as the concordance of this coinciding sufficed, the One, the objective sense, was characterized in the mode of being. As this thoroughgoing unity, every constituted thing for itself in the background of consciousness exercises an affection on the ego precisely as one."

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