
SOME REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF DESIRING

Uma Análise Reflexiva do Desejar

Un Análisis Reflexivo del Deseo

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Abstract: After some remarks about methodology, a predominantly affective type of encountering best called “*desiring*”, will be compared with *wishing* and *hoping* and also related to believing and willing.

Keywords: Desiring; Reflective analysis; Phenomenology.

Resumo: Após algumas notas acerca da metodologia, irei descrever um tipo de encontro predominantemente afetivo chamado “desejar” (*desiring*), e irei compará-lo com “pretender algo” (*wishing*) e esperança (*hoping*), e também relacioná-lo com crença e volição.

Palavras-chave: Desejar; Análise reflexiva; Fenomenologia.

Resumen: Después de unas pocas notas sobre la metodología, voy a describir un tipo de encuentro predominantemente afectiva llamado “*desear*”, y voy a compararlo con “querer algo” (*desear*) y la esperanza, y también se relacionan con la creencia y la voluntad.

Palabras-clave: Desear; Análisis reflexivo; Fenomenología.



ing) is desiring is not so clear. Nevertheless, this is a good beginning.

3. Examples can help reflective analyses and here the main example will be a Porsche 911 automobile, such as is depicted above, that I desire to enjoy. Reflection quickly shows that I do not merely desire this car but rather also the enjoying of it and, correlatively, the car-to-be-enjoyed, which, among other things, raises good questions about the temporality involved.

4. Where method is concerned, the first step for phenomenologists is to adopt a reflective theoretical attitude. Most educated intellectuals today easily adopt a contemplative or theoretical attitude and that attitude can also be reflective. If one does not reflect, one is in a straightforward attitude and overlooks how things appear perspectively, have values and uses, have manners of givenness, etc. that are disclosed in the object-as-intended-to along with the various correlative components in the mental processes attentive to them, not to speak of determinations of the ego or I, all of which can be disclosed when one reflects. In the present case, one's reflective theoretical theme is thus denominated by (a) “desiring,” (b) “the thing-as-desired,” and (c) “ego” or “I.” (Some colleagues unfortunately learn to remain professionally, one might say, in the unreflective or straightforward attitude, but even they can respond in everyday life to the question, “How are you feeling?” by, so to speak, looking inward

1. While not exercises in lexicography, it is best, when possible, to begin reflective analyses by seeking the signification(s) in ordinary language that seem to refer well to the eidos in question. The first two definitions of “desire” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (accessed on line 7/1/13) nicely read as follows.

1. The fact or condition of desiring; that feeling or emotion which is directed to the attainment or possession of some object from which pleasure or satisfaction is expected; longing, craving; a particular instance of this feeling, a wish.
2. Physical or sensual appetite; lust.

2. Already on this basis, it can be suspected that, while sometimes desire may be specifically sensual, the first concept in ordinary language is generic. This concept will be focused on here. Furthermore, the usage of “desiring” nicely focuses on a *type of* mental process that is predominantly affective, but whether wishing (or hop-

and then reporting what they see there, e.g., boredom. Phenomenology can be considered a development from beginnings like this.

5. Another methodological move often taken for granted and thus seldom described deserves attention. This procedure is called “the egological *epochē*, reduction, and purification.” Let me approach this with a story. Years ago I had a conversation at a reception with a new graduate student from Africa beginning in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh, where my then wife was also a graduate student. The new African student, who had learned excellent English at a missionary school, was upset that he had been told to select the courses he wanted to take. Finding this odd, I got him to explain that if he was still at home such a decision would involve a discussion involving his grandfather, father, and several uncles, and all with various women somewhat in the background. Ultimately, I could say that, in my terms, the student expected something of a *familial committee decision to be made*. But this student fresh from someplace in Africa felt abandoned if not orphaned when told to select his courses chiefly by himself. By contrast, I was quite familiar with perhaps sometimes seeking advice but nevertheless basically selecting my own courses *on my own* when I was in graduate school.

6. I tell this story because that was when I first recognized how one can be consciously a member of an intersubjectivity or group. Of course I have consciously experienced myself as a functioning member of larger and smaller intersubjectivities many times since then (and unconsciously long before and also since) and have fairly recently learned to connect it with phenomenological methodology.¹ Indeed I find it unusual not to find myself functioning as a member of a group and I have become more able to sort out what are my own mental processes from those of others. After all, we do perceive the mental processes of others to some extent, albeit appresentively and not presentively, as my own mental processes can alone be presented to me.

7. As I currently understand Husserl, our fall-back or default attitude is the so-called natural attitude and that attitude includes not only belief in oneself in the world but also others as in the world and this in such a way that others along with oneself form a “we” that shares what can be called public objects, such as the floor under our feet. Thus, there is a priority of intersubjectivity, but one can perform an *epochē* whereby the others who had been co-subjects, the floor, and indeed the world for us become then objects just for me as a single subjectivity.

¹ Dorion Cairns, ed. Lester Embree, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), Chapter 12, “The Egological Reduction.”

Thus, the attitude in which all things are, so to speak, reflectively intended to by ‘us’ is reduced to the attitude in which all things, even though still intended to by others and the others themselves, are considered only as intended to by ‘me.’²

8. In yet other words, the result is an actual or possible individual mental life and things-as-intended-to-in-it and this as such is purified of being given as an object for others. For my society, class, ethnic group, gender, and educational level, this egological *epochē* is as automatic as the adoption of the theoretical *and reflective* attitude. It seems part of what is sometimes called “bourgeois individualism” and I think it is the source of what is often called Husserl’s Cartesianism, which predominates in his *Ideen* (1913) and *Cartesianische Meditationen* (1931). It often seems more difficult for me to be conscious of how I am a subjectivity within an intersubjectivity, but of course objectivity ultimately requires that. We begin in intersubjectivity, thematize subjectivity, and seek ultimately to reach intersubjectivity again.

9. Let me now insert, incidentally, that I heard the following story twice in lecture courses in phenomenology by my teacher Dorion Cairns at the New School for Social Research in the 1960s. Both times, students asked what “pure” signified for Husserl and Cairns told of a conversation he had had with Eugen Fink at Freiburg in the early 1930s in which Fink explained that the full general methodological title was “*epochē*, reduction, and purification,” “*epochē*” naming the operation of suspension or refraining, “reduction” naming its effect on the attitude of the ego or I, and “purification” its effect on the thing-as-intended-to.

10. There are, of course, a number of species of such a generally characterized method, the eidetic, the transcendental, and the phenomenological psychological *epochēs*, reductions, and purifications being the most widely discussed. The short name can then be “*epochē*” and the specific procedures are named by their *pure* effects, the eidetic *epochē* leading to a pure *eidōs* or *eidē*, the transcendental *epochē* leading to a transcendently pure consciousness or mental life, and the phenomenological psychological *epochē* – which can also become habitual – leading to pure psychic life, facts or actualities, the status of being-in-the-world, and the real relations of psychic processes to somatic and environmental factors being, respectively, what the things in question are purified of. And the story both times ended with Cairns

² Lester Embree, “Dorion Cairns and Alfred Schutz on the Egological Reduction,” in Hisashi Nasu, Lester Embree, George Psathas, and Ilja Srubar, eds., *Alfred Schutz and his Intellectual Partners* (UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2009). By the way, Schutz believed that Husserl performed the egological and transcendental *epochēs* simultaneously.

reporting how he and Fink laughed about how Husserl often said and wrote equivocatingly “reduction” rather than “*epochē*” as the short form.)³

11. Assuming the reflective theoretical and also egologically (and psychologically!) reduced attitude, what is it that one can reflectively observe, analyze, and describe in order to clarify the concept of desiring? Phenomenology or reflective analysis is of course investigation of phenomena and phenomena are not the appearances of things-as-intended-to but rather things that themselves appear and that Husserl calls *Erlebnisse*. This expression has been translated as “experience” and, curiously, “lived experience,” but I prefer sometimes to follow my teacher Cairns with “mental process” and even “intentional process,” but I often prefer to say “encountering.”

“*Encountering*” has, I believe, at least three advantages. Firstly, it nicely invites asking about what is encountered, secondly, it is readily specified as “experiential,” “positional,” “doxic,” “affective” or “pathic,” “conative” or “praxic,” etc., and, thirdly, encountered objects are readily recognized to be originally cultural objects with belief characters, values, and uses.

12. As already intimated, desiring, upon reflection, is observed to involve “ego” or “I,” “desiring,” and “thing-as-desired.” For example, “I desire to enjoy a Porsche 911.” The next question to ask is whether desiring is chiefly experiential or positional? I say “chiefly” because all encounterings include, concretely speaking, both experiential and positional orthetic components. “Experiencing,” in the broadest signification, can be *of* atemporal or ideal things or, more usually, of temporal things in the now, the past, or in the future. What predominates in desiring, however, is not experiential but chiefly something positional and, more specifically, something affective-valuational. Thus I can reflectively find in my mental life a predominantly intentional process component that is a liking that is intentional to the 911 Porsche. This liking and the value that the car has for me in it is positive and contrasts with disliking or being apathetic or neutral. But unlike most types of liking, which have negative forms, i.e., disliking, desiring does not have a negative modality. If one desires the death of an enemy, for example, that death is a good thing, it has positive value. But there can be neutrality or a lack of desire. There can also be a pre-

ferring, i.e., I can desire a Porsche more than I desire a Ferrari, but a desiring is not necessarily *preferential*.

13. The species of valuing that is desiring can be direct or indirect. I can indirectly desire the square root of 3. The square root of 3 is an ideal mathematical object, but the calculating of it is a mental operation and that operation is what is directly desired in this case. Similarly, I can desire to recollect a conversation that occurred yesterday, the recollecting in the future and the conversation in the past, and there can also be indirect hoping analogously. The conversation and the recollecting are both temporal things, the former is in the past and the latter is in the future and is also directly desired or hoped for. However, I can directly desire or hope to enjoy a Porsche 911.

14. It needs also to be recognized that not only desiring, but also hoping and wishing can all take reflective as well as straightforward forms. Thus, I can desire a 911 straightforwardly and I can reflectively desire not only that object but also my ego or I and the encountering of the car, e.g., a case of “I-desiring-a 911.” Wishing can reflectively be for rain tomorrow or “I-wishing-rain tomorrow,” and analogously for hoping and expecting. This is like straightforwardly recollecting yesterday’s lunch and reflectively recollecting “I-eating-yesterday’s lunch.” In the reflective forms one can access manners of givenness, appearances, positionality as well as the correlative components in the encounterings.

15. Desiring is unlike wishing, for example, in that it cannot be directly of something in the past, while I can wish that it had not rained on the parade yesterday. Interestingly, wishing appears not to motivate willing as desiring can. Desiring is like hoping in that its object is temporal but not in the past and also not in the now but only in the future. Strictly speaking, questions about the temporality of objects relates not to the positionality of an encountering but to the experiential component within it. Some sorts of liking can accompany the intentionality to an ideal object (“a beautiful theory”) and can also accompany recollecting, perceiving, and expecting. Besides including the predominantly affective component of positive valuing or liking, hoping can be for sunshine at the beach this weekend or for another fairly definite future event.

16. But what is usually called “desiring” can be accompanied by an intentionality to the future but *not* necessarily to any definite time there, but of course it often is. It might bring some clarity to consider that, using a synonym for “desiring,” one can speak of “hopeful longing” and “hopeless longing.” The intentionality to the future in desiring cannot then always be called an expecting. And by virtue of the accompanying intentionality to a future without any definite event necessarily, the form

³ I have tried to confirm my recollections with a passage from Cairns and the best I have found in his *Nachlaß* thus far is this: “One consequence of psychological-phenomenological *epochē* is phenomenological-psychological reduction of them to their psychic purity. A parallel consequence is that the reflecting psychic ego puts himself into a psychological-phenomenological attitude toward them in their psychic purity.” (Cairns *Nachlaß*, p. 5350) Perhaps consciously or unconsciously, my teacher seems to have followed Husserl’s use of “reduction” as the short form for “*epochē*, reduction, and purification.”! (More recently, in studying student notes from Cairns’s seminar on the *Ideen*, I found his assertion that in later work Husserl stopped using “pure,” but no reason for this change was mentioned by Cairns.)

of encountering called desiring is also like hoping. We cannot hope for a past event and we cannot directly desire the past.⁴

17. Reflective analyses are often advanced through considering opposites. Desiring and hoping appear not to have clearly negative opposite forms like positive valuing has negative disvaluing, e.g., moral disapproval and disliking. Rather, hoping has the opposite that is despair, which appears to be an absence of hoping. Similarly, desiring has a lack of desire as its opposite, e.g., I am, so to speak, cold with respect to Volkswagen Beetles.⁵

18. What about believing? Because I do not have the current minimum of \$182,000 to purchase a new Porsche 911, this is now a de facto impossibility for me. Nevertheless, my coming to enjoy my own Porsche 911 is not essentially impossible, for I could win the lottery and then afford one. To know whether it could be possible for me requires the determination of necessary conditions. But desiring can occur without believing that the desired thing is possible. I desire to live forever but believe this to be impossible. The same goes for hoping.

19. What about conation and willing? Desiring can certainly motivate actions such as buying lottery tickets. The willing involved in such a predominantly conative or praxic encountering is usually intentive to means as well as to at least one end. The immediate end of using the means of a modest amount of money to purchase the lottery ticket would be having enough money to use as means ultimately to purchase the car that I desire.

20. While desiring is thus accompanied by willing as well as experiencing, it deserves repetition that it is the valuing component that predominates in it.

21. Another distinction is important. This is expressed by Husserl in terms of acts and primarily and secondarily passive mental processes. To gain the modifier “actional,” my teacher Cairns preferred to speak of “actions” rather than “acts” and he also preferred “automatic” to “passive,” also specifying the “secondarily” as well as “primarily automatic” mental processes. I differ

with Cairns in two respects in this connection. I also like “automatic,” but because of my interest in culture, habit, and tradition, I lay more emphasis on secondary automaticity than on the primary automaticity where nature, including animals human and non-human, are constituted. Then again, I prefer “operation” to Cairns’s “action” and Husserl’s “act” because I see the need to distinguish active and passive operations. For example, when I balance my checkbook and reflect on the operations I perform, I find my ego or I as *actively* engaged, but sometimes I hear music that engages me, that carries me along, and reflection on my I then discloses that it is engaged in a *passive* operation.

22. Returning to desiring, sometimes I find what can be described as “I-desire-a Porsche 911.” If I was asked what car I would really like to have, my answer would be “I desire a Porsche 911” and I could then reflectively find my I as actively engaged in that operation of speaking and, of course, busied with at least the emptily intended to state of affairs signified by that phrase. On the other hand, walking down the street I might see such a car drive by and find a habitual or individual secondarily automatic desiring arise within my mental life so strong that I come to engage in it. And of course my desiring of a 911 is only one of many habitual *desirings* that I have acquired *and that* can become operational *in this way*.

23. As for primary automaticity, it could be that the desire for sweet things or for warm surroundings, slacked thirst, etc. are primarily automatic and even usefully called instinctual. Whether there is such automatic desiring of *sweet things*, for example, without there having previously been a tasting of a sweet thing such as honey, I am not sure. But my desiring for the enjoyment of a Porsche 911 is highly cultural. I have learned in various ways what an automobile is, what driving is, the distinctive features of the wonderful Porsche 911, etc.

24. In sum, one can reflectively theoretically observe and analyze mental or intentive process or encounters of a sort ordinarily referred to at least in English as “desiring.” A prominent sub-species of desiring is sensual, e.g., intentive straightforwardly to types of drink, food, sex, etc., but it is broader than that, something that a non-sensual object as a running example can help to make clear.

25. Desiring is an encountering in which positive affective positing predominates and the thing-as-intended-to in it has positive value. Unlike most other types of encountering in which valuing predominates, e.g., wishing and moral approving, however, desiring is like hoping in not being directly intentive to ideal, past, or present objects, but only to a future object and that may be a future object *without a probable* date.

⁴ Colleagues tell me that there is no difference between wishing and desiring in Castilian, Catalan, or Portuguese and translators notes, etc. are needed in translations. I look forward to asking a German colleague and am especially curious about Asian languages.

⁵ A friend suggested that there is a negative form of desiring that is clear when one considers the opposition of attraction and aversion. I certainly find some food attractive and rotten food repulsive and these indeed have positive and negative values in the things-as-intended-to, but it seems to me that this is a matter of the sensual species of desiring and not desiring in general as seemingly recognized in the OED. I do not find an aversion in my mental life to any make or model of automobile, but only stronger and weaker desire and, in the extreme case of the Beetle, minimal if not non-existent or neutral desiring.

26. Unlike how it seems that a desiring for sweetness or warmth might occur in primary automaticity, desiring in secondary automaticity, i.e., as habitual, is something clearly learned and that becomes operational under determinable circumstances.

27. Finally, while it might now seem problematical, desiring is discussed in traditional psychology and pertains also to constitutive phenomenology chiefly as possibly part of accounts of motivation and justification for willing and action, but apart from those uses, it can also foster the improvement of skill at reflective analysis.

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