

Christian Lotz: *From Subjectivity to Affectivity: Husserl's Phenomenology Revisited*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007 (169 pp.)

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In the past decades the traditional interpretation of Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) work has been radically revised. Whereas the old interpretation refers only to the works published by Husserl himself (mostly to *Logische Untersuchungen*, *Ideen I*, *Cartesianische Meditationen*,¹ and *Krisis*²), the new and revised interpretation builds upon Husserl's work as a whole, referring also to the unpublished and posthumously published manuscripts.³ Since the late 1970's, 39 volumes of the *Husserlicana* series have been published (about 17.000 pages). As the published works constitute less than a quarter of Husserl's oeuvre, it is understandable that the interpretation has changed remarkably after the publication of the manuscripts. The publication of the manuscripts has shed new light upon the published works not only by offering them a broader context, but also by establishing many remarkable expansions that are invisible in the published works. This, again, has revealed the old interpretation as outdated. As Husserl's published writings focus mainly on problems of intentionality, the old interpretation take the problems of intersubjectivity and self-awareness, for instance, as particular intentional relations, and thus considers them as contingent and secondary phenomena in the context of Husserl's thought (and Husserl was often therefore labeled as an "idealist" and even "solipsist"). This interpretation was thoroughly questioned by several scholars who, by studying carefully also the manuscripts, argued that in Husserl's view intersubjectivity and self-awareness are essential and intrinsic features of *all* intentional consciousness, and not particular intentional relations. In other words, it was established that Husserl not only studied consciousness as a *relation to the world*, but just as originally considered consciousness as a *relation to itself* and *to other selves*.

¹ This work was published in french in Husserl's lifetime.

² Two first two parts of it were published by Husserl. The third and largest part was published posthumously.

³ The whole of Husserl's manuscripts consist in approx. 40.000 pages in Gabelsberger stenographic writing and 10.000 pages typewritten.

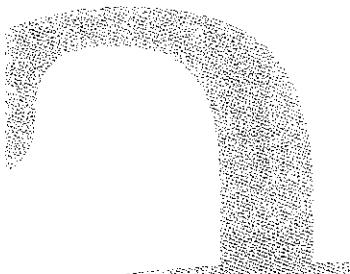
Christian Lotz's book *From Affectivity to Subjectivity. Husserl's Phenomenology Revisited* continues this new line of research by unraveling neglected dimensions in Husserl's thought. Lotz's focus is in Husserl's notion of self-affection. He emphasizes the role of *self-feeling* in all experiencing, and argues that feeling is "the true locus of self-consciousness" (p. 61). Lotz's main contribution is the clarification that, in Husserl, this self-feeling is fundamentally a normative and proto-ethical phenomenon.

Motives of Phenomenology

Lotz's book is divided into three parts. The first one, entitled as "Phenomenology," engages in methodological considerations of phenomenological research. Lotz argues that the original motives that drive phenomenology are both anthropological and hermeneutic. On the one hand, we human beings are equipped with the ability to *variate* in imagination the possible other appearances of things and situations, as well as to *play* with these potentialities, and thus we are not bound to the actual and the present. According to Lotz, this everyday eidetic variation is what gives a motivation to phenomenology in the first place. Variations are initially bound to "actual possibilities" (i.e., to what we consider might actually happen), whereas the phenomenological epoché frees our imaginative capacities, purifies the variation, thus establishing that "phenomenological method and thinking move on a completely different level than actual consciousness" (p. 19). Yet, the leeway or "playground" of possibilities is outlined and restricted by the imaginative capacities of factual subjectivity. In this sense, according to Lotz, "eidetic intuition remains fundamentally bound to [the imaginative capacities of] a *factual* subject" (p. 24). That is to say, even though phenomenological thinking (as eidetic) is not tied to actualities, it can be fruitful only in regard to *human* possibilities.

On the other hand, the "search for sense and meaning in transcendental phenomenology is due to an original gap between phenomenon and horizon" (p. 24). The present meaningfulness is grasped within a broader horizon, within a temporal context. Whereas the "imaginative" or "anthropological motive" drives forward what Husserl calls *static phenomenology*, this "hermeneutical motive" initiates a *genetic phenomenology*: a search for comprehensibility into the incomprehensible relation between the phenomenon as a handed-down meaning-complex and its origination.

In this manner, Lotz emphasizes the tension between Husserl's methodological writings and his concrete phenomenological analyses (p. 7). Lotz argues that Husserl's actual phenomenological analyses – in their rootedness in everyday,



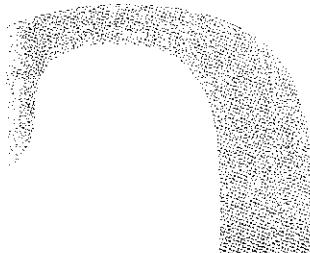
human activities (p. 5) – run counter to his methodological self-understanding such as considering phenomenology as an apodictic science. In order to illuminate this tension, Lotz engages in a study of self-awareness.

Self-Affectivity as an Ethical Phenomenon

Whereas the first part of Lotz's book is methodological, the two latter ones are more systematic. The main contribution of Lotz's book is an interpretation according to which Husserl's notion of self-awareness not only develops into a notion of *affective self-awareness* (this has been studied extensively by other writers, as Lotz himself notes), but moreover that “affectivity is *intrinsically* an ethical phenomenon” (p. 134). For Husserl, self-awareness means the factual affectedness of consciousness by itself. A perception, for instance, is not a cold and lifeless – say, mere logical – relation between a mind and an object, but a *lived* experience, an experience that I am *undergoing* while perceiving. This is not to be confounded with any type of reflection: experiences are not originally reflected, but – as conscious – they are self-aware in the non-objectifying and pre-reflective sense that they are lived through. “One lives one's life: to live is a sort of transitive verb,” as Lotz cites Levinas (p. 76; Levinas 1969, p. 111). As Husserl puts it: “to be lived is not to be objectified” (*Erlebtsein ist nicht Gegenständlichsein*) (Hua19/2, p. 669). To live one's life is not to reflect one's life – and, again, when we do reflect, the act of reflection is lived and not itself reflected upon. In this sense, all experiences – reflected or not – are self-aware.

This is Lotz's starting point. His argument is that, already in Husserl, self-affectivity involves a certain primal *valuing*. While I eat for instance, Lotz writes, “I am not only enjoying the food on my plate (and the value of the food-object toward which my hunger is directed), rather, I also enjoy the value of my positive feeling while eating. In other words, [...] *I am enjoying myself*” (p. 73). That is to say, I not only value the *object of experience* positively or negatively, but I also value my *experiencing* of the object. In experiencing (perceiving, thinking, remembering, imagining) something pleasant and beautiful, I *enjoy* my experiencing, I undergo my *experiencing* in a positive and affirming manner – and likewise I value my experiencing in a negative manner: I *suffer* a painful experience, for instance. Lotz argues that affections are indeed “pregiven, but for them to be *suffered* or *enjoyed*, they must be given to me in *negative* or *positive* feeling” (p. 51).

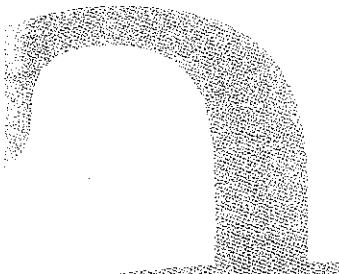
This primal self-evaluation is not an additional or secondary dimension built upon a *neutral* self-affectivity. Instead, to undergo an experience is already to



value this undergoing positively or negatively. This valuing, Lotz argues, is not a judgment, but a “minimal ‘attitude’ or ‘mode of comportment’” toward oneself (p. 51) – something that structurally pertains to the self-feeling itself: “a moment of valuing is experienced in the self-affective component of feeling” (p. 62). Lotz argues that “affectivity systematically conceived must be *primarily* seen as a normative phenomenon” (p. 41). Normativity is introduced in this connection because affectivity, self-feeling, is always a “motive for activity” (p. 52; Ms. E III 9, 161-16b). Suffering motivates negative actions, and enjoyment positive actions – and experiences of enjoyment and suffering are inseparable from such motivation. For instance, in tasting an excellent food, my feeling of enjoyment affirms itself, it establishes itself as something to be sensuously strived for (it affirms itself as a norm), which means that I am motivated to reactivate the sensation by tasting again; whereas if I taste something spoiled, I am motivated to spit it out, to distance myself from the food, to turn away, or to engage in some other kind of negative action. Regardless of what I am thinking or sensing – be it a geometrical problem or the taste of lemon – my thinking and sensing is lived through in an affective manner. There is no experiencing without a primal self-awareness – otherwise experiencing would be fundamentally unconscious – and this self-awareness has an affective-normative element in it (we are always “attuned” somehow). This valuing self-feeling, that Lotz finds in Husserl’s work, is more or less what Heidegger later called *mood* (see p. 146, note 55).

Because of its “evaluative” and thus normative element, self-awareness is originally a proto-ethical awareness of oneself in the world: before reflecting upon it, we feel comfortable or uncomfortable in our current situation and experiencing and this motivates our actions. Lotz writes: “Affectivity is *intrinsically* an ethical phenomenon since being-affected turns out to be a way for subjects to position themselves towards the world and themselves” (p. 134). Lotz therefore concludes: “if affection is the ‘lowest’ level of subject-constitution, then there are no ‘pure’ theoretical acts, or cognitive acts, nor are there non-normative experiences. Every experience must be lived through with at least a ‘having’ those experiences in a proto-ethical way” (p. 134).

This conclusion serves, in Lotz’s argument, as a proof for the imbalance between Husserl’s (early) methodological reflections and his concrete analyses. On the other hand, this “impurity” is perhaps what the later Husserl had in mind while arguing that all knowledge (even scientific knowledge) is built upon a pre-scientific life-world: in the *Crisis* Husserl argues that in their meaning, scientific and theoretical concepts (including those of phenomenology itself) refer back to



the pre-scientific and pre-theoretical life of consciousness – and thus, ultimately, to the sphere of affective experience. In this sense, all experiences and concepts have a normative dimension.

Ethical Consequences

The third part of the book extends this claim, showing how Husserl develops an idea of the ethical self-constitution of concrete subjectivity. For Husserl, transcendental subjectivity is ultimately a historically situated subject: the ego-pole is an abstraction of this concrete transcendental subject that is first named the “person” and then the “monad” (pp. 30-31). Since subjectivity is constituted as a temporal being, the claim that self-awareness is fundamentally ethical implies that *the temporal unity of subjective life as a whole* becomes an ethical issue. Lotz emphasizes that in Husserl the past is not something the self has an external relation to. Our acts are rather *repetitions* of our previous, sedimented acts that constitute our anticipatory horizon (our acts are modifications of our habitual manners of acting, and this habituality outlines our familiar, normal, way of being. Thus, as we act, “the monad *as a whole*, or my entire life *as a whole* is intentionally implicated” (p. 126). That is to say, in the affective level, the subject values its present experiences, but it values them in the context of its whole subjective life – and thus it at once values its life as a whole.

Building on such insights, in the 1920’s, Husserl develops an “ethics of renewal.” As Lotz mentions, Husserl’s notion of ethics is a broad one (p. 129). It covers not only the active and habitual doings of a person, but also the transcendental “style” of his or her life.⁴ Style is the subject’s individual *manner* of being, an individual *way* of being motivated in such and such circumstances (Hua4, p. 270), and as such it constitutes the subject’s “personal identity”. Therefore, to value one’s particular acts is at once to value one’s manner of being. The highest theme of Husserlian ethics is the renewal (*Erneuerung*) of this manner of being, a revision of the fundamental norms guiding one’s life. That is to say, ethical renewal is not only the renewal of particular habits and convictions, but of the whole manner of being: it is fundamentally the renewal of personal style (cf. p. 130; Hua27, p. 96). In this sense – and now we come back to the themes of the first part of the book – the motivation for phenomenological philosophy (the clarification of subjectivity) arises from self-responsibility, from a responsibility to live “a true life.” It is this call of *conscience* that ultimately motivates phenomenological self-examination (see Hua8, pp. 7-8, 11, 16).

⁴ Style, in this connection, is a transcendental (constitutive) issue – and as such it has only little to do with the external and superficial features to which this word is usually associated.

Critical Remarks and Open Questions

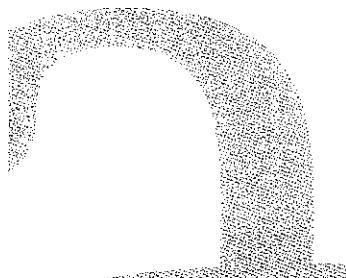
From Subjectivity to Affectivity is a rich contribution in phenomenological philosophy: as a systematic work, the book offers an interesting argument to all interested in phenomenological ethics, as an interpretative work the book is a recommended reading not only to everyone interested in the phenomenological method but also to those interested in the historical background of Husserl's thought. Lotz not only links the Husserlian notion of subjectivity with the Levinasian notion (arguing that what is usually associated with Levinas – namely, the claim that life is fundamentally enjoyment – can already be found in Husserl's work), but he also illuminates Husserl's thought in relation to thinkers such as Fichte and Gadamer. As a whole the book is an excellent reading to anyone interested in Husserlian phenomenology.

As always, new questions arise. I will here mention one concerning the relation of proto-ethical self-awareness to intersubjectivity and sedimentation. Even though Lotz discusses quite extensively the themes of proto-ethical self-awareness and intersubjectivity, the question remains whether and how the proto-ethical self-awareness itself is in some sense intersubjective and sedimented. When we passively value our experiencing, are we dealing with inborn drives, subjectively sedimented norms, intersubjectively sedimented norms, or all these? If it is the case that through our encounter with Others, the primordial self-normativity of experiencing gains a reference to an intersubjective normativity, then there is an *intersubjective* dimension to be unraveled also *within the subjective* self-normativity. We may, for instance, feel a normative conflict within an experience that is primordially enjoyable (and thus subjectively established as a positive norm), but disapproved in the intersubjective community (and thus intersubjectively established as a negative norm). However, rather than as a critique of the book, this theme should be seen as a suggestion for further developments.

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