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ONTOLOGY OF THE WILL — GEIGER, PFÄNDER, HUSSERL

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A phenomenological approach to the ontology of the will could be rendered along three positions: Firstly, the willing I is completely immanent in its experience, such that one can only will, and know that one wills, by reflecting on the actual experience of willing. Secondly, one could hold that the will, while being analyzable as a conscious phenomenon, is itself a real psychic force driving one's motivations and actions without one necessarily being aware of it. The third position would argue that the reality of the will is not exhausted by the way it is experienced, but that its real causes are not necessarily part of a complete phenomenological investigation. I discuss the phenomenology of the will of Alexander Pfänder, Moritz Geiger and Edmund Husserl along this realist-transcendentalist spectrum. My basic concern here is a critical examination of the phenomenological approach to an entity beyond experience which is responsible for the experienced volitions. I will proceed in three steps, based on the distinction of volitions into three parts. Firstly, I ask what antecedes a volition in order to determine its phenomenal and ontological causes. Secondly, the analysis of the apperception of willing clarifies in what sense an "I" is experienced as the real or phenomenal cause of its volition. Thirdly, the discussion of the realization of the volition will address the role that this "I" subsequently plays in the process of fulfilling its intent. The paper develops the ways in which the ontology of the "willing I" limits and shapes the conception of the intentional relation between willing and desiring consciousness and its contents.

Keywords: Pfänder, Geiger, Husserl, phenomenology, ontology, will, volition.

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Феноменологический подход к онтологии воли можно было бы представить с трех позиций: во-первых, обладающее волей «я» полностью имманентно своему опыту, так что иметь волю и знать, что является ее объектом, можно только посредством размышления о действительном опыте воли. Во-вторых, можно считать, что воля, хотя и поддается анализу как сознательный феномен, сама по себе является реальной психической силой, управляющей мотивами и действиями человека, хотя человек не обязательно осознает это. Третья позиция утверждает, что реальность воли не исчерпывается тем, как она переживается, но что ее реальные причины не обязательно являются частью полного феноменологического исследования. Автор обсуждает феноменологию воли Александра Пфендера, Морица Гейгера и Эдмунда Гуссерля в рамках этого реалистично-трансценденталистского спектра. Его основной задачей здесь является критическое рассмотрение феноменологического подхода к находящейся за пределами опыта сущности, которая отвечает за данные в опыте волевые акты. Автор действовал в три этапа, исходя из разделения воли на три части. Во-первых, выявил, что предшествует воле, чтобы определить ее феноменальные и онтологические причины. Во-вторых, анализ апперцепции воли прояснил, в каком смысле переживается «я» как реальная или феноменальная причина своего волеизъявления. В-третьих, при обсуждении реализации воли речь шла о той роли, которую впоследствии играет это «я» в процессе осуществления своего намерения. В статье развиваются способы, которыми онтология «волящего «я»» ограничивает и формирует представление об интенциональном отношении между обладающим волей и желающим сознанием и его содержанием.

Ключевые слова: Пфендер, Гайгер, Гуссерль, феноменология, онтология, воля, волевой акт.

In what sense can we phenomenologically inquire after the ontological status of the will? Given that phenomenology is the discipline studying the lived experience of conscious acts and their correlates, one could describe the will as the experience of willing something, which is related both to the representations that motivate the will, as well as to its outcome, the goal of the volition. That being the case, the ontological status of the will is tied to its being immanent to consciousness. We can only will, and know *that* we will, by reflecting on our actual experience of willing. Although not necessarily identical to Husserl's position, this could be termed the transcendental account of a phenomenology of the will. But it is certainly not the only tenable position. The opposite account would argue that the will, while being analyzable as a conscious phenomenon, is itself a real psychic force driving our motivations and actions without our necessarily being aware of it. The "I" that actually wills is not identical to the phe-

nomenal I which has the experience of willing. This is roughly the position of Moritz Geiger. A moderate account of the phenomenology of will would in turn suggest that the reality of our will is not exhausted by the way we experience it, but that its real causes are not necessarily part of a complete phenomenological investigation. Alexander Pfänder's account could be rendered along these lines.

In this paper, my aim is to elaborate on the status of the will along this realist-transcendentalist spectrum. The basic question that poses itself here is simultaneously phenomenological and metaphysical: is there an entity beyond experience which is responsible for the experienced volitions? And if so, how can this entity be approached through phenomenological means, e. g., intentional analysis? Does the will in a realist sense present a first step toward a naturalization of consciousness, or is the phenomenological realism of a different sort¹? Put another way, the ontology of the will points to a very basic ethical problem, namely the substance (or substrate) of ethical action. The realist position refers to a real I outside of experience which is ultimately responsible for its volitional acts, whereas the transcendental position locates the responsible instance within the immanence of experience. This suggests two very different ways that phenomenology is able to articulate the ontological ground of volitions, either by directly describing it or by showing how it merely appears in the way we experience our own willing. Here, I will confine myself to the discussion of the phenomenological and ontological modalities of this problem, which I hope will be of use for ethical and axiological considerations as well.

The experience of willing could be roughly distinguished into three consecutive steps. Firstly, willing has to be anteceded by an *x* that motivates it. This could be a representation or a perception which serves as an intentional object the volition is directed at, as well as an affect or a sensation such as hunger. Secondly, this *x* provokes or entails a decision on my part: I resolve to do *y* related to *x*. Thirdly, the will has to be actualized, whether immediately following the decision or at a later time. The actualization of the decision is in any case a temporally extended process that presupposes that my willing *x* is, explicitly or implicitly, maintained throughout its entire duration. While this is not meant as a definitive framework for conceiving of volitions in general, it will serve in the following to bring Husserl's, Pfänder's and Geiger's accounts into contact in order to elucidate the realist and transcendentalist characteristics of their respective phenomenological discussions of the will².

¹ For a detailed discussion of the issue of naturalism in Husserl's concept of action see: (Staiti, 2019, 8–21).

² The term "volition" used in this paper refers to all three aspects mentioned here, not just the act of willing or deciding. For these, I will use the specific terminology, e. g., *Willenssetzung* and *fiat*.

1. WHAT ANTECEDES THE VOLITION?

In his *Motive und Motivation* (1911), Alexander Pfänder sets out to distinguish rational action based on motives from action based on strivings (*Strebungen*). It is only the first kind of action that can adequately be called *willful* because it is only in being determined by a motive that we are able to determine ourselves to will something. A volition then is inherently rational and it cannot be caused by anything other than the will itself, as that would constitute an automatic or coerced decision, which for Pfänder is a contradiction in itself. To be “tempted” by a striving on the other hand involves an external cause, namely a *phenomenal* causation which has to be strictly distinguished from a *real* causation (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 149). A phenomenal cause in this sense may be an item that I perceive and which prompts me to eat it (but not: that makes me want to eat it). The way that strivings arise in us versus the way that a motivation constitutes the ground for an act of willing can serve as a starting point to gauge the ontological status of the will in Pfänder’s phenomenology.

Both strivings and volitions start with a special form of consciousness of the object (*Gegenstandsbewusstsein*). In the case of strivings, one centrifugally perceives the object, thereby making a first contact with it. This enables the object to centripetally stimulate a striving in the perceiver. Finally, the actual striving is now centrifugally directed from the perceiver to the object (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 129–130). Thus, even though striving is not based on a conscious deliberation or decision, it is not immediately aroused by the object either. Structurally, we have to reaffirm, as it were, the striving that the perception of the object arouses in us. Striving is an outward phenomenon. This feature is important because it allows Pfänder to directly contrast it with the kind of interaction we have with objects that *motivate* us. In this second case, the object does not merely stimulate an action, but affords a special kind of recognition which answers the question: “what should I do?” (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 142–143). What antecedes the volition is the formation of a sufficient ground, one that has to reasonably support my decision. But it is important to note that this ground in itself does not constitute or cause the act to will (*Willensakt*) as such. What Pfänder shows instead is that the same perception (i. e., the same phenomenal cause) can both arouse a striving or point us to a rational decision.

In his example, we are sitting at our desk in a room, absorbed in a writing process. More and more, we notice the coldness in the room which awakens our striving to leave it. We may simply ignore this striving without giving reasons for our doing so. Yet, the cold could also prompt us to think: “I should leave the room,” without this being necessarily based on the sensation of coldness. Whereas the I is gripped and seized

by a phenomenal cause in the case of strivings, it can also receive an ideal indication (*ideeller Hinweis*) that serves as the basis for a motivation which in turn grounds a genuine act of will (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 145–146). Whereas strivings are grounded in perception, there is a considerable disconnect between will and world since what reasonably motivates a volition is not derived from perceptions, but rather based on them. In other words, the I that wills is not immanent to its experiences. This distinction points to an idea of the will as subsisting beyond experience, as a *real* will in an ontological sense. I will discuss Pfänder's consideration of this assumption in the next section. For now, let us note that here, what antecedes a volition does not act in any way as its cause, but rather points to the will as a rational and phenomenal *causa sui*.

The will as not just as a phenomenal, but as a real cause is at the heart of Moritz Geiger's *Fragment über den Begriff des Unbewussten* (1921), which appeared ten years after Pfänder's text. Geiger mentions Pfänder as one of the few psychological interlocutors who take a realist position in the debate on the ontology of the will, next to other Munich phenomenologists such as Scheler and Hildebrand (Geiger, 1921, 96). Geiger's main goal is to argue against an approach to psychology which focusses solely on the description of experience, practically cutting off any questions as to how experience might be caused in a non-perceptible way. He does so by developing a theory of the unconscious which his opponents of the *Erlebnispsychologie* cannot posit, as the idea of unconscious factors operative in conscious experience is excluded by a method that focusses exclusively on the description of mental life (*Erlebnisse*).

A discussion of the will and volitions plays a special role in this debate as it is one of the topics in which the (non)existence of a real I beyond experience is most tangible. For if there were no such thing, we would be relegated to describing the experience of willing as that of a volition which has been made without us, as it were. Geiger's central conviction, and one that he defends vigorously throughout the treatise, becomes clear in two programmatic statements: "One does not learn the least about the *real* essence of willing when hearing that it is experienced, when learning how it is given *to an I*."³ As well as: "Experiencing willing and willing are two closely related yet *different* matters of fact."⁴

What enables Geiger to posit the existence of the real cause of the will, given that a phenomenological approach, even if directed at the elucidation of essences, has

³ „Man erfährt nicht das Mindeste über die *reale* Wesensart des Wollens, wenn man hört, dass es erlebt wird, wenn man also über die Art seines Gegebenseins *für ein Ich* unterrichtet wird“ (Geiger, 1921, 39).

⁴ „Erleben des Wollens und Wollen sind zwei zwar engverbundene, aber doch *verschiedene* Tatbestände“ (Geiger, 1921, 37).

to start with the description of experience? And how can Geiger ensure that the real I that he claims to underlie the experience of willing is not itself the product of this experience? At what point, in other words, do the phenomenal and the real intersect?

One way to phenomenologically conceive of the reality of the will is by pointing to how the act with which I determine myself to will something is reflexive. In determining myself, I am directed against myself, acting on myself such that the volition, in the sense of a positing of the will (*Willenssetzung*) has become a real fact. This is distinguished from the reflexivity of willing that is immanent to experience. Here, I recognize that “a willing takes place,” and merely take note of a real psychic event that the experiential psychologist has no direct access to (cf. Geiger, 1921, 100). Even though Geiger does not further specify the kind of reflexivity he has in mind here, it seems feasible to think of Husserl’s expanded notion of reflexivity, which is not limited to an explicit “looking back” but which corresponds more broadly to an apperception of conscious acts. The real I that is the source of the volition then does not have to figure as an explicit object of our understanding (which would inevitably lead to metaphysical questions concerning the subject beyond experience), but its existence still has to be demonstrated in order to be considered a legitimate concept. As we will see in the next sections, Geiger’s strategy here will be to argue from the effects that the decision of the real I has for the process of willing.

In this section, the focus is on the factors that antecede the will. In Pfänder, I have discussed how these may or may not be related to perceptions. Interestingly, in Geiger one finds no considerations of this sort. His discussion of the will starts immediately with a decision process that has no anterior experiential motivations, which is not surprising insofar as the act of willing arises outside of experience. And indeed, the strict dualism presented here makes it difficult for a motivating factor arising *within* experience to determine the real I because it would have to “switch planes,” such that this experience would have to figure as a real cause, or that, on the contrary, the real I would be describable as being affected by experiences, in which case it would run the risk of being equated with being experienced.

One might suspect that Geiger’s critique of *Erlebnispsychologie* might also, in an oblique way, be directed at Husserl’s phenomenology insofar as it does not leave the description and analysis of consciousness either⁵. But this worry is quickly dispelled when considering that Husserl’s approach to the will is also concerned with objectively valid statements about willing and its different modalities. In this context, I cannot aim at giving a comprehensive account of Husserl’s phenomenology of the will, which

⁵ For a discussion of Geiger’s critique of Husserl’s idealism see: (Averchi, 2021).

has not been brought into a systematic form but can be found across lectures and notes. As Henning Peucker has shown, Husserl's ideas on the will span across his static and genetic phenomenological phases without forming a coherent whole (cf. Peucker, 2015). A few of the biggest discrepancies here concern the constitution and application of the will. In static phenomenology, the will is founded in doxic and axiological acts, such that we will based on representations to which we have ascribed certain values. Because volitions are founded on prior intellectual and emotional acts, their lawfulness can be connected to the lawfulness of intellectual acts such as judgements (cf. Husserl, 1988, 126–153). In Husserl's later genetic phenomenology, the will is discussed as arising out of our own complex habituality, as well as from passive affections and drives. Here, a volition does not require a prior intentional foundation. The later works on ethics are increasingly centered around the subjective side of willing and acting (cf. Rinofner-Kreidl, 2017; Loidolt, 2009).

Can the question of the reality of the willing I be of help here? While the two phases seem to apply the will to contrary problems, one to a formalization of ethics, the other to mundane experience, we can nonetheless suppose that different kinds of volitions refer back to a willing I which ultimately accounts for the experience of willing and which allows us to reflectively determine *who* the real or phenomenal cause of the volition is. What, then, antecedes the volition in Husserl's phenomenology of the will?

The genesis of a volition is described by Husserl under various subjective, axiological, formal and constitutional aspects. For the purpose of my discussion, I will highlight three distinctive features that factor into an act of willing. (1) Volitions arise out of passive experiences such as stimuli or drives. (2) Volitions are founded upon valueceptions (*Wertnehmungen*) which emotionally legitimize them (cf. Drummond, 1995, 180). (3) Volitions are a product of our habituality, of past volitions that, to a certain extent, prefigure future acts of willing. I will look at each of these in turn.

(1) When perceiving something, we are usually not permanently readjusting our gaze in a deliberate way. Rather, we often find ourselves drawn to a new feature which we only noticed in the corner of our eye, or we are turning our head towards the door behind which the approaching footsteps are momentarily becoming audible. Our perceptions are to a certain extent determined by these stimuli which prompt the tendency to turn towards them (*Ichzuwendung*). This phenomenon may also be applied to volitions, as Husserl observes in a note from 1914, for are not these drives and tendencies that direct our attention themselves volitions of the lowest degree (cf. Husserl, 2020, 83)? Against this, Husserl himself emphasizes that an act of willing involves a conscious positing, a resolve. Thus, if we are merely following the stimuli of our surroundings, we are not acting willfully. But the actual difficulty is rather in the genetic

aspect: if an attentional modification prompts a volition, then where exactly, in terms of constitution, can the volition proper be said to originate?

Husserl gives the example of visually following one's own hands which, quasi-mechanically, play a rehearsed piece on the piano. Here, I merely follow a drive. After making a mistake, I resolve to play correctly, thereby taking on a different attitude, concentrated towards this activity. The action itself does not change, but it becomes reflective: "Not only do I act, the action is not just centrally generated by the I, but there is a reflective regard which does not annul the generation itself in its own character."⁶ The question for Husserl is this: Did I, in choosing to play correctly, reactive a prior decision, or did this volition arise out of a driven, non-volitional activity (cf. Husserl, 2020, 82)? Can this quasi-automatic activity be understood as a volition even though it does not appear as such, but rather as a drive? Whatever the case may be, of import is the inner apperception, in this case the reflective aspect, which considerably alters the experience of playing the piano, turning it into a willful activity⁷.

(2) In his lecture on ethics dating from 1914, Husserl is foremost concerned with aligning acts of will with acts of judging and valuing. Here, I cannot delve into the details of his formal axiology, but will ask how valuing and willing are related. To put it another way, how does the fact that we value something as good determine our act of willing? One could compare this to how drives are co-constituting our volitions, viewing values as the more noble influence on our acting, and Husserl also reasons along those lines (cf. Husserl, 2020, 459–460). One reason for the greater nobility of values lies in the fact that they accord with our rationality. Values require objectified acts, i. e. objects that enable us to concretely perceive their values. As Husserl states, we do not desire an object because of its perceived value, but we desire the realization of the value we perceive the object to have (cf. Husserl, 2020, 168–169). In other words, we do not merely desire the object itself as we possibly would in the case of a drive or tendency. Instead, we rationally engage with our own valueception, being able to distinguish object and value, thereby making decisions that may for instance involve a comparative rationale⁸. Very shortly, one could say that volitions based on

⁶ „Ich tue nicht nur, das Geschehen ist nicht nur zentral erzeugt vom Ich aus, sondern vom Ich aus geht zugleich ein reflektierender Blick, der das Erzeugen selbst in seinem eigenen Charakter nicht aufhebt“ (Husserl, 2020, 81–82).

⁷ For a discussion of the foundation of volitions on tendencies and drives see: (Bejarano, 2006, 236–239, 266–269) and (Lee, 1993, 183–185).

⁸ Thus, Husserl's modification of the Categorical Imperative: "Do the best among what is attainable," clearly requires that we be able to compare and in a certain sense sum up the perceived values. For more on Husserl on Kant see: (Husserl, 2004, 212–226) and (Rinofner-Kreidl, 2010).

values involve the I as rational agent. What factors into the volition here is our intellectual, objectifying ability and a reasoning that is analogical to judging.

(3) Finally, volitions are predetermined by prior decisions and our past experiences on the whole. Husserl explains this in analogy to perceptions: Once I have perceived an object from different sides, I have, in the synthesis of my perceptions, posited an ideal object, the remembrance of which enables me to anticipate similar objective unfoldings in the future. By learning about the nature of objectivity, I am able to bring to bear my knowledge in perceptions, turning them into apperceptions (cf. Husserl, 2020, 185–186). This increase in cognitive abilities expands the notion of “I can.” With this, Husserl means the understanding of oneself as a continuously living being, as well as the ability to represent oneself as the subject of future actions (cf. Husserl, 2020, 106–107). The “I can” could thus be described as a fundament of volitions that is permanently modified by new perceptions and acts of willing which, turned into “habitual positings” (*habituelle Setzungen*), factor into future volitions. The idea that volitions require the belief that we can realize them, that “there has to be a way for there to be a will,” is based on the guidance of past volitions. To will something is never abstract or arbitrary, but refers to past acts of will, thereby making new acts appear as possible in the first place (cf. Husserl, 2020, 102).

We thus get a sense of the complexity of Husserl’s phenomenology of the will. The question of *who* wills or decides has to consider volitions as driven, rational and personal phenomena. This will be the subject of the next section, where I will take up again Pfänder’s and Geiger’s accounts first to determine where in the metaphysical and phenomenological discussion of the will Husserl’s position might be located.

2. APPERCEIVING THE VOLITION

Whereas the last section has discussed the possible antecedents and motivations of volitions, the question now is how Pfänder, Geiger and Husserl are able to articulate the subjective experience of willing, as the very act of an I that wills. One of the primary difficulties here is being able to express this instance. How can we refer with the first-person pronoun not just to our experience, but to the reality underlying experience? How can we address our agency not just as *Erlebnis* but as the actual cause of our volitions? A metaphorical use of language here seems inevitable, and this is what one finds in the authors as well. As a guiding concept, one could think of the description of willing as implying an apperception of the volition. This means that we, in positing a will, are also aware of the instance that actually wills, the willing I in a real or transcendental sense. The task in this section then is twofold: determining the nature of

this apperception and understanding how the act of willing is related to, or motivated by, the antecedent factors discussed above.

For Pfänder, the will is a phenomenal *causa sui*. We will something in an emphatic sense when the I has a practical intent, when it posits what it wills as its project⁹. This may or may not be accompanied by a valueception or by the feeling that it ought to be so. But these factors are accidental to the volition. What is central is that the will refers to the I, to an immediate form of self-consciousness. As Pfänder emphasizes, this I should not only be thought of (*gedacht*), but directly grasped (*erfasst*) and made subject of the practical intent (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 135). In other words, *I have to will that I will*. The self-determination that constitutes a volition requires that the I is simultaneously subject and object of the act of willing. I (subject) determine myself (object) to will. And in determining myself thus, I am able to grasp myself, to load onto myself a certain intent which requires a further impulse to be discharged into action (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 136).

How can we grasp this process in terms of apperception? Following Pfänder's description, it seems that the act of willing entails that we understand ourselves as the future bearers of our will. That is, as soon as we will something, for instance by deciding to buy a certain book, we have before us, though not necessarily in the form of an explicit representation, ourselves as going to the bookstore. In this way, we do not determine ourselves as subjects, but as objects of our will. But doesn't this contradict the idea that we grasp our very subjectivity in the act of willing? Is our sense of agency only conceivable as applied to a certain intent? But how can *this certain intent* arise in the first place?

In the first section, I have described the motive for a volition as enabling the I to determine itself. This relationship has to be discussed in more detail. Because the only phenomenal source of a volition is the I, a motive cannot *cause* it in any way. Rather, a motive *supports* the decision in providing a sufficient reason for it (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 149). I use the term sufficient reason to indicate that a volition strictly speaking has to be rational to a certain extent. It cannot be based on strivings, but has to be supported by an ideal indication. As Pfänder says, the I has to "let in" (*hereinlassen*) the reasons for the volition (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 143). From this rather figurative way of putting things, we can infer the role of apperception. In the act of willing, we do not only implicitly experience ourselves as the future bearers of our intent, but we also affirm the motive, making it the motive for our will. Thus, I may get the idea that I need to read

⁹ In German, the word *Vorsatz* implies a reflexivity of the will putting before itself what it wills. This semantic implication cannot be rendered by the English word "intent."

a certain book and the thought of getting to know better a certain concept may tempt me, arousing a striving to buy it. But it is only when I affirm that I will buy the book that there is a practical intent to speak of. Here, I affirm two things: that I actually want to buy the book and that I will buy it.

Importantly, there is no compelling relationship between the two. It is not because I want to buy the book that I will do so because the motive alone does not entail the concomitant act of self-determination. Nor can we say that we buy it because we will so, as this volition would not be sufficiently motivated. In my understanding it is this lack of mutual determination which enables Pfänder to claim that the will is, in a phenomenal sense, always free (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 149). In other words, the I that wills is phenomenologically elucidated by the apperception of a volition in which the motivation and its affirmation remain firmly separated. I remain free in my willing because I apperceive that *even when* I determine myself, this is not because of external factors acting on me but because I become, in affirming these factors, the future bearer of my will.

Does this enable us to say that the I is the cause of the will in a metaphysical sense? Or is it only in experiencing and affirming my volition that there is a willing I to speak of? When Pfänder says that we reach, in determining ourselves, the I *as such*, he seems to be hinting at something beyond the realm of experience (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 136). On the other hand, he clearly distinguishes the grounds of the volition from its real cause, which is not part of the phenomenological investigation, but is elucidated by inductive methods that are not based on lived experience (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 149). Thus, it is left open whether Pfänder's concept of the willing I necessarily implies a naturalization of the act of willing. It is in Geiger that we find a decisive notion of an autonomous psychic force that can be approached in phenomenological terms.

Like Pfänder, Geiger distinguishes clearly between positing the will and executing it. Similar too is the conviction that positing a will means determining oneself to will, to will the will. Yet there is a decisive difference which Geiger himself observes: For Pfänder, the will is determined by the projective character of the volition, by *what* one wills. By contrast, in the self-determination in question here, "the I itself is determined to *will* (not to do), willing is what *determines*, not what *is determined*"¹⁰. This is correct if we accept Pfänder's concept of motivation as a determining force for the volition. Yet we have seen that the only legitimate cause is the will itself. In this sense,

¹⁰ „In der Selbstbestimmung dagegen von der hier geredet wird, wird das Ich durch sich selbst bestimmt zu *wollen* (nicht zu tun), das Wollen ist das *Bestimmte*, nicht das *Bestimmende*“ (Geiger, 1921, 100).

Geiger's assessment is not totally adequate: Pfänder too posits that one determines oneself in the first place to will and only subsequently to do *what* one wills.

Still, there are differences that merit a closer look. These concern firstly, the motivation for the volition and secondly, the causal status of the I in the volition as a whole. Geiger frames the motivation very schematically: We will by pondering several alternatives, eventually choosing one and in doing so, determining ourselves to will it (cf. Geiger, 1921, 97). The focus here is clearly on the willing I, with the motivation being an indifferent set of options that, on their own, exert no tangible influence. It seems that Geiger has to exclude any impact empirical motives may have on the I in order for it to be real. We do not determine ourselves *in light of* a sufficient reason (as in Pfänder), but independently. In willing, we are acting in an *absolute* manner, which also implies (even though Geiger does not draw this conclusion) that the act of willing is exactly the same in every volition, as there are no material grounds which would discernably alter it. This could be read as a realist assertion: Positing a real, metaphysical I as the source of volitions entails that the experience of willing is always the same.

But how exactly do we apperceive the willing I then? Geiger employs a similar division as Pfänder between a willing subject and a willing object to conceive of this reflexively (cf. Geiger, 1921, 97). That is, the very act of willing takes an object, namely oneself as the one who wills (instead of the one who is the future bearer of the will, as in Pfänder). This has important consequences for the I as the executor of the will, and here we find the second difference to Pfänder. Whereas the willing I is, for Geiger, a real metaphysical instance, the I that carries out this will in a temporally extended process is not. In other words, whereas I am the cause for *the fact of willing*, I am not the (primary) cause of how this volition is realized. This makes perfect sense, insofar as I carry out what I will in a real world that confronts me with all kinds of contingencies. And it is here that the apperception of the willing I can best be elucidated because it is the real, willing I to which the continuous or discontinuous willing process constantly refers. In other words, the reality of the I makes itself felt through its effects, namely through the experience of continuously wanting to carry out a will.

How can Husserl's position be characterized *vis-à-vis* Pfänder and Geiger? In the lectures on formal axiology, Husserl distinguishes theoretical acts from volitions in that the latter involve individual conditions, whereas the former do not. While there is an objectivity to willing and deciding similar to judgements, the practical possibilities available are tied to a singular subject (cf. Husserl, 1988, 149). But in what sense is the I implied by the act of willing? In order to clarify this, a note from the so-called *Pfänder-Konvolut* dating, like the lecture, from 1914, may be of help. "Is

it correct, Husserl asks, that in every actual 'I will,' the I itself has to be made object, [and that] an actual 'self-consciousness' has to be performed (as Pfänder says)?"¹¹ The context for this question is the transition from a driven to a conscious activity, or from a passive to an active synthesis of perceptions, as discussed in the last section. I am letting my eyes wander from one object to the next. Suddenly I become conscious of this activity. Now, the "pure I" is directly implied, I am pre-reflectively aware of my perceiving. If I now want to turn my head, do I have to posit *myself* as object of my will, as Pfänder and Geiger suggest? Do we find the same radical conceptual distinction between tendencies and volitions in Husserl?

As it turns out, this is not the case. And the reason for this is that there is no "will as such" in Husserl's writings. Nor is there a moment in which I turn my back on my motivations or options to freely and independently will. The purported existence of this pure psychological faculty and its correlative experience separates both Geiger's and Pfänder's phenomenology from that of Husserl. To substantiate this claim, I see three reasons: (1) The I is implied in all kinds of acts, not just in volitions, thus "I" cannot will in an emphatic sense. (2) There is no clear-cut distinction between the act of willing and the execution of the will, blurring the line between the I as cause and effect of the will. (3) Husserl's framing the volition as going from an empty intention to its fulfillment marks the pure intent as deficient with respect to its realization.

(1) While it is true that a tendency or a drive does not constitute an act of willing, and that a form of I-involvement (*Ich-Hereingezogenheit*) is necessary to speak of a volition, a similar involvement is required for explicit acts of judging and valuing (cf. Husserl, 2020, 72). The I in this sense is just the *cogito*, or the pure I-pole of intentionality. Reflecting on it, apperceiving its involvement in our conscious acts does not give us access to a metaphysical personhood¹². From this perspective, willing is a conscious act just like any other, different from doxic and axiological acts in terms of complexity and noetic-noematic characteristics, but not in respect to the I whose experience they constitute¹³.

¹¹ „Ist es richtig, dass bei jedem eigentlichen ‚Ich will‘ das Ich selbst Objekt sein muss, ein eigentliches ‚Selbstbewusstsein‘ vollzogen sein muss (wie Pfänder sagt)?“ (Husserl, 2020, 71).

¹² The empirical I that Husserl investigates in *Ideas II* and other writings, which has to do with the apperception of one's own body, is a different matter altogether and cannot be equated with Pfänder's or Geiger's willing I either.

¹³ In Schuhmann's analysis, Pfänder's failure, according to Husserl, of not exploring the whole of consciousness is also the reason why his theory of the will remains a superficial descriptive psychology, see: (Schuhmann, 1973, 105).

(2) By contrast to Geiger, the will in Husserl does not take itself as object, but is, at any time, related to empirical circumstances, as well as to one's sedimented and habitual experiences, instantiated in the "I can" which grounds the possibility of volitions. As soon as I form an intent, I also start intending, whether by representing to myself a future action or by even more simply stating that *I will x*. Thus, when I want to sit down on the chair next to me, positing the will and realizing it are inseparable because the very act of intending this chair and sitting down on it share, as it were, the same intentional substrate. Willful action, even based on an explicit intent, "... is a becoming, an unfolding, but always action from action. No abstract *fiat*, a pure 'I will' without matter, instead the beginning is already fulfilled action"¹⁴. Things are more complicated for an intended action that lies in the future. But here too, we are not merely making the decision as such. Instead, it is always already tied to a representation of the future action as a "creative intention" (*schöpferische Intention*) (cf. Husserl, 1988, 109). Even in the case of a future intent then, the volition is not postponed, but already emptily intends its fulfillment. The I that wills is at any time fully engaged with the I that perceives or the I that represents, in other words, in the life of consciousness as such. To reflect on volitions does not yield a pure will, but the will's embeddedness in prior acts of subjectivity.

(3) The fact that the volition is always already in some sense striving towards its realization, that it is a continuous fulfillment, deems the idea of an explicit will to will, so prominent in Geiger and Pfänder, to be an abstract notion. Husserl requires that where there is a will, there is a way, meaning that we have to believe that what we will is actually attainable (cf. Husserl, 2020, 102). For this requirement to hold, the act of will has to derive from, or at least accord with, the experience that motivates it. Whereas in Pfänder, the motivation merely serves as an indicator for an autonomous rational act, in Husserl, the motivation is already part of the volition. To return to the example of leaving the cold room, the idea that "I should leave this room" entails an empty intention that indicates its fulfillment.

In terms of the apperception of the volition then, we find Husserl diverging considerably from Geiger and Pfänder. Nonetheless, there is in Husserl also a structural moment within the volition which separates the intent from its fulfillment, and this is the *impulse* that sets the subject into motion. This (re)activation turns the discussion to the third aspect of volitions, namely their realization. Whether the I is understood

¹⁴ „Es ist ein Entwerden, ein Sich-Entfalten, aber immer Handlung aus Handlung. Nicht etwa ein abstraktes fiat, ein pures ‚Ich will‘ noch ohne Materie, sondern der Anfang ist schon volle Handlung“ (Husserl, 2020, 265). See also: (Melle, 1992, 292).

to be the cause or to be merely implicated in acts of willing makes a difference in how I understand myself as *acting* willfully. It is this phenomenon that I will turn to next.

3. REALIZING THE VOLITION

The question this section seeks to answer concerns the experience of one's own agency: now that I have posited my will by determining myself or by having formed the belief that what I will is attainable, are my actions as autonomous as my act of willing, or does the latter constitute a cause for the former? In other words, how is my experience of fulfilling my will related to, or derived from, the formation of the practical intent? Do I, in realizing my will, only glimpse the consequences of the decision of a real I, or does the reality of the volition rather fulfill itself in being carried out?

In Pfänder, this question is not easily answered, as the realization of the will is not discussed in *Motive und Motivation*. To get an answer, we have to look to his habilitation *Phänomenologie des Wollens* (1900), which appeared ten years earlier and thematically overlaps with the later text in many respects. An important difference for the purpose of this discussion is the fact that the earlier text only develops a very rudimentary concept of the self-determination necessary to form a practical intent. Pfänder speaks of an "inner act" which precedes the realization of the will, but it does not have the same deliberative, spontaneous quality (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 87). This is also evident in the conceptual differences of *motive*. Whereas I have discussed how the motive is understood by Pfänder as providing a sufficient reason to will (as opposed to a striving based on a phenomenal cause), in the earlier text, the function of the motive is to prompt a series of actions that mediately contribute to the ultimate aim of the volition (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 94). In other words, the motive is itself motivated by our taking the necessary steps to reach the *Willensziel*.

In Pfänder's early text, a volition is essentially the knowledge and awareness of one's ability to freely and spontaneously realize one's intent. Willing takes the form of a certainty that has to accompany every aspect of the realization of the volition, including the representation of the necessary particular steps. Only with this being the case can we speak of willing, instead of merely striving (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 120). How does this compare to Pfänder's concept of volition described above, specifically as it relates to the role of the I in a transcendental or realist sense?

One could put it shortly by stating that in the later text, the representation of the realization of the will is the consequence of an *absolute decision*, whereas in the earlier text, the decision itself is dependent on the representation of the will's realization. That is, we can only will what we can conceive of as freely and spontaneously

achievable. This is in many respects much closer to Husserl's notion of an "I can" which plays a vital role in making a volition appear possible in the first place, being itself tied to past experiences. We can thus draw the conclusion that Pfänder has moved from a transcendental to a more realist position, which is due to the changing ideas about motivation and self-determination. One could say that in both the early and the late text, I determine myself to will but it is only in the later writing that an actual, independent I appears as a *causa sui*. In the *Phänomenologie des Wollens*, the willing I cannot be separated from the conviction that the will is attainable because it is nothing other than the practical intent, founded on this attainability. One can only speculate what prompted Pfänder's change of mind. Here I give two possible reasons.

Firstly, the motivation as conceived in early Pfänder does not exactly explain what it is supposed to: *how* we become motivated to will something, how the motivation prompts a volition. As motivations merely fill in the gaps on the way to realizing one's intent, they are based on a prior motivation, itself non-explicable. For instance, the question *why* we strive after a certain taste perception (*Geschmacksempfindung*) ultimately leads to causes that lie beyond a phenomenological investigation, i. e., we cannot give a sensible reason what it is about that taste we desire, we simply know that we want it (cf. Pfänder, 1963, 89). While this might be admitted, the question still remains how we form a volition to achieve the taste perception. To do this, it does not matter whether or not we can explain why we want the perception itself—what needs to be explained is the self-determination necessary to *will it*. This is the difference between motivation in early and later Pfänder: For the former, the ultimate reasons for the motivation remain inexplicable, while the latter shows how we ourselves become the cause of a volition, aided by a motivation. The second reason for Pfänder's change of mind might be more generally that the phenomenology of willing, i. e., the experience of forming a practical intent or of making a decision, requires in some sense that *the I that has this experience* become the direct object of the discussion, instead of merely being the substrate of the will's attainability. Yet whether or not this is the case, we will shortly see in the discussion of Husserl that self-determination can also occur in the course of realizing one's will. Beforehand, a closer look at Geiger will show how the problem plays out in a strictly realist scenario.

For Geiger, the I that determines itself thereby effectuates the I that carries out this intent. In other words, the self-determination perseveres as a *real cause* throughout our mental life and can be (re)activated under appropriate circumstances. For a phenomenology of the will, an important question is how we apperceive this real causality, and whether or not we *identify*, in realizing our volition, with the instance that formed it in the first place. The inverse question is this: how can we, in apperceiving

a prior volition, be certain that it does not just arise out of occurrent experience, but antecedes it causally? In short: how does the ontological status of the willing I exhibit itself?

Geiger's reasoning can be broken down into three characteristics. We come to know of the real causality of a prior volition by experiencing: (1) a disposition in ourselves to realize it under certain conditions¹⁵, (2) an inner tension that the volition exerts even when we are not conscious of it (cf. Geiger, 1921, 129), and (3) an existential priority of the volition analog to the priority of real objects in perception. All three characteristics are purely reflective and experiential: Their evidence lies in a certain conscious state in which we find ourselves. This is very much in line with Geiger's notion that we are the effect of our own will. But how exactly does this play out in terms of consciousness?

Out of the three characteristics, the third one is most relevant in pointing us to the limits of Geiger's realist inquiry, as it explicitly conceives of the becoming conscious of the existence of a prior volition. Becoming conscious of it is not tantamount to remembering it, because simply remembering what we will does not entail *willing* it (cf. Geiger, 1921, 118). Neither do we require the memory of a volition to reactivate it. It is rather the other way around: it is because we will something that it reappears in consciousness. And in thus reappearing, we become aware of the volition as such, as well as of the fact that it is *the same volition*, extending itself through time (cf. Geiger, 1921, 120). Geiger likens this to the perception of an external object. Perceiving a tree includes knowing that the tree was there before we saw it, that we see it by virtue of itself, whereas a perception we manipulate ourselves, for instance by rapidly blinking, appears as our artifice. Similarly, when we become conscious of a prior volition, we have the same sense of it existing independently of being remembered (cf. Geiger, 1921, 125). *Someone* has willed it into existence, namely the real I.

Geiger is satisfied with establishing this analogy, considering the comparison of conscious states of external perception and prior volition as providing sufficient evidence. But what seems unconvincing about this is that the self-determination of the will is a fully autonomous act, whereas the autonomous existence of the tree is something that I merely notice, no matter how often I see the same tree. In other words, whereas I find myself to be the cause of the prior volition, I merely know myself to be the recipient of the visual impression. These appear to be two very different reflective outcomes — how can Geiger be so certain about his analogical reasoning? The prob-

¹⁵ In Geiger's example, a soldier, after having made the conscious decision to carry out every order upon arrival, is now disposed to do so, see: (Geiger, 1921, 113–114).

lem, in other words, is this: While I always find myself in the same position towards my perceptions, my position towards my volitions changes from being their cause (in the act of self-determination) to being their effect (in realizing them).

Why doesn't Geiger consider the I, insofar as it reaffirms its own volition, to be its *continuous* cause? Why does the I become the effect of its volition? The reason for this, I would suggest, has to do with the limitations that a realist position necessarily entails: If I would be again the real cause of my volition every time I reaffirm or realize it, I would have to somehow causally interact with the world that provides the conditions for this realization. But these conditions could not, in turn, cause anything in me, as I determine myself absolutely in order to really will. The real I would then have to be awkwardly superimposed on its conscious experience. To avoid these kinds of consequences, the act of self-determination is in Geiger, just as in the later Pfänder, a singular and exceptional act, one in which I seemingly step out of the immanence of experience. The conceptual price to pay is considerable: The will might be directed at the world, but it cannot be *sufficiently* influenced by it, neither in form of ideal indications (Pfänder), nor in the deliberations of an "I can" (Husserl). While the reality of the I here does not consist in physiological processes that lie beyond the reach of the analysis of consciousness, it is nonetheless extra-experiential in a different sense: In realizing a volition, one becomes the effect of the real I which is the quasi-external cause of one's own actions.

In Husserl, we find almost an inverse scenario: the actual volition is a temporally extended series of acts striving towards fulfillment, a reiteration and readjustment of a persevering intention. Realizing one's will is conceived in processual terms and the willing I implicated here is the correlate of its experience. In light of the previous discussion, the basic question to be addressed in Husserl's phenomenology of the will is this: How is the willing I immanent in its experience? This can be unpacked in a subset of questions which will help to clarify my approach: In what sense is a self-determination, enabling the perseverance of the goal of the volitions (*Willensziel*), present in Husserl's description of realization? How is the fulfillment of a practical intent founded upon the fulfillment of underlying intentional acts such as perceptions? Finally, is there a reflexivity inherent in the realization of the will that clearly exhibits *that we, in fact, act according to what we will?*

One fundamental problem in this regard has been exposed by Tom Nenon: If we can only recognize our will through its empirical consequences (or its phenomenal consequences, in the case of transcendental reduction), then there is no immediate, self-transparent certainty that we, in fact, realize what we will (cf. Nenon, 1990, 308). This meshes well with the idea, presented in the last section, that there is no explicit

willing I to speak of in Husserl. The discussion of Geiger and Pfänder has shown that a self-determination to will is all the more removed from its realization, the more it is conceived as a pure act of a real, non-experiential I. This in turn suggests that the certainty that I act according to *my* will, can only be elucidated through its realization. Consequently, we may have to readjust our expectation towards the form that the certainty of willful acting takes. It might be that in Husserl, there is no single, or *singular* moment that exhibits the will as such. To experience our willing self-evidently, we are either referred to the processual, occurrent fulfillment of the practical intent, or to a retrospective reflection of it.

As discussed above, the formation of a practical intent, the impulse to realize it and the actual realization cannot be neatly separated—Husserl refrains from definitive statements¹⁶. What is clear though, is that in the action, the intention immediately transitions into a gradual fulfillment. The teleology inherent in realizing a volition implies an awareness of constant change, our constantly coming closer to (or drifting further away from) the goal. To this end, Husserl says that we are non-objectivatively directed, in each phase of our action, towards its further course, just as the consciousness of our will is not just founded on our current perception, but on future acts we intend through it (cf. Husserl, 2020, 26). Our will is at any time embedded in the flow of our action. In this context, it does not make sense to ask: is what I am doing *right now* in accordance with my will? Rather, one could ask: can I expect the course of my action to lead to what I will in the first place? The difficulty lies in the fact that this question does not take the form of a representation or phantasy, but is grounded in our current perception. How exactly is the consciousness of will (*Willensbewusstsein*) grounded in occurrent activity?

While a definitive answer here would have to take into consideration the different kinds of action and the associated degrees of premeditation, at this point, I want to focus on a decisive passage on the consciousness of the will. After having stated that the will cannot be based on a single act, Husserl claims that the volition is, just like the stream of perceptions founding it, in itself extended: “At every point the will is thus an extended continuity, such that the whole consciousness of the will is not just a simple continuity, but a *continuity of continuities*”¹⁷. I take the two continuities to be the stream of perceptions on the one hand and the practical intention based on the

¹⁶ See (Husserl, 2020, 26), where Husserl says that on this issue, all we can ultimately say is that the *fiat* structurally and temporally precedes the action.

¹⁷ „In jedem Punkt selbst ist also der Wille eine ausgebreitete Kontinuität, so dass das ganze Willensbewusstsein nicht nur eine schlichte Kontinuität, sondern eine *Kontinuität von Kontinuitäten* ist“ (Husserl, 2020, 26).

ongoing perceptual process on the other. When Husserl says that the will is not just a simple continuity, he could be understood to mean that the will does not take the form of a willing I that simply animates (*beseelt*) every point in the course of action. Instead, since the consciousness of the will is itself extended, i. e. a continuity founded on another continuity, the relationship between the two is complex. I am involved in a certain action and experience a series of perceptions (first continuity). Based on this experience, I become aware of coming closer to fulfilling my intent. This awareness constantly changes because of my changing perception and can only be reflected on *as changing* (second continuity). What exactly is to be considered the consciousness of willing here, is it simply the changing awareness? I would argue that this is not the case, as I have to be conscious not just of the fact *that* I will but of how what I am doing aligns with my intent. The will is, as *Willensbewusstsein*, constantly changing, deliberating, never fully certain of itself, in expectation of its future fulfillment.

4. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

One could say that if there is an I will in Husserl, it is firstly, tied to the objectifying acts of perception and secondly, in itself extended, such that I am at any one time conscious of my will as of a gradually changing certainty of fulfillment. To conclude my discussion of Husserl, I want to consider a problem that directly arises out of this characterization. If there are two continuities making up the consciousness of the will, then there seem to be two candidates to which the extension of the will refers: There is the expectation related to perceptions, in the sense that we apperceive the spatiotemporal continuation of what we are presently conscious of, and there is the expectation of the will that is directed towards its fulfillment, based on these perceptions. Should we take it that there are two different expectations at play in realizing a volition? But how could we be conscious of both at the same time? It seems more plausible to assume that in a volition, we are dealing with a *modified* expectation in which we are not just directed toward future objectivating acts, but toward the increase of fulfillment of our intent. We expect that our action will lead us to eventually realizing our will. *That* we expect to eventually achieve this is what separates the volition from a wish¹⁸. Yet actually experiencing oneself as willing entails, to a greater or lesser degree, an uncertainty in the face of what we continually strive to fulfill. The extension characterizing the consciousness of the will could then be understood to take the form of an uncertainty towards the realization of the volition: I know and apperceive that I will,

¹⁸ For more on this distinction see: (Husserl, 1988, 112–115) and (Lotz, 2006, 125–129).

that I act willfully, because I gradually know myself to come more or less close to, of acting more or less in line with, my intent.

Pfänder and Geiger sought to describe the experience of the willing I in the confines of pure self-determination. One could say that for both of them, the feeling of certainty is correlative to the act of willing, which means that this act has no objective content in the usual phenomenological sense, but a feeling which is tantamount to the I itself¹⁹. In Husserl, by contrast, the vacillation of the feeling of certainty is tied to the ever-changing objective content the volition refers to, functioning as an index of the I that wills.

Paradoxically, the more one tries to locate the source of the volition in an I in a real sense, i. e. one that transcends the experience which can be described as being that of this I, the less one is able to locate the volition in this very description. This suggests that the moment of decision, so pivotal for Pfänder and especially Geiger, might in some cases not be the most adequate basis for a phenomenological description of volitions, but rather constitute one founded act among others, serving merely as an affirmation for a will that is already taking place.

This is in line with a basic phenomenological insight, namely that the adequate description of the intentionality of an act has to consider how it relates to its object as meaningful, not as the real (reell) constituent of the intention²⁰. Similarly in the case of the will, the best approach may not be start with a real I that decides *ex nihilo*, but with the objective content the volition intends and to which the fulfillment refers. This in turn seems to exclude the strategy of naturalizing the real I to explain the will. Whether as metaphysical or as physiological, the source of the will can only play a meaningful role in phenomenology when one observes the continuous, manifold intentional structure of volitions into which it has to eventually translate itself.

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¹⁹ Pfänder holds that feelings require an objective content to be analyzed phenomenologically, see: (Schuhmann, 1982, 170–171). I hope to have shown with my discussion that the "willing I" is, as an objective correlate of acts of volitions, in many respects problematic.

²⁰ See: (Husserl, 2009, 360 ff.)

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