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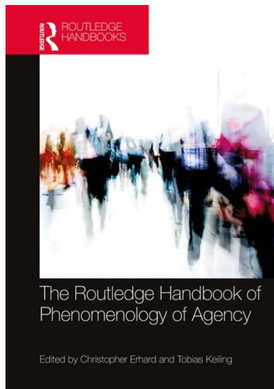

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Dietrich von Hildebrand on the will and intentional agency

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6

DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND ON THE WILL AND INTENTIONAL AGENCY*

Alessandro Salice

Introduction

The window of your office is open and you look outside: it is a sunny and, as usual, busy day. A lot of cars are parked on the street, the wind moves the branches of the trees, people are walking and talking to each other. One of them stumbles, loses her balance, and falls. But she rapidly stands up again and proceeds on her way. Luckily, she doesn't seem hurt. The scent of the blossoming trees reminds you that spring has finally arrived.

Even this brief glance outside the window allows you to perceive a rich multitude of different things. Some of them are *objects* with their properties: the shining sun, the red car parked near the blue one. Others are *actions*. So, for instance, the guy with the black handbag, who *walks* down the street, is acting. The two people *talking* to each other are acting, too. Interestingly, perceiving actions differs from perceiving other kinds of events. One of the elements that make the perception of actions somewhat peculiar is that when you perceive actions, you apparently ascribe mentality to their agents. In fact, you won't describe the movements of the branches as actions: not only the branches are merely *moved* by the wind but also trees, in all likelihood, do not belong to the sorts of creatures that have the resources required for exercising intentional agency.

But humans generally do have those resources. You know that because you have performed actions yourself: you have made decisions in the past and acted on them – more or less successfully. So, you know the difference between things that happen to you and actions that you perform. For instance, that person's stumbling does not qualify as an action – at least at first glance. True, the bodily movements that you perceive do not univocally reveal to you whether they constitute an action or not. In this particular scenario, it may be legitimate of you to *assume* that the person has fallen unintentionally, but you could not exclude that, at least in principle, those movements do constitute an intentional action after all: e.g. the person could have fallen on purpose. But in order to make this assumption, you again would have to ascribe a certain mental state to her. And this raises the question of what mental state turns a set of bodily movements into an intentional action. That is, what kind of mental states should agents be in for their movements to constitute an action? Ordinary language offers a straightforward answer to that question: a person φs intentionally, if that person *intends* or *wants* to φ. But what do we mean when we say of a person that she wants to φ?

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On the one hand, it seems clear that, by using the verb "to want," we ascribe a certain mental state to a person. Just as when we say "Pam is sad," we do ascribe an emotional state to Pam, namely, sadness. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the English language has no noun that corresponds to the predicate "to want." As Harry Frankfurt puts it: "It is perhaps acceptable, albeit graceless, to speak in the plural of someone's 'wants.' But to speak in the singular of someone's 'want' would be an abomination" (Frankfurt 1971: 7).

In personal conversation, Kevin Mulligan suggested that precisely this linguistic peculiarity of the English language may represent one of the reasons why large parts of English-speaking philosophy of action assume that the pivotal notion in the analysis of conation is the one of *desire*. As a paradigmatic example of this tendency, one can precisely adduce Frankfurt, who in his seminal article of 1971 on *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person* writes:

> To identify an agent's will is either to identify the desire (or desires) by which he is motivated in some action he performs or to identify the desire (or desires) by which he will or would be motivated when or if he acts. *An agent's will, then, is identical with one or more of his first-order desires* [. . .] the notion of the will [. . .] is the notion of an *effective* desire.
> *(Frankfurt 1971: 8, my emphasis)*

Sure, on Frankfurt's view, we also have the capacity to form second-order volitions, which is a capacity that distinguishes persons from mere "wantons."[1] But these volitions of higher order are also desires. Put another way, Frankfurt and many others deny that willing is a psychological category on its own right, for willing is or can be traced back to desire.

Mulligan's suggestion gains traction the moment one realizes that philosophers of action trained in languages which *do* have a noun corresponding to the verb "to want" not only carefully distinguish between desire and will but also put the will – and not desire – in the central position of conation. This is most visible in the German philosophical tradition. The German language ordinarily employs nouns such as "der Wille" or "das Wollen" to refer to the mental state one ascribes to a person when one says "she wants to φ." It should hence not come as a surprise that, in German philosophy, entire books have been devoted to the will (think of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*) and even well-known philosophical mottos mention the will (think of Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*).[2]

Arguably, one of the most detailed treatments of the will and of its role in intentional action can be found in Austro-German Phenomenology: questions about the will, its main features, and its relations with other experiences have occupied members of the phenomenological movement from its very beginning in the first decades of the 20th century (for a reconstruction of this debate, see Salice 2018). One of the first phenomenologists who have explicitly tackled that bundle of questions and, more generally, the nature of intentional action is Dietrich von Hildebrand. Some of his most interesting ideas on this topic can be found in his dissertation, which the young phenomenologist submitted in 1912 at the University of Göttingen under the supervision of Edmund Husserl. A revised version of this dissertation was published four years later in the third volume of the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* with the slightly revised title *Die Idee der sittlichen Handlung* (*The Idea of Moral Action*). This is a complex piece of written work, both from a systematic and a historic point of view, and a highly representative one of the short but extraordinarily prolific Göttingen period within the history of phenomenology.[3]

This chapter aims at reconstructing Hildebrand's contributions to the philosophy of action and, in particular, his view about the will as presented in his dissertation. What makes

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this work unique is the attempt to develop a theory of the will within the broader framework of an original theory of intentionality. Against this background, the chapter is organized in two parts. In the first, I lay out Hildebrand's theory of intentionality by mainly focusing on his distinction between cognitive experiences and attitudes. In the second part, I will discuss his phenomenology of the will and its relevance for a definition of the notion of intentional action. In the conclusion, I shall come back to Frankfurt and show that, based on Hildebrand's understanding of the will, many of his considerations about 'A wants to X' do not apply if the predicate 'to want' expresses a state akin to the 'Wille' in Hildebrand's sense.

Hildebrand's theory of intentionality[4]

Hildebrand's theory of intentionality is characterized by a sharp distinction between what he calls *Kenntnisnahmen* (cognitions) and *Stellungnahmen* (attitudes).[5, 6] Let's start with the first concept – what are cognitions? Back to the example: by looking outside the window, you are immediately acquainted with a multitude of objects.[7] You see colors and shapes with a certain dimension. You hear sounds. You smell the perfume of the blossoming flowers, but you also *feel* the delicacy of the scent (that is, you feel a certain value). Interestingly, all these experiences enter specific correlative relations with their intentional objects: seeing can only be directed at colors and shapes, hearing can only be directed at sounds and noises, smelling can only be directed at olfactory phenomena like perfumes, and feeling (*Fühlen*) – sometimes also called "value-ception (*Wertnehmen*)" – can only be directed at values (see also Reinach 1989a for these correlations).

All these experiences secure an "objectual having (*gegenständliches Haben*)" of the object in the sense that their objects are merely "had" by the subject. The same can be said for experiences that target more complex kinds of objects, like states of affairs. In fact, while watching from the window, you also perceive *that* one car is blue, *that* flowers are blossoming, or *that* this car is parked next to the red one. To put this differently, your visual field is not only made up of qualitative objects (nuances of colors, shapes, sounds, values), but it also includes states of affairs such as the being-blue of the car or the spatial relation between one car and the other. And you can be acquainted with these states of affairs, too, by 'having' them in corresponding experiences.

Hildebrand contends that, despite their differences, all these experiences have something in common (and therefore all qualify as "cognitions"), which is that they are entirely passive. The subject, when living through them, is not active in any sense (Hildebrand 1969: 11). Note that, by emphasizing the passivity of the subject, Hildebrand draws the attention to two phenomenological features that qualify cognitions. The first feature concerns the kind of intentional relation that these experiences enter with their objects: cognitions, Hildebrand argues (but this aspect will become fully clear only after the discussion about attitudes), do not establish an 'ideal' relation with their objects (Hildebrand 1969: 10). In fact, they are merely a "consciousness of (*Bewußtsein von*)" objects. By contrast, attitudes do enter such ideal relations with their objects – e.g. you are enthused *over* the spring's onset, you are angry *at* the guy honking at the other car, you are afraid *for* the person that fell. I will come back to this feature at the end of this section, but for the moment it suffices to pinpoint that all these prepositions ("over," "at," "for") express a particular way in which the subject is 'ideally' related to their objects, which is different from the mere 'of-ness' of cognitions (on this point, see Müller 2018).

The second feature about the phenomenology of cognitions is that, when the subject cognizes something (in the sense of having cognitions), she is not "doing" anything. It may

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well be that the subject's cognitive system is "active" (in a broad sense), for instance, it may well be that the subject's cognitive systems are computing all sorts of inferences and predictions, but these activities are sub-personal and thus not phenomenologically detectable by the subject. The subject is not first-personally aware of them and even cannot be first-personally aware of them. Hildebrand goes as far as stating that, even if one can correctly describe the perceived states of affairs as "formed (*Geformtsein*)" or "organized (*gegliedert*)," this should not mislead one into postulating a "forming" or "organizing" *activity* on the side of the subject: "all this [talking] refers to purely objective distinctions (*rein gegenständliche Unterschiede*)" that affect states of affairs (Hildebrand 1969: 12).

Before moving over to attitudes, it may be important to touch upon another experience of the cognitive kind that plays a crucial role in Hildebrand's philosophy of mind and epistemology. When you *come to know* something, you live through an experience of a particular kind, which Hildebrand calls "cognizing" or "knowledge (*Erkennen*)" (see Mulligan 2014; as Hildebrand acknowledges, the very idea of *Erkennen* as an experience of its own kind stems from Reinach; see again his 1989a). Albeit related to *Kenntnisnahmen*, cognizing does not belong to that psychological category. Why not? Hildebrand provides four interrelated answers to that question.

First, whereas *Kenntnisnahmen* can be directed at both, objects and states of affairs, cognizing is always and only directed at states of affairs. Second, cognizing is an act, whereas cognitions – even those directed at states of affairs – are states, which can endure through time. For example, you can observe the spatial relation between two cars for a longer period of time, but the act of securing knowledge (or of coming to know), insofar as it is an act, is episodic: it makes no sense to ask how long your coming to know lasted. (This characteristic also distinguishes knowledge in the sense of *Erkennen* from the *state* of knowledge, which Hildebrand calls "Wissen," cf. Hildebrand 1969: 21ff.) Third, if you come to know a given state of affairs, that state of affairs is given to you as *evident* or *actual* – to put it differently, its subsistence must be immediately manifested to you. This is Hildebrand's example: "I can certainly 'cognize' the imagined visit of my friend, for instance in order to savor everything joyful about it in advance, but in this case I cannot [come to] *know* that my friend is visiting" (Hildebrand 1969: 19). Fourth, in order for a state of affairs to reveal itself as subsisting to a subject, it does not necessarily have to be given to that subject in an intuitive way. To put this differently, *Erkennen can* be founded by a cognition: if I see that two cars are beside each other, I can come to know that they are beside each other. But *Erkennen does not have* to be founded by cognitions: if I see smoke, I can come to know that there is fire, without seeing that there is fire.

It is now time to move our attention to the notion of attitudes (*Stellungnahmen*). Attitudes come into three basic kinds: doxastic, affective, or conative. Volitions will be the specific topic of the next section, but the basic idea about attitudes also applies to volitions and can be stated presently: as the German term of *Stellungnahme* already suggests, once the subject 'has' the object, that is, once the subject is acquainted with an object or state of affairs (regardless of whether this acquaintance is secured by cognitions, acts of knowledge, or states of knowledge), the subject can *adopt an attitude* (a mental position or a stance) toward it. If we come back to our initial example, one can easily see that you are not only a passive recipient of information present in your visual field, for you can – and generally do – take a particular position vis-à-vis that information: you not only perceive that the branches are moved by the wind, you also *believe* that. You not only perceive a person falling on the street, you are also *afraid* for her. And, perhaps, the noises coming from the street motivate you to *want* to close

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the window. Believing, being afraid, and wanting are then attitudes (of obviously different kinds) that you have adopted toward those objects and states of affairs.

Another way of formulating the idea that the subject adopts an attitude is by saying that the subject *responds* to objects and states of affairs. Hildebrand's notion of a response is complex as it collates several different ideas together. The first one is that attitudes have specific phenomenal properties. You always respond *in a certain way* to states of affairs: you are afraid or happy, convinced or doubtful, motivated or disinclined (to act). And this very phenomenal character of the experience is something you are immediately aware of by simply living through the experience (that is, you don't need to activate a numerically distinct state directed at the attitude in order for you to be aware of its phenomenal character). This is why Hildebrand claims that attitudes do not only have an intentional object (or "content (*Inhalt*)," see fn. 5), but also a "content (*Gehalt*)." By contrast, cognitions do not have a content (in the sense of *Gehalt*); they just 'have' their objects.[8]

The second idea captured by the notion of a "response" is that the contents (*Gehalte*) of attitudes (and therefore the attitudes themselves) are *intentionally* directed toward objects and states of affairs: "every attitude is an attitude toward [*zu*] an object and thus possesses an *intention* [*Intention*] towards something objectual" (1969: 13). To have an intention is to enter an *ideal relation* toward the object, which is linguistically captured by the peculiar prepositions that, as we saw earlier, are required when linguistically reporting (the contents of) attitudes. One interesting consequence of this position is that it amounts to a dismissal of the idea that cognitions are intentional experiences. It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to exhaustively elucidate this point, but it may be important to highlight that Hildebrand aligns with many other phenomenologists (though, crucially, not with Husserl in his *Logical Investigations*) in distinguishing different kinds of intentional directedness, which do not have an overarching genus (see Salice 2012, 2015a). To put this another way, the sense in which attitudes are about objects and facts in the world is merely analogous, but ultimately different from the sense in which cognitions and cognitive experiences more in general (incl. *Erkennen* and *Wissen*) are about objects and facts.

Finally, attitudes – precisely in virtue of their being responses – secure some knowledge about *their objects*. This claim, however, needs specification. The first specification is that attitudes stand on (or: are funded by) cognitive experiences. For an attitude to occur, there must be a cognitive experience, which is presupposed by the attitude. Any cognitive experience can here play the founding role: so, an emotive attitude can be funded, say, by feeling the value of an object, by the knowledge (*qua* act) that a given object has a certain value, or by the knowledge (*qua* state) that a given object has a certain value (1969: 25–26). For example, it is based on your *feeling* of the danger (the disvalue) instantiated by that person's falling, that you *respond* to that disvalue by becoming anxious. But your anxiety could be founded by the act (or state) of knowledge *that* that person is in a dangerous situation. This first specification has two interesting consequences. The first, which can be mentioned here only in passing, is that the different way in which an attitude can be founded has moral significance: Hildebrand contends that the more intuitive the acquaintance with the value grounding the attitude is, the more profound is its moral significance (see Salice 2015b). The second is that there are two different senses in which an attitude may be assessed as fitting or not. An attitude may be unfitting because the founding cognitive experience is unfitting. To make an extreme case: if you hallucinate a barking dog and you elicit an emotion of fear, the emotion is unfitting simply because there is no barking dog. However, the emotion could be assessed as unfitting at a different level, too: suppose you do see a barking dog and you elicit an emotion of intense

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fear, but the dog is, say, a Chihuahua – in this case, the intensity of the emotion does not fit the actual danger displayed by the dog.[9]

The second specification about the relation between attitudes and knowledge concerns the following: attitudes secure knowledge about their subjects. In fact, knowing the attitudes of a subject is to know something about that very subject in a non-trivial sense. The very person and her nature is first and foremost revealed in her attitudes: we call a person sensitive, brave, wise, unsecure, malign, smart, thoughtful, emotive, precisely on the basis of the affective, volitive, or doxastic attitudes of this person.

Willing and intentional action

We have seen that attitudes can also be of a conative nature, but conation is a variegated category, which is populated by a large family of experiences. In particular, Hildebrand distinguishes between different concepts of volitions or willing experiences (*Wollen*), although only one of these concepts points to a psychological kind that is core to intentional agency.

The first concept of will refers to an experience that is entirely inert and ineffective. Typical cases of this volitive experience are directed at other experiences: your neighbor did you some wrong and you want to forgive him, but you can't. Or: you want to overcome your feeling of envy toward your neighbor, but again you can't. Two facts make clear that this concept of the will is unique and has to be distinguished from other concepts. The first is that this experience can be directed at the two other forms of will – without being able to elicit them. The second, on which I will elaborate more below, is that this experience does not entail a disposition to form a decision or intention (*Vorsatz*). But first, what are these other two forms of will that can be aimed at by inert will?

The second form of the will is exclusively directed at what Hildebrand calls "activities (*Tätigkeiten*)," example of which are: to eat, to walk, to hit, to fight . . . Activities, Hildebrand claims, consist in a "unity of movements and behavioral patterns (*Verhaltungsweisen*) of the body" (1969: 27) and do *not* constitute intentional actions (*Handlungen*). Although Hildebrand's idea may be perhaps conducive to the German term of *Handlung*, it admittedly is at odds with the colloquial use of the English term "action," according to which eating and walking do certainly qualify as actions. Linguistic considerations apart, what matters is the way in which Hildebrand characterizes the volitive experience as related to the activities it steers. In fact, the main reason Hildebrand adduces to support his claim is that the will, in this sense, is already and entirely satisfied when the activity has taken place. To put this differently, activities are not performed to produce states of affairs other than themselves: they are "basic actions" in the sense that, once the activity is realized, the conative experience is fulfilled (see also Chisholm 1964: 616; Danto 1965).

Now, this is precisely what characterizes the third and last concept of the will: when you want something in this sense, you want to bring about a state of affairs as something "external" from you and from your consciousness, as it were. For instance, at this moment you may just want to (simply) eat, but you also may want your paper to be finally submitted. Your will, in this case, won't be satisfied by a mere bodily activity (as in the case of wanting to eat) – that state of affairs in the world aimed at by the will must subsist in order for the experience to be satisfied. One way to distinguish these two concepts at the linguistic level is by arguing that the willing directed at activities requires infinitive sentences that necessarily include an agentive predicate: "I want to φ" (or "my will to φ"), where "φ" is such an agentive predicate. By contrast, the third concept of the will is captured by using the more

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convoluted expression "I want to bring about *p*," (or "my will to bring about *p*") where "p" points to the state of affairs the subject aims at realizing.

Despite the important differences between these two concepts, it is crucial to highlight a feature they have in common: these two conative experiences entail the *disposition* to lead to a decision. If the decision is made, it initiates the realization (*Realisation*) of the activity or of the state of affairs: "[. . .] it belongs to the sense of this will, that it can inaugurate the realization of the state of affairs" (1969: 32).[10] It is precisely this disposition that distinguishes these two forms of will from the inert one. Note that the possibility of the will to conduce to a decision requires the awareness that the state of affairs (or activity) *can* be brought about (or performed) by the subject. This lends further evidence to the thesis that the first concept of the will ought to be isolated from the other two: it is *not* possible for the subject to (willingly or voluntarily) elicit an attitude. And this is something that makes inert will akin to the concept of desire or wish (1969: 35 fn. 1).[11]

Let me take stock. We have seen that when it comes to, especially, the third notion of the will, Hildebrand establishes an important link between the volitive attitude, the decision, and the realization of the state of affairs. It is now time to zoom in on these relations as they open up the possibility to define the concept of intentional agency. Let us return to the example: your window is open and it is loud outside. You cannot focus on your paper, which is due the end of the month. You are aware that a closed window would help you focus. The closed window (that state of affairs) gains *importance* to you. You *want* to close the window. You *decide* to close the window. You *act* on that decision to the effect that the window is closed.

Deliberative processes such as the one just described obviously consist of different experiences, which are merged together and often go unnoticed by their subjects. But it is precisely (one of the) task(s) of phenomenology to disentangle experiential knots, and to distinguish and describe its main constituents. In fact, based on Hildebrand's theory of intentionality, one is now in a position to appreciate the several elements at the basis of deliberation. Start with cognitions: at some point you come to know that a state of affairs – like the window's being closed – has importance to you.[12] Once that state of affairs is "had" by you in the sense specified earlier, you can take a position toward it: you now want that to be the case. Note that you do not have to adopt an attitude toward that state of affairs. It may well be that, although you know of the importance that the closed window may have for your work, you remain neutral toward it. Perhaps it is the first day of spring and you prefer to enjoy the sweetly fragrant breeze at cost of being distracted by all the noises.

But if you want the window to be closed, you have adopted a conative attitude, which – as such – is "ideally" directed toward that state of affairs. This intentional direction is enabled by the willing's content (again, in the sense of *Gehalt*), which the subject is immediately aware of by simply living through that attitude. But then, what is the phenomenal character of the attitude? Hildebrand claims that, phenomenologically, the attitude presents itself to the subject as a *commitment*: if you want the window to be closed, *you should* close the window (1969: 31).[13] The will, to put this another way, is accompanied by a sense of commitment, which makes up its qualitative character. This clearly distinguishes a mere desire – which does not elicit any sense of commitment – from the will (on this, see also Bratman 1987; Salice 2018). Desire may wax and wane, whereas willing makes one's conduct stable through time and psychologically costly to revise – precisely because willing generates a sense of "I should" that infuses our mental life.

However, as we have seen, there are forms of will that, as such, may generate that sense of commitment, but which are completely inert. So, what is distinctive about the will directed

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at states of affairs? This is a peculiar modal property: to want something in this sense *can* lead to the intention to realize the state of affairs, where the term "intention" (*Vorsatz*) points to an experience of a specific kind, as we will see. Again, it could be that not all tokens of willing (of this type) lead to an intention, but at least in principle they could. An attitude that qualifies as willing (in this sense), but which does not give raise to an intention, would still have to be distinguished from an experience of inert willing, which as such can *never* lead to an intention. One of the reasons for this claim is that, when you want to bring about *p* and you thus feel that you should bring about *p*, you are already oriented toward the realization of *p*. Thanks to this orientation the subject is open to two possible options: either the subject thinks that *p* can be realized or she thinks that *p* cannot be realized. It is only in the first case that the subject is disposed to form an intention to act toward *p*. It is to this effect that she will indeed decide to act toward *p*, barring all circumstances that would prevent her from doing that.

But then, what is a decision or an intention (I am using these two terms interchangeably) in contradistinction to willing? On the one hand, the decision is a *mental action* of the subject and thus it is not an attitude (Hildebrand 1969: 36)[14] – more precisely, the decision is a "spontaneous" experience in the sense that it is up to the subject if and when to form an intention, whereas we have seen that attitudes cannot be elicited at the subject's discretion. Interestingly, intentions – other than attitudes – do not have polarity: although decisions could be directed at negative states of affairs (e.g. "I intend p *not* to be brought about"), decisions do not have a negative counterpart (see also Stein 1970: 311). On the other hand, the intentional object of an intention is different from the intentional object of willing. Intentions are still characterized by the sense of commitment that accompanies willing, but they determine the future conduct of their very subject. This is because they are not (only) directed at the (*wanted*) states of affairs, but rather at *projects* that aim at the realization of those states of affairs – that is, they are directed at states of affairs with an instrumental structure. Hildebrand is brief about the notion of a project (Hildebrand 1969: 43; Reinach 1989b: 291), but one could think of projects as states of affairs that have a X-by-means-of-Y structure, where X refers to the goal and the Y-variable ranges over actions of the subject that are means for the achievement of the goal (see Salice 2015c). To put this another way, if you want to bring about X and therefore you feel you should do that, then you are disposed to form an intention, the occurrence of which commits you to a certain course of actions (Y), by means of which X is supposed to be brought about. Note that one important consequence of this idea is that you can form decisions that are not supported by willing (Hildebrand 1969: 33ff.). For instance, it can be that the specification of Y compels you to an action, which you do not want to perform. Since forming an intention is under your control, you can intend to Y even though you do not have a corresponding willing toward Y. For instance, you might want to keep the window open to enjoy the fresh air, but because it is your intention to submit the paper by the end of the week, you nevertheless decide to close the window. Here, your intention to close the window is motivated by wanting the paper to be submitted, not by wanting to close the window (which is something that, by contrast, you do *not* want).

All this indicates that intentions, insofar as they are about a project that is partly constituted by a subject's action, lead to the realization of the wanted state of affairs. The realization, together with its psychological pendants, constitutes what Hildebrand calls *Handlung* or intentional agency. The realization itself requires a further act; this is an *incipit* act, as it were, which sets the conduct in motion (Hildebrand's term for this further act is *Inangriffnahme* or "commencement" [1969: 36] – Husserl, following William James, will prefer the Latin *fiat!*; see Husserl 1988: 110). The existence of this act has been contested (see Reiner 1927: 76ff.),

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but what is more important is that the realization it triggers is not simply a set of bodily movements (a "mere doing"), but rather an *experience*:

> every doing . . . which is lived through (*erlebt*) as a *realization*, follows an intention. Insofar as it is a conscious realization of a state of affairs, there is a relation to a state of affairs, which a mere doing as such can never deliver.
>
> *(1969: 37)*

It follows from this that the agent possesses a peculiar awareness about her action, which she does not gain through observation, but from her inner perspective (see Anscombe 2000): a set of movements is not described by the agent as an action because this is observed from a viewpoint external of the action. Rather, the set of movements is first-personally *experienced* as an intentional action from within the action itself precisely because it realizes the subject's corresponding intention.

To return to our initial example: all things considered, it may be legitimate of you to think that the person did *not* act when she fell on the street. However, this is and remains an assumption for it is *her* prerogative to describe the agentive situation: *she* (but not you) has first-personal epistemic authority in describing what she does. Sure, she may be mistaken in the description of the state of affairs *resulting* from her actions as an external party may be in a better position to observe the result of her action. Suppose she wanted to make somebody believe that she fell (this being the state of affairs she wanted to bring about) – to ascertain whether this state of affairs subsists she would have to rely on observation just as anybody else (and somebody may be better equipped than her to find out whether that state of affairs does indeed subsist). But any description of that state of affairs *as* the result of an intentional (or non-intentional) action cannot prescind from her personal perspective. Eventually, the only reliable way you have to find out what has happened on the street is to ask what her intention was (or, at the very least, whatever way one has to find out what has happened cannot ignore her intention).

Conclusion

We can now come back to Frankfurt's idea that the notion of the will can be reduced to that of desire and, thus, does not point to a genuine psychological category. Frankfurt writes:

> A statement of the form "*A* wants to X" – taken by itself, apart from a context that serves to amplify or to specify its meaning – conveys remarkably little information. Such a statement may be consistent, for example, with each of the following statements: (a) the prospect of doing X elicits no sensation or introspectible emotional response in *A;* (b) *A* is unaware that he wants to X; (c) *A* believes that he does not want to X; (d) *A* wants to refrain from X-ing; (e) *A* wants to *Y* and believes that it is impossible for him both to *Y* and to X; (f) *A* does not "really" want to X; (g) *A* would rather die than X; and so on.
>
> *(Frankfurt 1971: 7)*

How to assess this quote in the light of Hildebrand's theory? To begin with, it is doubtful whether Hildebrand (and early phenomenologists more in general) would concede that there is a form of conation which can be squared with (a) for granting that point comes very close to denying that conation is an experience at all. Furthermore, the notion of awareness in (b)

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is too underdetermined to draw any sensible conclusion (but again if (b) dismisses any form of awareness, including the very possibility to become aware of one's willing, then that again would be equal to denying that conation is an experience).

However, Frankfurt is certainly right that some of those statements are consistent with the sentence "A wants to X." For instance, if one looks at the desire-end of the volitive spectrum, which partly encompasses Hildebrand's first notion of the will, then "A wants to X" can be compatible with (e) (precisely because wishes can be about states of affairs that are impossible to attain – like the conjunction of Y and X). In contrast, if "A wants to X" is supposed to express a decision or an intention, then certainly the statement is consistent with (c), (d), (f), and (g) because decisions do not have to be supported by the will. Interestingly, based on what has been said in the previous section, none of those statements is compatible with "A wants to X" if the concept of "to want" is Hildebrand's *Wille*.

Against this backdrop, one conclusion to draw is that those claims about compatibilities hold or do not hold depending on the concept of "to want" at stake. But what does all this show? It seems to me that this just shows that the concept of "to want" is ambiguous and thus in need of an analysis. But then, which analysis should be preferred? There are reasons to believe that an analysis able to capture the fine-grained (phenomenological) differences between our conative experiences is preferable to any analysis that waters down all those differences. In fact, it is only on the basis of a phenomenologically sound theory of desires, (different forms of) willing, intentions that one can ascertain which of those sentences is compatible with which conative notion. Only this way can disambiguation be acquired. But if this is correct, it strongly suggests that the best way to achieve disambiguation of our psychological concepts is by means of phenomenology and, crucially, by its core methodological idea that everything is what it is (and not something else).

Related topics

Chapters 2 (on Pfänder & Husserl), 4 (on Scheler), 5 (on Reinach), 7 (on Reiner), 9 (on Stein), 24 (De Monticelli), 25 (Drummond).

Notes

* I have presented the material of this chapter at the conference *Phenomenology of Action and Volition* (Prague, May 2018), where I have received much appreciated feedback. I am also thankful to Christopher Erhard and Danny Forde, who read and commented upon a previous version of this chapter. This chapter has been drafted during a research visit at the University of Memphis in April 2018. This visit has been enabled by a Research Fellowships granted to me by Prof. Shaun Gallagher and Prof. Albert Newen, for which I am very grateful.

1 A wanton is a creature the essential characteristic of which is "that he does not care about his will. His desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires" (Frankfurt 1971: 11).

2 In this context one, however, should not leave unmentioned O'Shaughnessy's seminal work "The Will" (2008), where the author also sharply distinguishes desiring from willing. I am thankful to Christopher Erhard for drawing my attention to this notable exception.

3 Hildebrand's philosophy has been profoundly influenced by his fellow phenomenologists – mainly by Max Scheler and Adolf Reinach –, and it stands in a complex relation with Husserl's phenomenology. On the relations between Reinach and Hildebrand specifically on philosophy of action and its moral dimension, see Salice (2015a). Convergences and divergences between Scheler and Hildebrand have been discussed by Crosby in his 2002 work. Schuhmann has investigated Husserl's reception of Hildebrand's dissertation in his 1992 work. Finally, for an overview on the phenomenology of the Munich and Göttingen circles, see Salice (2015b).

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4 Unless otherwise specified, all translations from German are mine.

5 Another translation of "Stellungnahmen" one encounters in the literature, which I also have adopted in previous articles (Salice 2015a, b), is "position-taking" or "stance." However, and as Mulligan has pointed out to me, a better translation of that term could be "attitude." On the one hand, "stance" better captures the German "Haltung" (as in Reinach's theory of *Fragehaltung*, "erotetic stance", Reinach 1989b). On the other hand, Wittgenstein too employs that term (see Wittgenstein 1984), which the translators have rendered into English as "attitude." Opting for "attitude," thus, not only seems to be linguistically more adequate, but may also contribute to make the important relations between Wittgenstein and early phenomenology more salient (see Mulligan 2012).

6 This distinction, although formulated with widely different expressions, is central for many phenomenologists. It goes back at least to Franz Brentano, who in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* distinguishes between presentations (*Vorstellungen*), which have no polarity, and polar attitudes like beliefs and "phenomena of love and hate."

7 Interestingly, Hildebrand employs the term "content (*Inhalt*)" instead of "object" to refer to the intentional correlate of cognitions. Hildebrand aligns with Reinach on this (see Reinach 1989a), but as far as I know neither of them provide a justification for this terminological stipulation.

8 Hildebrand does not deny that cognitions have phenomenal properties: e.g. hearing *phenomenally* differs from seeing. But these properties, in contradistinction to attitudes' contents, are not lived through (*erlebt*) by the subject (Hildebrand 1969: 17 fn. 2). Hildebrand's argument on this point is not immediately clear, but perhaps his idea can be illustrated by saying that, in the case of cognitions, their phenomenal properties supervene on the kinds of objects the experience is directed at. By contrast, attitudes do not (at least: entirely) supervene on their intentional objects. To put this differently, if confronted with a color and a sound, you cannot but *see* the color and *hear* the sound. The phenomenal properties of these experiences become salient only when you reflect upon them (for instance, by engaging in counterfactual reasoning on whether sounds could be seen or colors heard). By contrast, you do not necessarily emote in a certain way when confronted with a given state of affairs. That is, the phenomenal properties that characterize attitudes become evident the moment you elicit those attitudes exactly because attitudes originate in you and are not exacted by their objects.

9 I am thankful to Olivier Massin, who drew my attention to this point.

10 To be sure, Hildebrand mainly focuses on the third form of the will in that quote, but there are no reasons to deny that similar considerations apply to the second form, too (even though only briefly, Hildebrand speaks of "intentions towards activities (*Tätigkeitsvorsatz*)," which signals that the realization of activities, too, is initiated by a decision; see 1969: 30).

11 Hildebrand does not expand on the notion of desire, but his scant remarks are conducive to the attempt of deriving that notion from the concept of the will, which is a possibility explicitly defended by Scheler. On this view, the notion of desire does not pick out a genuine kind of mental state, but is just an experiential coloring (a "desire character (*Wunschcharakter*)") that the will assumes once it becomes transparent to the subject that that state cannot be accompanied by what Scheler calls a "being-able-to-do" about the content of that volition. The sense of being-able-to-do (*Tunkönnen*) is a subjective sense of empowerment – the awareness of being able to act upon that will and satisfy it. See Scheler (1973: 123ff.), and Salice (2018).

12 In many cases, what motivates our willing is not the importance of a state of affairs, but rather the values that it exemplifies. One of the merits of Hildebrand's dissertation is to carefully distinguish between the personal preferences that we accord to states of affairs and the values that they can exemplify. On this, see also Reinach (1989b: 298).

13 This notion of commitment (*Sollen*) is normative, but non-moral. It is possible to direct the will to states of affairs that exemplify disvalues and thus to have a commitment to realize those (morally despicable) states of affairs, but this commitment is certainly not of a moral kind.

14 Hildebrand's description of intentions runs in parallel to – and to a great extent presupposes – Reinach's description of assertions: just as the belief or conviction (*Überzeugung*) that *p* entails the disposition to assert (*behaupten*) *p*, so entails the will to bring about *p* the disposition to intend to realize *p*.

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