

**Summer Module Course**  
**University of Würzburg**

**“Affective intentionality in medieval philosophy & phenomenology”**

**Panel:** 4 “Guiding Directedness? Affectivity and Feelings as (Pre-)Intentional Spheres”

**Conference:** Western

**Day:** Thursday, July 29; 17.30

**Title:**

Emotion as attitude, emotion as value perception. The problem of the specificity of affective intentionality in Husserl’s phenomenology

**Abstract:**

The acknowledgment of the intentional character of emotions – or at least of some of them – immediately raises the question of the *specificity* of affective intentionality: what distinguishes it from the paradigmatic “aboutness” of perceptions or beliefs? In contemporary philosophy of emotions, two distinct replies are suggested: one may first locate this originality in the *content*, that is, in the intentional object, of affective experiences, stating for instance that emotions are directed towards axiological facts ; or, contrariwise, one may assert that affective acts are not primarily defined by a particular type of content, but by a special *attitude vis-à-vis* their intentional object. In this presentation, I focus on Husserl’s solution to this issue. I first reveal that his phenomenology of affectivity is actually crossed by two antithetic ambitions: from the perspective of *pure psychology*, the attitudinal conception of emotions is privileged to the extent that it permits an eidetic distinction between affective and intellectual acts ; yet, from the perspective of a *universal theory of reason*, the contentual theory is favored, since it explains our knowledge of values. The second part of the presentation is dedicated to an original approach to this antinomy. I unveil how the consideration of what Husserl calls *Gefühlsempfindungen*, affective sensations, like sensual pleasures or pains, which are not consciousness-of by themselves, but lie at the basis of all intentional emotions, allows a reconstruction of affectivity that accounts both for its specificity and for its intuition of values.

## ***1. Introduction***

Hello everyone,

I am very pleased to be here today with all of you from so many different countries. This Summer school is truly a unique opportunity to present our thoughts and to share it with other passionate specialists. As a young researcher, these meetings are extraordinarily valuable, and therefore I would like to sincerely thank all the organizers for their commitment and for having made this summer school possible, and, of course, I also would like to thank all the participants for their presence and their very fruitful talks, comments and ideas.

I am currently a doctoral student at Rouen University, in co-tutelle with Heidelberg University. My PhD thesis focuses on Husserl's theory of emotions and affectivity. Generally speaking, I try to show that Husserl, the father of phenomenology, offers a coherent and in fact quite systematic doctrine of the affective life. For this talk, however, I have chosen to first embrace a more global perspective on the philosophy of emotions.

Here is an outline of my presentation. I will begin by investigating the specificity of affective intentionality. I will demonstrate that two different perspectives can be defended, the contentual position and the attitudinal position, and that both have pros and cons.

In the second part, I will unveil that Husserl was already facing the very same dilemma within his phenomenological project, and that it emerged from the conflictual points of view of his pure psychology on the one hand and of his transcendental theory of reason on the other.

In the third and last part, I will try and solve the Husserlian version of this dilemma by appealing to the concept of "affective sensations".

## ***2. Where should the specificity of affective intentionality be located?***

Let's begin with the exposition of a conflict that is, to my mind, inherent to the contemporary philosophy of emotions.

Just a very brief remark, for the sake of clarity: by this term "emotion", I mean those affective episodes that we call anger, fear, joy, admiration, etc. I thus leave aside questions regarding moods and affective dispositions.

With such definition, most contemporary philosophers of emotions would acknowledge that emotions, or at least some of them, are *intentional*, that is, that they are experiences which are directed towards objects. I am indeed afraid *of* the dog, I rejoice *about* the birth of my child, etc. In these experiences, I am therefore aiming at a precise object or a specific state of affairs. In what follows, I will not try to challenge this postulate, but rather to draw certain implications which result from it and which may seem problematic.

It is indeed clear that emotions are not the only intentional experiences, since perceptions, judgments, memories, etc., are intentional as well. It even seems quite straightforward that the "cognitive" intentionality that these experiences manifest plays the role of a "paradigm": the concept of intentionality is, so to speak, "tailor-made" for them, whose objectual directedness is unquestionable. But this raises a major issue: to say that affective experiences are intentional would be to reduce them to cognitive experiences, and, consequently, to deprive them of their originality.

The thesis of an intentionality of emotions must therefore necessarily be accompanied by the uncovering of its specificity with respect to the canonical "cognitive" intentionality in order not to run the risk of what could be called an "intellectualist reductionism".

To do so, two solutions seem available. First of all, we can locate the originality of the intentionality of emotions in their “object”. For example, we would say that, while perception and scientific knowledge can make me know all the factual characteristics of a thunderstorm, for instance the colors and the nature of the clouds it contains, etc., only the emotion is able to make me appreciate its *beauty* or its *sublimity*. From this idea, we will claim that the emotion has a specific object, which is precisely a “value”.

To say it roughly, “cognitive” experiences make me know the mere things, the mere facts, which are axiologically neutral,

while the emotional experiences make appear the axiological qualities of these things and facts.

The second solution, quite different, consists in locating the specificity of affective intentionality, not in the object, but in the “attitude” that the subject adopts towards it. This solution starts from the idea that one can precisely relate to the very same object in several ways.

This is already the case from a strictly cognitive point of view: I can for instance believe that there is water on Mars, or, on the contrary, reject this claim. In both cases, it is the same object or state of affairs that is aimed at, except that, in the belief, I accept it, and in the rejection, I refuse it.

It would be the same in emotion: being afraid of the dog would not mean perceiving in it an axiological quality, but, conversely, adopting an affective attitude towards it, being turned towards it “in a frightened manner”, so to speak.

This conflict between a “contentual” or “objectual” position and an “attitudinal” position crosses the contemporary philosophy of emotions. Christine Tappolet, for instance, embraces the contentual point of view. In her book *Émotions et valeurs (Emotions and values)*, published in 2000 (Tappolet 2000), she considers the emotions as perceptions of values. They thus function like perceptions in the usual sense, in particular perceptions of color, except that they aim at values.

Other philosophers reject such an approach, insisting in particular that it implies an “intellectualization” of emotion and thus the disappearance of its “affective side” which is precisely why an emotion is always, as its name implies, a motion of the soul. In particular, Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni try to show in several works, and especially in their 2015 article called “Emotions as Attitudes” (Deonna and Teroni 2015) that what differentiates emotion from cognition is not the object we apprehend but the attitude we adopt in front of it, attitude which itself relies on the feeling of our body being prepared to act in a certain manner (for instance, in fear, in flee).

This “attitudinal” position seems to be phenomenologically more correct. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that mere differences of contents suffice to establish distinct “classes” of experiences. It is straightforward that the difference between a perception of a blue spot and of a red spot is not enough to speak of two species of acts. Why would it be different with value?

The following assertion from Arnaud Dewalque’s paper entitled “Emotional Phenomenology: Toward a Nonreductive Analysis” (Dewalque 2017) aptly formulates this idea:

The fact that cold blood evaluative judgments are conceivable shows that evaluative judgments are quite *separable* from emotions. Therefore, making an evaluative judgment is *not sufficient* to experience an emotion: There is more to emotion than cognition (Dewalque 2017, 32).

Yet, on the other hand, this attitudinal conception seems to make the understanding of our relation to values delicate, if not impossible.

Indeed, if emotion is defined by its mode, then, so to speak, it “brings nothing new” to the object, since the same content can also appear in the other attitudes. Accordingly, emotions do not make us know any proper object. But then, what kind of intentional experience would be able, if not emotion, to provide us with an access to values?

There is thus a real quandary here. As I have tried to sum up in this table, the contentual position gains the values but loses the experiential dimension of affectivity; contrariwise, the attitudinal position gains the original phenomenology of emotion, but loses the values.

What should we do in these circumstances?

### ***3. The Husserlian version of the opposition between contentualism and attitudinalism***

Well, quite simply, go back to Husserl! For Husserl was actually already facing, in his peculiar context, the *very same dilemma*.

To depict the Husserlian version of the contentual versus attitudinal debate, we must distinguish the two structuring issues of the Husserlian phenomenology of affectivity. These two issues in fact parallel the distinction between *phenomenology as pure psychology* and *phenomenology as transcendental philosophy*.

Let us start with pure psychology, which is explicitly thematized by Husserl in a series of courses, papers, and lectures of the second half of the 1920s. Husserl conceives pure psychology as a recasting of Brentano's empirical descriptive psychology in which what is sought is no longer inductive laws,

but the essence of the soul, that is, the essential or, as Husserl says, the *eidetic* necessities that structure any *psychè*.

How does pure psychology apprehend affectivity? According to its methodology, pure psychology will have to bring to light the *eidós* "emotion", that is to say to describe the unity of this class of experiences. Negatively, this implies to distinguish the class of affective acts from the other types of mental acts.

How does Husserl manage to make this demarcation? His first answer, that of the *Logical Investigations*, which is precisely taken up in his "pure psychology", consists in embracing the "attitudinal" position. In the *Logical Investigations*, in particular, Husserl distinguishes, within each intentional experience, its *matter* and its *quality*. The matter of an act is that which gives it a relation to a particular object; it is that in virtue of which the lived experience aims at *that dog*, aims at *the tree*, etc. Conversely, the quality designates the *way* in which the act relates to the object presented by the matter. For instance, to quote the *Logical Investigations*:

The manner in which a 'mere presentation' refers to its object, differs from the manner of a judgment, which treats the same state of affairs as true or false. Quite different again is the manner of a surmise or doubt, the manner of a hope or a fear, of approval or disapproval, of desire or aversion (Husserl 2001, 2:96).

This distinction between matter and quality is crucial, because the classification of acts must rely only on the latter, and in no case on the matter. Husserl exposes this requirement very firmly:

The distinction of "basic classes" of acts relates, as is readily apparent, only to the act-qualities (Husserl 2001, 2:159).

This "qualitative" solution to the problem of the demarcation between emotion and cognition seems promising, and it would have been perfectly sufficient, if only phenomenology was reduced to pure psychology. But this is precisely not the case.

On the contrary, pure psychology remains in the "natural attitude" and does not perform the transcendental reduction. Therefore, it remains "naive". Such naivety is removed only when consciousness is no longer considered as a mere "part" of the world but is apprehended as its phenomenological origin, the source from which all beings draw their meaning.

When this reduction is performed, we attain the kingdom of transcendental phenomenology. The latter is, for Husserl, (I quote), the “absolute universal science” (Husserl 1968, 349); it is up to it to take charge of (I quote again) “all true knowledge” and to solve “all problems of reason” (Husserl 1968, 299). What does it mean? For Husserl, who says reason, says knowledge. And who says *universal* reason, says knowledge of all things, that is to say, not only *theoretical reason* – knowledge of nature and mathematical or logical truths – but also *axiological reason* – knowledge of values – and *practical reason* – knowledge of ethical duties. This enlargement of reason beyond the sphere of the understanding carries with it extremely strong demands. It implies, not only that values are *objects*, which can therefore be aimed at in certain intentional experiences, but also that values can be *known*, that is to say, that objective, universal truths about them are attainable.

But which are then the intentional experiences in which such evident apprehension of values is carried out?

It is here that emotions intervene again: only emotions, or, as Husserl calls them, *Gefühle*, feelings, can manifest something as beautiful, noble, disgusting, etc. As he puts it in the second book of the *Ideen*,

*each consciousness which originally constitutes a value-Object as such, necessarily has in itself a component belonging to the sphere of feelings* (Husserl 1989, 11).

As a result of this inquiry, we find, formulated in the terms of Husserl’s phenomenology, the very same dilemma whose importance we had underlined for contemporary philosophy of emotions.

Here it is.

From the point of view of pure psychology, it seems more efficient to identify the eidetic specificity of affectivity as a “mode”, as a “quality”; but then, we lose the values, which are however essential to the project of a truly universal reason. Conversely, if we follow this latter perspective, we recover the values and the possibility of an axiological knowledge, but it seems that we lose the originality of affective experience as such, since all acts become “objectifying” or “cognitive”.

#### **4. Solution to the dilemma through the introduction of affective sensations**

In the last part of this presentation, I will propose an interpretation of Husserl that allows us to resolve this difficulty. I would like to show that affectivity can be defined independently from its “content” while preserving the possibility of axiological knowledge.

To do so, it is necessary to introduce a key concept, which is that of *affective sensation* (*Gefühlsempfindung* in German). For Husserl, in fact, and contrary to Brentano, not all experiences are intentional. Sensations, for example the purely felt red, or a sound understood as a purely immanent quality, are indeed experienced, but are not “directed” towards something.

Husserl underlines, however, that these sensations play a fundamental role in objective apperception, since they serve as a support for objectifying apprehensions. To put it in the words of the *V<sup>th</sup> Logical Investigation*:

Apperception is, for us, the surplus [...] as opposed to the raw existence of the sensation: it is the act-character which as it were ensouls the sensation, and is such as to make us [...] perceive this or that object, for instance see this tree, hear this ringing, smell this scent of flower, etc. (Husserl 2001, 2:105)

We also find this schema sensation versus apprehension in the case of affective experiences.

Husserl considers that, analogously to the “sensory” sensations (sensations of color, sound sensations, etc.), there are also *affective sensations*. These are the sensations of pleasure (*Lust*) and displeasure

(*Unlust*). The pain that I feel in my back, or during a migraine, is experienced, but it does not give rise, by itself, to any objectifying apprehension. On the other hand, like “sensory” sensations, those *Gefühlsempfindungen* can also play the role of a *hylè*, that is, of a material underpinning for an objective interpretation. As Husserl says again in this §15 of the *V<sup>th</sup> Logical Investigation*, the sensations of pleasure, because of the apprehension, come to “color” the object itself: when I see the loved one, not only do I shiver with pleasure (this is the merely hyletic dimension), but I “interpret” this pleasure as “surrounding” the person of the loved one: the latter appears as nimbed in pink.

I can now put forward the hypothesis that I want to defend.

My claim is that the eidetic unity of affective acts does not essentially come from a special “attitude”, nor from a special “object”, but stems originally from the presence, within them, of affective sensations. To put it very simply: let us take any intentional experience. It is the result of the “application” of an apprehension on a hyletic material, that is to say on certain contents of sensation. If, among these hyletic contents, there are affective sensations of pleasure or displeasure, then the intentional experience is an emotion, is an affective act. If, on the contrary, all the hyletic contents at the base of this act are sensory sensations, then we are dealing with a purely cognitive experience.

This hypothesis finds multiple confirmations in Husserl’s manuscripts and in particular in the texts that were gathered by one of Husserl’s assistants, Ludwig Landgrebe, in 1927, under the title of “*Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins*” (*Studies on the Structure of Consciousness*), which have just been published in the series of the *Husserliana*, and in which the most advanced analyses of affective consciousness in Husserl’s work are located.

For instance, in a text dated from the beginning of September 1911, Husserl writes that it is “beyond doubt” that “as soon as there is an attribution of value (*Für-wert-Halten*)” or “a joy (*Freude*)”, there are also “feelings (*Gefühle*) which as such belong to the same kind as sensitive feelings (*Empfindungsgefühle*)” (Husserl 2020, 69).

It thus appears that these sensitive feelings, or affective sensations – these two concepts are synonyms – which are in themselves non-intentional, are nonetheless the essential component of emotions, of joy, and of all evaluative intentional experiences. It is this component that allows us to identify the specificity of affective intentionality and to distinguish it from the canonical “cognitive” intentionality.

This interpretation also allows us to understand how affective acts can relate to values.

As Husserl says again in the same manuscript, those *Gefühlsempfindungen* (I quote) “thus belong in an essential way to the composition of all evaluative acts and first of all to those in which axiological objects as such “appear”, are given”. As a result, in order for (I quote) “an evaluation (*ein Werten*)”, that is, “a value prehension (*ein Wertnehmen*)” to “become experienced, the experienced feelings receive, in one way or another, something like an apprehension” (Husserl 2020, 69).

The parallel with merely perceptual acts thus still works: when an act character “takes on” pure and simple sense sensations, only “ontic” determinations, or natural qualities of things, appear: their color, shape, mass, etc. On the other hand, as soon as there are affective sensations at the base of the apprehension, the latter is also an apprehension of value: the thing appears not only blue, heavy, etc., but also beautiful, or on the contrary repulsive, disgusting, etc.

## 5. Conclusion

It is now time to conclude.

We have seen that contemporary philosophers of emotions disagree on the best way to capture the originality of affective intentionality. Some of them embrace the objectual or contentual solution, some others the attitudinal one.

We then emphasized that such conflict was actually crossing Husserl's phenomenology of affectivity: the perspective of pure psychology incited Husserl to defend an attitudinal position, while the one of the transcendental theory of reason inclined him to support the contentual point of view.

In the last section, we considered a solution to this dilemma: in truth, for Husserl, what makes, in priority, the originality of affective acts, it is neither their intentional object, nor the mode of relation to this object, but their hyletic underpinning. It is this component that gives an account of the eidetic unity of the affective kind and at the same time of the specificity of the emotional objectivity, that is to say, of value.

Hence, it appears that Husserl has a lot to say to the contemporary philosophy of emotions: he proposes and defends theses which, in many respects, allow to solve the pitfalls with which the current theories of emotion are confronted.

I thank you very much and I look forward to your comments.

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