

ON THE “GREEN” OF THE “GOLDEN TREE” OF LIFE

ACERCA DEL “VERDE” DEL “ÁRBOL DORADO” DE LA VIDA

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Abstract: This essay has as a keystone the words in which Husserl identifies life with the flux of lived experiences. It attempts a phenomenological approach to primary consciousness. Starting from the reduction to the sphere of “my ownness”, it then makes reference to the issue of the “living present” (two important themes where life is at stake); afterwards, it goes to the notion of reason in Husserl in its relationship with life and the lived experiences of the feeling of being alive, such as “*connatus*” as originary intuition, and the concept, stemming from Ortega y Gasset, of “living reason” (*razón vital*). As a last issue, a description is made of those features of life expounded by Husserl that can be interpreted in reference to “the green of the golden tree”.

Key Words: Life, Ownness, Living Present, Living Reason, Golden Tree, Flux, Conatus.

Resumen: Este estudio tiene como clave de bóveda la frase en que Husserl identifica la vida con el fluir de las vivencias. Intenta una aproximación fenomenológica a la conciencia primaria. Parte de la reducción al ámbito de “lo mío propio”. A continuación se hace referencia al tema del “presente viviente” (dos temas importantes caracterizados por la vida); luego se pasa a la concepción de la razón en Husserl en relación con la vida y las vivencias del sentimiento de vivir, tales como “*conatus*” como intuición originaria, y al concepto orteguiano de *razón vital*. Como última cuestión, se estudian los rasgos de la vida expuestos por Husserl que puedan ser interpretados con referencia a “el verde del árbol dorado”.

Palabras clave: Vida, lo-mío-propio, propiedad, presente viviente, razón vital, árbol dorado, flujo, conatus.

*Young friend, every theory is grey.
But green is the golden tree of life*

Goethe

Although Goethe’s words (chosen as epigraph) refer to a tree, this study does not deal with life in nature. Its issues are the following: 1) It deals with some of Husserl’s texts on life. 2) In order to approach to the primal consciousness, a reduction is performed to the sphere of “my ownness”. 3) The “living present”. 4) The idea of reason by Husserl, and feelings such as “*conatus*” and

concepts as “vital reason”. 5) The way the “green” of life is conceived by Husserl.

1. A TEXT ON LIFE

The starting point is a text of the First of the *Cartesian Meditations* (*I CM*). Therein, after considering formal and material regions as index of transcendental systems of evidences, it leads back to

the synthesis of objective perceptions and other objective intuitions, which extends throughout the unity of *life as a whole*, and is such, that the world is at all times intended –and can become thematic– as a unit. Consequently the world is a universal problem of egology, as is likewise the whole of *conscious life*, in its *immanent temporality*, when we direct our regard to the purely immanent realm.¹

This text is significant inasmuch as it identifies conscious life and immanent time.

In § 9 of the *I CM*, Husserl explicitly acknowledges being indebted to Descartes, concerning “the fundamental transcendental method of *epojé*, as far as it goes back to the last reality: I myself as the pure ego with the stream of my *cogitations*”².

If we take the unitary objective world as a transcendental clue, it leads back to the synthesis of objective perceptions and other objective intuitions, which extends throughout the unity of life as a whole, and is such that the world is at all times intended –and can become thematic– as a unit. Consequently the world is a universal problem of egology, as is likewise the whole of conscious life, in its immanent temporality, when we direct our regard to the purely immanent realm.

Even if it is true that the past of the corresponding subjectivity depends on memory³, it cannot be said that memory is apodictic, but, Husserl says, the denial of the apodicticity of the “I exist” on this basis would be absurd.

¹ E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*. English version by Dorion Cairns, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960; p. 53. The emphasis is mine.

² *Ibidem*, p. 53.

³ *Ibidem*, cf. § 24, pp. 57-58.

2. THE PRIMAL CONSCIOUSNESS. THE SPHERE OF MY "OWNNESS"

Our next step circumscribes the realm of my "ownness", according to Husserl's procedure in the *V CM*. In order to grasp the primal consciousness, reduction should be applied to all alien experience, i.e. the world or the other existing-fellows, as they are alien to the field of my consciousness of myself. Afterward, only the experience of being a psychophysical being in the world among others remains; the very sense of the word "world" is "being such for anybody". Although the world and the others have been reduced, I am constituted as member of the world, together with the exterior multiplicity.

What is manifest in the sphere of my ownness, is the transcendental ego. My ownness consists in the manifestation of actualities and potentialities of the flow of experiences.

I, the reduced "human Ego" ("psychophysical" Ego), am constituted, accordingly, as a member of the "world" with a multiplicity of "objects outside me". But I myself constitute all this in my "psyche" and bear it intentionally within me. If perchance it could be shown that everything constituted as part of my peculiar ownness, including then the reduced "world", belonged to the concrete essence of the constituting subject as an inseparable internal determination, then, in the Ego's self-explication, his peculiarly own world would be found as "inside" and, on the other hand, when running through that world straightforwardly, the Ego would find himself as a member among its "externalities" and would distinguish between himself and "the external world".⁴

We now ask how I, the Ego reduced to what is purely my own and, as thus reduced, included in the similarly reduced world-phenomenon and, on the other hand, I as transcendental ego, are related to one another. The transcendental ego emerged by virtue of my "parenthesizing" of the entire Objective world and all other (including all ideal) Objectivities. In consequence of this parenthesizing, I have become aware of myself as the transcendental ego, who constitutes in his constitutive life everything that is ever Objective for me – the ego of all constitutions, who exists in his actual and potential life processes and Ego-habitualities and who constitutes in them not only everything Objective but also

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 99

himself as identical ego. We can say now: In that I, as this ego, have constituted and am continually further constituting as a phenomenon (as a correlate) the world that exists for me, I have carried out a *mundanizing self-apperception*, under the title "Ego in the usual sense", in corresponding constitutive syntheses and am maintaining a continuing acceptance and further development of it⁵.

Senses, my own body, appear in my primordial sphere; thereby a kind of mediating intentionality can be seen.

As far as I know, Husserl did not systematically develop the issue "life". However, in his terminology two words: "lifeworld" and "flowing living present", are names for important realms of his philosophy.

3. THE LIVING PRESENT

May we speak about change in an authentic sense, if it is not possible to imagine non-change as a stable, not altered duration in the living present?

In the permanent flowing stream of the phenomenal phases, no possible change can be introduced.

There is no duration in the primal stream insofar as duration is the form of something that lasts, of an identity, through the temporal series that appears as being its duration.

But is there not something very peculiar here? Can one speak in the strict sense of change in a situation in which, after all, constancy, duration filled out without change, is inconceivable? No possible constancy can be attributed to the continuous flow of appearance-phases.

There is no duration in the original flow. For duration is the form of something enduring, of an enduring being, of something identical in the temporal sequence that functions as its duration. In the case of processes such as a thunderstorm, the motion of a shooting star, and so on, we have to do with unitary complexes of changes in enduring objects. Objective time is a form of "persisting" objects, of their changes and of other processes involved in them. "Process" is therefore a concept presupposing persistence. But persistence is unity that becomes constituted in the flow, and it pertains to the essence of the flow that no persistence can exist in it. Phases of experience and continuous series of phases exist in the flow. But such a

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 99-100.

phase is nothing that persists, any more than a continuous series of such phases is. To be sure, in a way it is also an objectivity. I can direct my regard towards a phase that stands out in the flow or towards an extended section of the flow, and I can identify it in repeated re-presentation, return to the same section again and again, and say: this section of the flow. And so too for the entire flow, which in the proper way, I can identify as this one flow. But what has been identifying, this identifying is not the unity of something that persists and it can never be such a unity. It belongs to the essence of persistence that what persists can persist as either changing or unchanging. Every change *idealiter* can pass over into a condition of constancy, every motion to rest and every rest into motion, and every qualitative change into a condition of qualitative constancy. The duration is then filled with "the same" phases.⁶

In events such as a storm, or the movement of a fiery meteor, etc., objective time is constituted and analyzed through the static approach of phenomenology, as well as through the genetic one, that also implies the regressive enquiry.

The phenomenological static approach entails an imaginary detaining of flowing experiences.

The static approach had been used to explore the constitution of objects. Since the twenties Husserl applies the genetic approach, resulting in an enrichment of the phenomenological thematic. It allows him to look for the primal source of constitution. The constitutive grounds of the performing of meanings, by means of the passive synthesis, goes back up to the instinctive activity.

4. HUSSERL'S IDEA OF REASON

Husserl's idea of reason relates to three ways of conscious experiences.

The foundational character of perception is usually accepted as a starting point of objectification. In *Logische Untersuchungen* (LU)⁷, Husserl deals with the meaning of the foundational viewpoint, highlighting the ambiguity of the word "presentation"; although it is possible to refer by means of it to what will afterward be known as "objectifying acts". Its strict meaning concerns the performance that justifies the object being presented in a certain way by the ob-

⁶ E. Husserl, *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917). Trans. John Barnett Brough, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, p. 118.

⁷ E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. Ed. Ursula Panzer, Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1950.

jectifying act; such is the sense (see *LU* 475-76), that definitively relates to the foundational act. Perception as objectifying act is accepted as a starting point. Afterward this priority decreases.

Later on, Husserl refers to not objectifying acts, and holds as acceptable the assertion that our grasping an object can from the very beginning be something else than perception; i.e. from the very beginning our experience can include affective characters. From the beginning things appear as agreeable or disagreeable, good or evil, attractive or repulsive. The orientation of eagerness functions the same way motivation does. According to Husserl, motivation is the fundamental law of spiritual life.

The practical function is the third way in which experiences take place. Moved affection means aspiration or wish, be it positive or negative, i.e. resulting from an approaching movement or from a flight. Here we have reached the realm of action: that to what we aspire to or that which is rejected. This performance is intertwined with the all-embracing form, "teleology". Husserl calls teleology "the form of all forms". Motive is attracted by the correlative *goal*; so that motivation is inseparable from teleology. The movement forwards also characterizes perceptive acts, that always tend to reach the highest possible degree of fulfillment. Inasmuch as affectivity is affected, there appears eagerness toward the good in which the affective value is embodied. In this way the practical realm becomes manifest, i.e. the realm of action tending to the aim it longs to reach.

What appears can be neutral, it is perceived according to our interests, or to pre-occupation, i.e., our project. In Husserl's Lectures on Ethics 1908-1914, he holds that there is a certain order that organizes the different modes of experience, and that descriptive experience precedes the evaluative one, and that the latter precedes the practical one.

Now we look after the archeology of instincts, which are the earliest forms of progressive experience. The sphere of instincts is unveiled by means of the phenomenological genetic retrospective inquiry. "Primal instincts are the primal beginning of transcendental genesis".

In the constitution of what is worldly in experience, there appear habitualities intertwined with instincts, thus it is possible to affirm a primal institution as being the essential form of the genesis (Ms. B III 3, pp. 1, 7). In this context Husserl alludes to our "transcendental birth" (Ms. E III, 9; p. 4).

This phrase neither concern the moment in which an active personal center, oriented toward the world, is able to constitute an object; nor the moment in which it disposes of the *latent* dispositions to work that way. The phrase refers to the beginning of the transcendental genesis; and is an originary presupposition concerning that genesis (Ms. K 11; p. 2). Original creative acts are the first ones in themselves. How does this state of affairs relate to the original awakening (birth)? Does it concern a pre-I as a referential center that has not yet a world, nor is a person? "Transcendental birth" does not allude to a child being born, as the newly born child is already an experiencing center of higher degree, it already has acquired experience, that starts in the maternal womb, it has perceptions and a perceptual horizon, together with which come other data of a different kind, new acquisitions on the basis of what has already been acquired; it is an "I of higher habitualities"⁸.

These assertions mean that the beginning of the transcendental genesis ought to be looked for even further, in a remote horizon of past, in the moment in which the primal ego was conceived and by means of the congenital instincts that are waking up and orient themselves toward its world, i.e. the maternal womb, and its own body. Today the technical means show the child's movements, it sucks his/her finger. We wonder if it concerns a primal experience that at the starting point results from chance or from instinct teleology, of instincts moved by a search of fulfillment starting from a certain lack of pleasure tending to satisfaction.

Step by step, an "effective system of instincts" is build up, in its play as congenital bud of the I, and its persistence as instincts system in the progressive development of the I and of its world, together with the correlative systematic fulfillment and constitution of fulfilling forms configure an ontological horizon and horizon of these forms. This primal essence, this congenital primal disposition of the I, is a necessary presupposition of any constitution (Ms E III 9, p. 4). Husserl calls "heritage" (*Erbmasse*) that sort of sedimentation of earlier experiences, without memory but still able to be awaken (Ms. K III 11, p. 4).

⁸ E. Husserl, Hua XV, p. 605. I have dealt with these issues more thoroughly in "*¿Es la afectividad una ampliación de la razón?*" in *Paideia Fenomenológica* 3, Santa Fe, 2011 (in print), Coord. Rabanaque and Fornari.

5. CONATUS AS PRIMARY INSTITUTION OF BEING ALIVE?

Is there a primary institution of the sense of being alive?

The only case in which a primal institution is impossible is the experience of our own death. As the experience of one's own death is the last one, from that moment on, as far as we know conscious no longer testify.

The fact is that, usually, it is not possible to recognize the moment of the primal institution; anyway, whatever has sense for us stands out of a transcendental history, i.e. of certain primal institution. The very moment in which the process of the institution took place, cannot be revisited, and therefore neither can our primal institution of the meaning of being alive.

Concerning the meaning of being alive, I deem important to retrieve the concept of "conatus" in the way that Spinoza grasped it. The concept alludes to evidence presenting every existing thing as striving to continue existing. Such evidence might have worked as primal institution. In daily life and having such institution already taken place, the feeling of being alive can be a feeling of a certain superabundance. Looking at the joy expressed in the eyes of very young children one presupposes the child is enjoying such superabundance. Any way, in grown-up people the feeling of being alive can also emerge from a quiet or from an immense joy; i.e. it is presumably acceptable that the moment Spinoza grasped the experience he named "conatus", expressed for him the very moment of the originally institution of the experience of being alive.

6. ON THE "GREEN" OF THE GOLDEN TREE OF LIFE

Goethe has definitely characterized the most outstanding traits of life by saying: "Young friend, grey is every theory, but green is the golden tree of life".

It might happen that a phenomenological approach to this issue turns to be a theoretical abstraction. It seems advisable to quote a phrase from J. Ortega y Gasset, in order to approach the green of the tree of life. Ortega says: "Our most deeply rooted convictions are the most suspicious ones, they built up our limits, our frontier, our imprisonment. Life is an inconsequential thing, if it is not inhabited by a formidable pawing eagerness to push away its frontiers. One

lives inasmuch as one wants to live more and more"⁹. Ortega's words describe a feeling of being alive that shows his experience of "the green" of life.

Husserl demands from the phenomenologist, and from the man of science, to carry out an archontic mission. Temporality has been shown as an essential trait of the primal consciousness, which equals life. Temporalization entails historicity, consequently the question arises "where to?", as well as the discussion on the legitimacy of that question. The question looks for the sense of life.

Inasmuch as temporalization is the structure of life ¹⁰, and as temporalization it is impregnated by teleology, which is "the form of all forms", the proper of the *telos* is always attract toward what is better and superior. This facticity concerns the human being as well, in its effort to accomplish its being him/herself, in response to one's own vocation. In order to accomplish the most fruitful development of the human being, Husserl counts upon the exercise of reason; which is capable of being creative in the sense of *telos*. Reason does not merely objectify, but also evaluates and cares for the practical realm. This idea of reason unifying three different functions, means a creative reason in accordance with the *telos*.

A significative issue in Husserl is his interest for "renewal" (*Erneurung*) which does not merely mean change of the state of affairs, it alludes to engagement of reason in order to overcome obsolete sedimentations. Green of life by Husserl concern this challenge to combat "lazy reason". He stresses the urgent obligation by those who are awake, to awaken his/her sleeping existing-fellows, he or she, who are awake eludes the conventional state of affairs, on which lazy reason sleeps. For Husserl's philosophy the green of life means challenge, engagement for one self and for the others, as well as for the community.

Ortega y Gasset's concept of "vital reason" seems to be an adequate name for Husserl's idea of a reason deeply engaged for the responsible development.

⁹ J. Ortega y Gasset, *La deshumanización del arte*, Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 4^a. ed. 1954, pp. 23-24 (my translation).

¹⁰ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 27, p. 60