

Christian Lotz, From Affectivity to Subjectivity. Husserl's Phenomenology Revisited

**Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 169 Pages, ISBN 9780230535336,
\$74.95/€58.99**

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Published online: 13 May 2010
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Christian Lotz' new book, *From Affectivity to Subjectivity. Husserl's Phenomenology Revisited*, claims, as the subtitle of the book announces, to provide a new perspective on Husserl. In the short introduction preceding the three main chapters, one reads that the author aims at a renewed investigation of familiar topics of Husserlian phenomenology, such as the reduction (Chap. 1), embodiment (Chap. 2) and subjectivity (Chap. 3), "without repeating them" (p. 4). Addressing these key issues, the author intends to connect phenomenological investigations of perception, values and different forms of affection in order to gain a deeper understanding of subjectivity; finally, he engages in a discussion of time consciousness, value theory and the relation between Husserl and other philosophers such as Fichte and Levinas. Given the number of topics that the book covers, *From Affectivity to Subjectivity* is a proportionally slim book; overall it takes up 169 pages of text (including footnotes and bibliography). The book is based on an English translation of a compilation of articles published in German journals, but the articles were, as the author writes in his acknowledgements, already written as a "seed for a book project" (p. ix). To compose a book out of a number of articles is a common practice in current academic philosophy. Nonetheless, it seems questionable to the reviewer whether the author succeeded in compiling the articles into a comprehensive text. But let us take a closer look at Lotz' argumentation.

In his Introduction Lotz reflects upon what we do when we are doing phenomenology. Here philosophical thinking is characterized—in opposition to our everyday life thinking—as a "higher form of consciousness" (p. 2) that takes the objects from our everyday life and transforms them into "a matter of thought" (ibid.). Doing phenomenology, as Lotz describes it, means to detach oneself from the factual in favour of the possible in order to investigate different ways of intending the factual and possible. Therefore, for Lotz, it is the "eidetic method," as

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a specific technique to imaginatively transform the real into various other possibilities, which is the primary phenomenological method. It is only via imagination that we are able to unfold the realm of philosophy.

In Chap. 1, *Phenomenology*, Lotz pursues these methodological considerations by discussing the relation between the eidetic and the transcendental reduction in more detail. According to Lotz, the different methodical operations that Husserl developed are expressions of different aims Husserl followed throughout his philosophical life: on the one hand, Husserl never gave up the Cartesian search for apodictic and absolute certainty; on the other hand, he also never lost track of his empirical and psychological roots (cf. p. 8). For Lotz, the transcendental reduction serves the first, Cartesian, motive, while the eidetic reduction does justice to Husserl's interests in the dimension of the empirical. Whereas Husserl has, according to Lotz, failed with respect to the "transcendental approach"—i.e., the search for certainty—one can very well follow the "empirical" path (ibid.).

In what follows, Lotz aims at investigating the "empirical" as the everyday life sources of phenomenology. In so doing, he provides a very unusual interpretation of the role and aim of eidetics in Husserlian phenomenology. Lotz correctly describes the empirical roots of the eidetic method, but to what extent is the eidetic method itself an empirical endeavour? Lotz does not develop this discussion any further. Instead, he argues that Husserl's phenomenological methodology has its roots in three motives, all of which we recognise as everyday human activities: *imagination, play and misunderstanding*. These "activities" are proto-versions of doing phenomenology. They constitute "the anthropological roots of the phenomenological realm" (p. 12). Lotz argues for a primacy of these activities over reflection (cf. p. 5). For him it is "play that is the decisive moment for discovering phenomenological contents at all" (p. 9). In play as well as in phenomenological research, we are not interested in the facticity of things but are directed to the world in an "as if" mode. Both play and eidetic intuition involve a loss of factuality; we indulge in the sphere of the possible. Thus, for Lotz, playing and doing phenomenology are similar activities.

What is the relation between these methodological discussions and Lotz's overall interest in affectivity and subjectivity? In Chap. 2, *Affectivity*, Lotz develops the relation between subjectivity and affectivity in terms of "self-relation." Self-relation is described as originating in affectivity. Lotz argues for an "experiential" (in contrast to reflective?) understanding of affection grounded in bodily experience. The body is taken to be the locus where spontaneity and affectivity, self and other converge. Here Lotz basically follows Husserl's concept of affection as based on kinaesthesia, i.e., on bodily perceptual movement (cf. p. 44).

In order to explicate a certain ambiguity inherent in the concept of bodily affection, Lotz turns to Emmanuel Lévinas' concept of "contact." According to Lotz, "contact" entails both a form of self-referentiality and an openness to the Other. To contact means always to be contacted. To see, hear etc., means to undergo contact with the seen and heard. For Lévinas, as Lotz describes it, sensibility is, in itself, "already sensibility for an Other, a sensibility that is already differentiated from self-sensing" (p. 74). Lotz interprets Levinas' discussion of the sensibility for the Other and its self-affective character as a "valuing-relation" (ibid.). Thus in

Lévinasian terms sensibility may not be interpreted merely as the moment of being-contacted within the act of contacting; it is a form of self-referentiality that must be understood in terms of value. The “enjoyment” of sensibility expresses a positive value towards one’s own being (ibid.). Lotz follows Levinas in taking this difference within sensibility to go beyond theoretical inquiry; for Lotz this difference is *proto-ethical* (cf. p. 43).

The presentation of Lévinas’ and Husserl’s accounts of being affected by another subject provide a very clear picture of the aims and presuppositions of a phenomenological investigation of intersubjectivity. Lotz shows that the criticism of the phenomenological approach to intersubjectivity is often based on a misunderstanding of the aims and methodology of phenomenology. A phenomenological approach to the problem of the “other mind”, as Lotz describes it, does not aim to prove the existence of the Other (thereby negating the possibility of solipsism); it merely describes concrete phenomena of experiencing the Other (cf. p. 92). Yet Lotz is not fully satisfied with the phenomenological answer to this problem. He claims that Husserl has failed to show that fulfilment by appresentation of the Other is excluded *in principle*. However, Lotz does not offer a detailed analysis of this critique but instead repeats his summary of Husserl’s analysis of intersubjective encounter as bodily co-presence and empathy (cf. p. 99f.). Thus it remains unclear what exactly it is that is lacking in Husserl’s analysis.

In the third chapter Lotz offers a discussion of another well-plowed field of phenomenology: the temporal dimension of subjectivity. For Lotz, the past is another dimension of subjectivity that cannot be rendered fully intelligible by transcendental phenomenology, “inasmuch as the past of the self constitutes itself in an *unavailable* form” (p. 117). Lotz describes two ways of dealing with the problem of the alleged unavailability of the past to the subject—a practical and a theoretical one. The answer to the practical question—whether we can refer to our past at all—is positive: we have access to our past via memory. The theoretical problem—whether we can have “knowledge” about the past—is, according to Lotz, more difficult. Is memory nothing but a presentification of something that has passed and thus only another present moment (cf. ibid.)? If that is so, what I take to be the past could also be a fiction, an invention. I have no direct access to the past moment to prove my memory right or wrong.

For Lotz this problem is closely related to problem of subjectivity as such. He refers to Husserl’s *Analyses of Passive Synthesis*, where Husserl asks whether it is possible to speak of subjectivity as a temporally constituted unity. For Husserl, as Lotz portrays it, only the process of recollection allows us to speak of a unity of self: “[S]ince the primal temporalization of consciousness in the living present and the process of retentive modification are still *not identifying and reproductive*, it is only with recollection that we can say that a life history is constituted *for an I* in these memories—namely, for the I that *carries out* these acts of remembering” (p. 118f.). It is through these acts of recollection that the self-constitution of an I takes place. But does this mean that there is no “self” without recollection? Is consciousness an anonymous process that only becomes an individual one through recollection or reflection? And is the insight into the unavailability of the past presence via reflection not exactly a phenomenological insight?

Lotz quotes some passages in *Analyses of Passive Synthesis* (XI, 124; 326f. cit. Lotz p. 118f.), in which Husserl speaks of the problem of the temporal constitution of the I, but it seems that Lotz ignores the difference between Husserl's quest for subjectivity as "*Lebendige Gegenwart*" (lived presence) and the capacity of the I to identify itself in time and space. Lotz briefly mentions Dan Zahavi and his account of prereflective self-awareness (cf. 120). However, he does not develop the relation between his own criticism and the positive account Zahavi gives of the issue at stake. According to Zahavi's well-known interpretation of Husserl, awareness always already entails a minimal form self-awareness. If I am directed towards the world I am always already aware of this directedness. I do not have to reflect upon myself to understand myself as a conscious being; I do not need some sort of recollection or introspection to be aware of my first-person-perspective. Recollection is a certain form of reflection that already presupposes a first-person-perspective (cf. Zahavi 2006, p. 106). For Lotz, in contrast, it is still an open and pressing phenomenological question *how* the simultaneity of presentification and presentifying consciousness is constituted (cf. p. 122). Lotz does not give an answer himself, nor does he attempt to find one in Husserl or the abundant phenomenological research that has been already done in this field. Rather, he writes that Husserl's concurrent unwillingness to give up transcendental phenomenology leads to a "remarkable gap between what is promised methodologically and what is returned in concrete results" (ibid.).

For Lotz—quite surprisingly to this reviewer—the only way out is "deconstruction": "It seems to me," he writes, "that when we really analyze the 'deep' structures of Husserl's analyses of *concrete* phenomena, such as affection and memory, we are forced to come to a different result, particularly because these 'phenomena' or concepts deconstruct themselves" (ibid.). But what does Lotz mean by "deconstruction" here? According to Lotz, not a single phenomenological work has been "successful in fulfilling Husserl's claim: to be successful in bringing all moments of the concepts in question to full intuitive presence" (ibid.). But what point is Lotz trying to make? It is far too simple to portray Husserl's phenomenology in this manner. Husserl never simply aimed at "intuitive presence"; he was interested in a method that would enable us to reflectively *reconstruct* and analyse the structure of our experiential live. Husserl was well aware of the problem of reflection, and it is exactly this awareness that prevents his philosophy from adopting a naïve "myth of the given." How can one argue for the self-destructive nature of concepts like subjectivity, affectivity, temporality, etc. and at the same time remain within a Husserlian framework, as Lotz claims to do? And furthermore; if phenomenological analyses deconstruct themselves, what is the status of Lotz's own approach?

The author seems to be unsure about this issue himself when he writes in his summary that his interpretation of selected methodological and concrete issues in Husserl "is a discovery of what Husserl was *really thinking*" (p. 135; my emphasis). On the other hand, he expresses "hope that the reader has gained a slightly *different* view of Husserl's thinking and a slightly *different* understanding of Husserlian concepts" (ibid.). This vagueness is constitutive for the argumentative structure of the whole book. And it is this vagueness of the formulations of the author's aims

and interests that makes it difficult to give a fruitful and coherent interpretation of the book as a whole.

Why is it so difficult to understand the aims of the book? Above all, it is hard to see how Lotz' methodological considerations are compatible with Husserl's own understanding of the phenomenological method. Lotz' analyses of the parallels between play and doing phenomenology are both interesting and fruitful (even if they are not particularly original), but his understanding of the eidetic method as the *primary* phenomenological method is problematic for at least four reasons.

First, it is unclear what Lotz' methodological claims really are. How are we to understand the two options he provides with regard to the phenomenological endeavour? Can one really characterize the relation between the eidetic and the phenomenological reduction as an either-or? And if that is indeed what Lotz wants to claim, how can we choose between the two and still claim to do phenomenology in a Husserlian sense?

For Husserl, reflection and imagination are not two mutually exclusive "methods" of phenomenology; we cannot do without either. Through pure repetition and phantasizing we would remain at the level of a positive directedness towards the world. A radical break with the natural attitude is necessary in order to gain access to it as such. In order to serve its philosophical purpose, the eidetic variation cannot be a mere "explicit and disciplined extension of everyday aimless play consciousness" (p. 10), as Lotz writes. As developed by Husserl, eidetic variation is not only a variation of playful phantasizing; it is not directed at individual objects in the world but at "essences." Of course, the parallels between "normal" experiences—such as play and imagination—and phenomenologically transformed experiences are not incidental. But whereas the everyday-life perspective is directed at the world (be it in a playful mode or not), the phenomenologist is directed at exactly this being-directed-to-the-world, to the "natural attitude." And furthermore, the "playfulness" of the phenomenologist is exclusively for the sake of arriving at essences, not an end in itself (for the sake of "relaxation" from everyday toils).

If we read Lotz' suggestions in a weaker sense—as aiming for a better *understanding* of the eidetic method by the use of a comparison with "play-consciousness"—one still must ask whether Lotz' characterization of eidetics is adequate. For the purpose of such comparison we must still carefully consider the relationship between quotidian imagination, which aims as "freeing ourselves from the here and now," and phenomenological imagination, which aims at disclosing the very structure of experience. In everyday imagination we still (tacitly) presuppose that there is a "real" world as opposed to the imagined one, a distinction that is not valid within the phenomenological attitude. Eidetic judgements are based on acts of intuition but are, as judgments, indifferent with regard to their perceptual or imaginative foundation (cf., e.g., Hua [XXVI](#), p. 124). The meaning content of eidetic judgements is independent from any kind of experience. This means that the eidetic variation as process of phantasy only provides the intuitive ground for the transcendental reduction but is not sufficient with regard to the phenomenological interest. The phenomenological reduction is dependent on the acceptance of the principle of intuition, of the self-givenness of objects as a universal philosophical

method. But this does not mean that we can remain on the level of pure intuition, as Lotz describes it—be it in the form of perception or imagination –, if we want to investigate the givenness of meaning-contents. Following Lotz' approach, the phenomenological project would lose both its specific sphere and mode of inquiry. The subject of phenomenological investigation is not a perceived or imagined "this", but *meaning*. This is the most important result of the reduction: the phenomenological reduction has to precede the eidetic reduction. The two options Lotz provides—either performing the reduction and being sentenced to Cartesianism or following the eidetic method of "pure play" and staying in the realm of the empirical—are neither satisfying with regard to the specific purpose of phenomenology nor compatible with Husserlian phenomenology.

A *second* critical point concerning Lotz' methodological assumptions concerns the characterization of phenomenology as "play." It is not clear to the reviewer what Lotz means by this notion. Obviously "playing" does not refer to playing a game like chess but rather to "play" in the way Gadamer uses the term in *Truth and Method*—as playful enjoyment of possibilities (cf. Gadamer 1960, pp. 111–116). It is nothing we are actively doing, but something we are involved in. Or, as Lotz writes, "from Husserl's point of view, it is the game and not the player that determines the rules" (p. 21f.). For Lotz, "play" as a philosophical method of "pure playing" (p. 21) is not only a matter of sheer enjoyment but always simultaneously aims at dismantling the limits of the "game" (ibid.). In carrying out the eidetic reduction as a playful variation of reality, we reach the limits of the "game" and thereby detect its "rules," i.e., the necessary invariables of our being-in-the-world (ibid.).

To explicate his concept of play as eidetics, Lotz supplies an example of an "eidetic variation" of a person: "Now in order to establish what character this person has—how [the] person actually is 'in essence'—I do the following: I consider how this person may behave in all possible situations. Thus I am varying the experience that I already have of this person. [...] In other words, I use the fantasy variation to *imagine* that the person is the way I think this person 'actually' is" (p. 16). The second methodical step consists in moving from "real possibility to pure possibility" (ibid.); i.e., we no longer refer to a "fact" of experience, an actually perceived, remembered, etc. object. The object to which we turn in a phenomenologically interested attitude is purely phantasizable (p. 17). This example shows very well an ambiguity inherent in Lotz' approach with regard to the phenomenological attitude. An eidetic understanding of a person in the phenomenological sense is, as Lotz himself notes, never interested in a distinct person; this would be an empirical, e.g., psychological approach. The phenomenologist is not interested in the specific personhood of an individual person but in the very constitution of "personhood" as such, as a complex intentional content. Husserl is very clear that individuals do not "possess" essences, nor are objects realizations of Platonic ideas. Moreover, each object can be investigated as "index" for a certain essential structure of transcendental subjectivity (cf., e.g., Hua XIII, p. 182; Hua IX, p. 250). Thus, the phenomenological reduction does not turn the concept of "essence" into a transcendental one but specifies the scope of phenomenological research into essences as belonging to the sphere of transcendental subjectivity.

What is missing in Lotz' characterization of the eidetic method is a clear-cut distinction between the goals of everyday playful imagination and a philosophical investigation.

A *third* problem concerns the relation between play and subjectivity and thereby between the method and object of investigation. Lotz writes that “from Husserl's point of view, it is the game and not the player that determines the rules” (p. 21f.). But does that mean that our intentional life is a play without a player? This is crucial insofar as it concerns the overall topic of the book: subjectivity and affectivity. Does it make sense to speak of a *primacy* of affectivity, or to say that we are, as it were, being played (cf. p. 30)? And if we go this route, is this tantamount to the claim that subjectivity *generally* has to be understood in terms of passivity and affectivity? Is the distinction between affectivity and spontaneity prior to the one between subject and world? Or is this only the case if we already argue from a phenomenological perspective, i.e., from the perspective of transcendental subjectivity? If the latter is the case, the concepts of affectivity, passivity, etc. cannot be invoked to call the very concept of subjectivity into question. Instead, a phenomenological investigation of “subjectivity” enables us to understand the different dimensions of intentional life.

Lotz puts emphasis on a certain “loss” of the empirical self in play as well as in philosophical thinking (cf. pp. 21, 30). But one should keep in mind that “self-forgetfulness” is exactly the characteristic of the natural, non-phenomenological attitude. In doing phenomenology, the object does not only appear in the mode of “as if” (p. 22), but as “intended,” as perceived, dreamed, imagined, etc. In finding the constructive aspects of perception, imagination, etc., we detect the “self” as the “dative of manifestation,” as that to which something appears as perceived, dreamed etc. Lotz himself refers to this in his last chapter when he writes about the *Kaizo*-articles (cf. pp. 128–132). Yet the subjectivity that becomes thematic is neither identical with the “factual subject” performing the reduction nor with some substantial Cartesian “ego” supposedly presupposed by any intentional act. It is rather this very factual subjectivity that we have to “lose” by doing phenomenology via the reduction in order to gain insight into transcendental subjectivity. In this sense, the subjectivity disclosed in phenomenological inquiry is not a “human activity” (p. 24), as Lotz writes, but a realm of meaning.¹ This realm of meaning can be investigated with regard to its noetic structures (the I-pole) and noematic structures (the object-pole).

Fourth, Lotz' interpretation of the aims and limits of a Husserlian approach to intersubjectivity is far from clear. On the one hand, he points to significant similarities between a Levinasian and a Husserlian phenomenology of intersubjectivity and affectivity. On the other hand, he writes that Husserl had, in contrast to Levinas, failed to provide a satisfying description of “affection from the outside”,

¹ In his concluding section the author even states that “subjectivity must be understood as a concrete anthropological unity” (p. 132), without explaining what he means by this. How is one to understand the usage of the term “anthropological” with regard to the roots of phenomenological research in “human activities,” and how is one to connect them with Lotz' interest in Lévinas and Husserl? Given that neither Husserl's nor Lévinas' work is traditionally considered as anthropological, a strong claim like that calls for further explanation. The question of how we can understand transcendental subjectivity as an “anthropological unit” remains open.

i.e., affection from another subject. But what is meant by affection “from the outside”? Is hetero-affection affection from the outside? In which sense is self-affection an “internal” process? Or are self- and hetero-affection rather different ways of understanding affection, different directions of investigation? How can we understand alterity in terms of “affection”? What is the difference between being affected by bad weather and being affected by another person? Lotz does not give an account of the different presuppositions inherent in the different approaches to affectivity he uses in his analyses, nor is he clear about their correlation.

Lotz’ critique of Husserl’s approach to intersubjectivity is surprising and confusing since, having offered such a critique, he goes on to refer explicitly to Husserl’s account of embodiment, time, empathy and ethics in order to explicate those questions Husserl allegedly had failed to address (cf. p. 96). Further, in the passages on intersubjectivity and embodiment there is no detailed analysis of how different forms of apprehending alterity actually affect the constitution of the self and vice versa. The concepts of “pairing” and “mirror consciousness” seem to describe a very harmonious picture of the self-other relation. One might ask whether these concepts suffice to express the practical-ethical dimension of Husserlian phenomenology that interests Lotz.

To sum up the critical points with regard to *Affectivity to Subjectivity*: What is missing is a clear picture of Lotz’ own phenomenological approach, his own presuppositions, motivations, and aims. Lotz’ own relation to Husserlian phenomenology remains a mystery. On the one hand, the book entails a defense of Husserl’s approach against analytic and classical transcendental philosophy. It also vindicates a certain approach to Husserl, in contrast to contemporary and historical understandings of Husserlian phenomenology as Cartesianism, intellectualism, rationalism, and so on. On the other hand, one finds numerous extremely critical passages concerning the very possibility of phenomenology. Thus, one wonders whether the book is an attempt to understand Husserl’s work, or an attempt to “deconstruct” it. “Repetition”, as Lotz writes, “is not possible, every new perspective adds to the original account.”² Lotz’ book involves many different approaches, but all these different approaches do not add up to a coherent one.

One might ask about the ideal reader of this book. The phenomenologically informed reader will not find many new discussions but will encounter interesting bits and pieces and some beautiful phenomenological descriptions. Phenomenologists who do not share Lotz’ (in themselves unclear) methodological assumptions, however, will find the book too tentative and lacking in sufficient argumentation. A reader looking for insight into the contemporary development of Husserlian phenomenology will most certainly be confused: What is contemporary phenomenology all about? Do we need a “revision” of Husserlian phenomenology? What can we expect from it? What are we doing when we are doing phenomenology? Is there a common ground of phenomenological research? These are very important questions, and Lotz raises them compellingly in his introduction. Nonetheless, after finishing the text readers might remain confused about these very questions. In his

² Yet, Lotz repeats himself: on page 67 one finds almost identical text-parts from paragraph 2.1 (cf. p. 45).

introduction Lotz states that the “contemporary discourse sometimes forgets that philosophical thinking not only has to do with rigorous arguments, but also with the beauty of a creative, almost artistic process, which philosophy undoubtedly is” (p. 3). Even if the reader is sympathetic with this account, in the end she might still expect phenomenology to be more than an endless game.

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