

# CHAPTER NINE

## HUSSERL AND THE TRUTH OF HEDONISM

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## §1

In the lectures on ethics and theory of values, delivered by Husserl at the University of Freiburg in 1920 and in 1924,<sup>1</sup> the doctrine of hedonism plays a paramount role. Far from being considered simply as a particular ethical approach among others, hedonism is instead pictured as “the antagonist of a true ethics”<sup>2</sup> and virtually identified with the empiricist and skeptical attitude towards ethics and practical reason as such. Accordingly, hedonism, as seen by Husserl, is not a historically determined ethical theory, but an ever-lasting philosophical mistake, whose driving motives are integral to the very essence of practical reason itself, just as epistemic skepticism appears as the unavoidable stumbling block facing any philosophical understanding of logic and the theory of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

This *heuristic over-determination of hedonism* in Husserl’s lectures on ethics of the 1920s appears to be significant, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it clearly emerges as a novelty, since the meaning and the scope of hedonism were left unnoticed in the famous lessons on formal ethics of 1914,<sup>4</sup> where Husserl engaged in a systematic critique of moral skepticism. In these lectures, Husserl hardly ever discusses hedonism, and where he does, it is always in a rather sketchy and superficial way.<sup>5</sup> However, as soon

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl, E. (2004). *Einleitung in die Ethik. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1920/1924*, ed. Henning Peucker, Husserliana XXXVII. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl, 2004, p. 39: „Gegenspieler einer wirklichen Ethik.“

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 2004, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl, E. (1988). *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre (1908-1914)*, ed. U. Melle, Husserliana XXVIII. Dordrech: Kluwer, pp. 402-413.

epistemology—namely, through recognizing its innermost component of ‘truth’, while rejecting its fundamentally erroneous claims.

The question of the relationship between Husserl and hedonism is, therefore, a broad one. One might be tempted to say that it is as broad as the question of a phenomenological ethics as such. Accordingly, the aim of this short paper cannot be that of providing a full account—be it historical or systematical—of such a relationship. Rather, we will try to reconstruct, as much as this is possible in the limited space allowed, the strategy behind Husserl’s appraisal and criticism of hedonism in his late Freiburg lectures. We will focus in particular on the way in which Husserl redefines some core tenets of ethical hedonism and unexpectedly integrates within the rationalistic framework of a phenomenological ethics revolving around the central notion of value (conceived as both the determinant motive of ethical conduct and the source of moral normativity). As we shall see, far from dismissing the idea that *pleasure plays a fundamental role in ethics*, Husserl’s historical critique of hedonism ends up emphasizing—like Brentano and unlike Kant—not only the importance of pleasure and joy in our moral life, but also its constitutive role in the apprehension of values, which establish duties and determine the motives of our conduct. It is precisely in this sense that we might be allowed to speak of the ‘core of truth’ that Husserl concedes to hedonism, in contrast with Kant’s purely deontological moral philosophy, which grounds the very ethical norms of conduct on a supposedly purely formal categorical imperative. If we are not too far off the mark, understanding the ‘truth’ of hedonism—namely, inscribing the experience of pleasure within the objective framework of a phenomenology of values—may turn out to be one of Husserl’s most original contributions to the achievement of that ‘true ethics’ (*wirkliche Ethik*) of which hedonism itself appears to be the ‘antagonist’.

## §2

In his lectures *Introduction to ethics* of 1920/24 Husserl articulates his discussion of hedonism in two parts, corresponding roughly to ancient and modern hedonism. In the first part (far less detailed and ramified than the second), Husserl credits Aristippus as the first philosopher having formulated the core principle of hedonism itself:

Pleasure is good and good is pleasure. The concepts of pleasure and good—i.e. that to which one should aspire to from a practical standpoint—coincide, as well as those of aversion and bad from a practical standpoint.<sup>1</sup>

Stated in the language of values, what we may dub the ‘hedonistic principle’ claims that something is a value for someone only insofar as it can be a source of pleasure; conversely, it is a disvalue only insofar as it can be a source of pain. Rephrased in the language of aims, this amounts to saying that seeking pleasure and avoiding pain are the most fundamental aims of human life.

Needless to say, because of its great generality, the hedonistic principle conveyed by Husserl can hardly do justice to the subtlety and variety of the hedonist doctrines formulated in ancient times. Nevertheless, Husserl seems to believe that in spite of its generality, this principle can usefully serve as a guiding thread to begin picturing the philosophical portrait of hedonism, in order to identify its core assumptions and uncover its inner flaws. Accordingly, the equation pleasure=good, though clearly not sufficient, is nevertheless a necessary condition for an ethical theory to be labeled as hedonistic.

Having identified his target, Husserl’s argument against what he takes to be the ancient variety of hedonism runs as follows: (1) concepts such as ‘true’ and ‘false’, ‘just’ and ‘unjust’, ‘good’, ‘evil’ and the like, have an intrinsic *normative* character, i.e., they are concepts of normative ideas pertaining to specific classes of acts. The conceptual pair ‘true/false’ plays a normative role for cognitive acts belonging to the class of judgments, whereas ‘just/unjust’ and ‘good/evil’ are conceptual pairs of normative ideas pertaining to acts belonging to the practical sphere of will. (2) Now, hedonism is a form of empiricism, insofar as it is an attempt to ground morality in the factual and contingent nature of human beings. Accordingly, the hedonistic principle boils down to the claim that, *as a matter of fact*, humans seek pleasure and only pleasure and try to derive ethical consequences from this fact. It seems clear that such an approach is blind to the normative character of moral ideas. (3) However, this is absurd, since from the mere *fact* of that a form of behaviour is constantly adopted, it does not follow that this form of behaviour *in principle* has a moral value. In other words, Husserl criticizes ancient hedonism for failing to distinguish between the *quid juris* and the *quid facti* of ethical life. Accordingly, Husserl considers that the appearance of Cyrenaic hedonism marked a sharp step

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl, 2004, pp. 39-40 “Die Lust ist das Gute, und das Gute ist die Lust. Die Begriffe Lust und Gutes, oder praktisch Anzustrebendes decken sich, ebenso Unlust und praktisch Schlechtes”.

backward with respect to Socrates, who had stressed the need to ground ethics *not* on factual observations but on ‘eidetic’ insights into the essence of moral virtues such as justice, wisdom, and piety. Unsurprisingly, Husserl here contrasts the objective and universally binding character of the *eidos* with the contingent facticity of the empirical traits of human psychology, the latter being unfit to ground any normativity—be this logical or ethical, cognitive or practical.

Again, one could sensibly express serious doubts over the legitimacy of criticizing Cyrenaic hedonism in particular—and ancient hedonism in general—along these lines. Like Roberto Brigati, one could question the accuracy of Husserl’s understanding of ancient hedonism as a form of inconsistent empiricism.<sup>2</sup> However, our reason for not indulging in a meta-critique of the soundness of Husserl’s appraisal of ancient hedonism is that, in our view, this would divert attention from something more crucial, namely the *role* of such a critical appraisal in the context of the opposition between ancient and modern hedonism.

### §3

Generally speaking, it is safe to say that in his historical surveys, Husserl usually tends to consider the different ‘historical’ forms of a given philosophical position as the factual instances of philosophical ideas revolving around a conceptual core—a core whose content can be explicated independently from the contingent features of its historical instantiations. In this regard, the historical surveys presented in Husserl’s lectures on ethics are no exception: ancient and modern hedonism are described as two historically contingent configurations of the very same hedonistic principle. But one question is still left unanswered: how do they differ? **If both equate pleasure and good, to what extent does the modern variety of hedonism differ from the ancient?**

The interesting point that we would like to stress relates precisely to the way in which Husserl conceives of **the difference between ancient and modern hedonism as a difference between an empirical and an a priori foundation of the validity of the hedonistic principle.** This point can be summarized as follows: (i) hedonism—namely the practical doctrine identifying good with pleasure—is the fundamental form of ethical scepticism; (ii) yet ethical scepticism has, historically, taken two different forms; (iii) in ancient times, the hedonistic principle was grounded upon

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<sup>2</sup> Brigati, R. (2010). “Husserl, l’etica, il piacere”. *Aisthesis*, 2(2), pp. 235-250.

merely empirical foundations; (iv) in modern times, this very same principle is now grounded on eidetic laws and, accordingly, its validity is no longer bound to the factuality of human nature.

If Aristippus is credited to having formulated the hedonistic principle for the first time, according to Husserl, the crucial figure responsible for the shift from a purely empiricist to an a priori and eidetic formulation of the hedonistic principle is Thomas Hobbes. This may certainly sound a little odd, for Hobbes was known to be an outspoken advocate of empiricism, and always explicitly rejected all kinds of concepts related to the traditional notion of essence. So, why does Husserl credit him with the merit of having formulated a more advanced variety of hedonism, one that does not fall short of distinguishing between facts and norms and does not ground moral theory in empirical facticity?

To begin with, Husserl believes that because of its account of the social contract, the Hobbesian form of hedonistic egoism is able—unlike its ancient ancestor—to set itself the task of deriving the duties holding in social relations from the principle of egoistic satisfaction. In other words, all egoistic reasonable creatures, limited in their actions by the will of others, should necessarily recognize that it is in their own interest to submit their will to a legislator. Moreover, Husserl trusts that, adequately understood, the Hobbesian theory of the social contract appears as the core of a formal *mathesis* of social relations, devoid of any empirical presupposition concerning the contingent nature of the subjects related through social bonds. Husserl's Hobbes is an essentialist *malgré lui*: in spite of himself and notwithstanding his empiricist credo, Hobbes ended up developing a philosophical account of ethics based on the ideal-typical notion of the personal subject. Accordingly, in Husserl's view, Hobbes' ethical and political principles do not refer to 'human beings'—namely factually contingent and empirically determined personal subjects—but to 'personal subjects as such', taken in their full a priori generality.

If we were to employ Husserl's own ontological terminology, we might say that Hobbes tried to derive sociality and moral duties from the *eidōs* 'personal subject', the pure essence of a personal subject in general, regardless of whether it is actually real or simply possible. Of course, Husserl maintains that Hobbes' misrepresented the ethical implications of the general laws founded on such an *eidōs*, as, according to Hobbes, these laws would imply the idea of a practical life determined by egoistic motives only and, in the end, by the desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

However, Hobbes' shortcomings and mistaken conclusions are of little importance, when compared with the ground-breaking discovery of the possibility of an a priori foundation of the hedonistic principle. With

Hobbes, ethical hedonism finally abandons the temptation of an a posteriori—and therefore inconsistent and self-conflicting—foundation for the hedonistic principle, based on the empirical concept of human nature, and instead chooses an (albeit incorrectly understood) a priori account, based on the *eidos* ‘personal subject’.

## §4

As in the case of his controversial reading of Aristippus, Husserl’s interpretation of Hobbes’ hedonism is far from unproblematic. Not only does Hobbes clearly aim at developing a philosophical anthropology, rather than an eidetic of political relations, but the *Leviathan* also unmistakably refers to features of the state of nature whose validity is manifestly empirical, such as the comparable *power* of the individuals subscribing to the social contract.<sup>3</sup> However, as already noted above, following Husserl’s rational reconstruction of the history of philosophy and measuring its philosophical consequences strikes us as a far more promising venture than criticizing Husserl on the basis of textual evidence. In addition, one of the most interesting outcomes of Husserl’s detour through the political theory of Hobbes is the clear indication that hedonism, at the most fundamental level, *needs to be grounded on the *eidos* of a personal subjectivity in order to avoid the contradictions of its empirical self-understanding, and that it calls for an eidetic account of intentional *Erlebnisse*, such as desires, will, pleasure and joy.* Husserl’s astonishing claim, which emerges from his opposition of ancient against modern hedonism, is that the project of an

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<sup>3</sup> Hobbes defines the power of a man as his present means to obtain some future apparent good. Given that all human beings seek to fulfil their desires, that is, to get hold of whatever they deem good for themselves, all human beings will try to achieve as much power as possible over material things, as well as over other people. This endless quest for power is not simply motivated by desires, but also by fear. Hobbes attaches great importance to the fact that, although there are differences in strength and wit among human beings, their natural condition is fundamentally one of equality; for the weakest person can still cause harm to or even kill the strongest ‘either by secret machination or by confederacy with the others’ (Hobbes, T. (1981). *Leviathan*. London: Penguin, p. 183). This condition of equality in power is a necessary component of the *rationale* for the social contract, and does not belong to the essence of a personal subject. It suffices to think of the society of Olympians, as described at the beginning of Book VIII of the *Iliad*, where Zeus reminds the other gods that his strength is superior even to their strengths combined. No calculation of hedonistic convenience would require a personal subject enjoying such privilege to adhere to a social contract, and give up his ‘natural right to all things’.

objective theory of values, founded on an eidetic inquiry into practical and volitional life, *is not inconsistent with the original inspiration of the hedonistic principle—rather, it is fostered by hedonism itself.* Hedonism does not have to be abandoned, it has to be retrieved. If phenomenology has to face hedonism, it is precisely because it has to be able to do what hedonism itself has been historically incapable of doing in either ancient or modern times, i.e., *grounding the a priori, objective and necessary connection between good and pleasure.*

As the final battle against hedonism must be fought in the field of the eidetic science of intentional consciousness, that is, in the terrain of *phenomenology*—as must the battle against epistemic scepticism—the remaining part of this paper will focus on the way in which, according to Husserl, an eidetic account of consciousness can cast light on the traditional issue of hedonism, and thereby lay the foundations for what Husserl calls a ‘scientific ethics.’ Before we move forward, however, a further premise appears to be necessary.

In spite of Husserl’s repeated claims that ethics and theory of value can only be founded by means of a *transcendental* theory of practical and evaluating reason,<sup>4</sup> most critics maintain that the lectures on ethics of 1920 and 1924 hardly depart from the level of eidetic psychology, and fail to take into account the transcendental reduction (and, accordingly, the transcendental subject). In what follows, we must therefore address the issue of whether it is necessary, in order to develop a satisfactory refutation of hedonism, for phenomenology to venture not only into the field of eidetic psychology but also into the much more impervious territory of the transcendental theory of consciousness. In other words, how are eidetic and transcendental phenomenology articulated within the Husserlian project of a critical retrieval of hedonism? *What is the actual contribution of the eidetic doctrine of will and emotions such as joy and love? Further, what is the contribution of a transcendental account of these very same acts of consciousness, i.e., of their constitutive role?* As we will see, whilst the first question finds an explicit answer in Husserl’s texts, an answer to the second question is nowhere to be found, although it can clearly be conjectured.

## §5

Let us return to the definition of the hedonistic principle (see §2 above) and ask ourselves how it could be soundly reformulated in eidetic terms. Husserl suggests the following formulation: *according to an apriori law,*

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<sup>4</sup> Husserl, 2004, p. 89.

each striving for something—be it an act of desire or will, actual or merely possible—necessarily has pleasure as its final aim. As we have already pointed out, the ancient hedonist replaces such an eidetic claim with the following argument (call it the ‘hedonistic empirical argument’): all accomplishments, all fulfilled strivings for something, are accompanied by pleasure; hence, no matter what human beings aspire to, they are always directed towards pleasure.<sup>5</sup> Now, Husserl stresses once more that what the true hedonist is really after is not an empirical generalization, but an eidetic law stating the inconceivability of a final aim different from pleasure: not that a fulfilled strive is *always* accompanied by pleasure, but that an unpleasant fulfilled striving is as *inconceivable* and *a priori impossible* as an non-extended colour, or a non-perspectival external perception. Consequently, the phenomenological critique has to jettison the eidetic version of the hedonistic argument, and show that all attempts to reject the eidetic formulation of the hedonist principle entail an a priori countersense. In order to reach this goal, Husserl introduces a phenomenological description of the eidetic structure of the fulfilled acts of striving, based upon the distinction between two different kinds of pleasure.

Within the structure of a fulfilled act of striving, Husserl’s eidetic description distinguishes between (i) the pleasure which arises due to the enjoyment of what we were striving for, and (ii) the pleasure which arises due to the accomplishment as such. To take an example, let us assume that I want to listen to a song that I like. As I finally succeed in doing what I wanted to do, and listen to the song, I simultaneously experience a twofold pleasure: the pleasure given by the music itself, *and* the pleasure deriving from the fact that I have succeeded in doing what I wanted to do. That these two types of pleasure must be distinguished is proven by the counter-example of a situation in which the desired object (in this case, the song) is encountered by chance, that is, without any conscious striving. In this case, the pleasure related to the successful accomplishment is clearly missing, while the pleasure of listening to the song is not.

If we now turn to the hedonistic argument, it becomes clear that invoking the pleasure of the accomplishment in order to prove that the only possible aim of our striving is pleasure, as suggested by the hedonistic empirical argument, entails a clear countersense. In fact, what we actually want—in most cases, at least—is not the pleasure deriving from the accomplishment *per se*, but that of the desired object. Nevertheless, the hedonistic argument as such can be retrieved, by stressing the structural role played by the pleasure related to the object desired (instead of that related to the

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<sup>5</sup> Husserl, 2004, p. 65.

accomplishment). *One can only strive for what one is lacking.* Such a principle presupposes a consciousness whose structure is able to anticipate the missing object as something attractive—attractiveness that is nothing but the promise of the future pleasure, brought about by the presence of the object itself.

Husserl's reply to this reformulation of the hedonistic argument involves a detour into the distinction between real and ideal values that we cannot explain in detail here, although the gist of his reply depends on the fundamental distinction between emotional acts (such as pleasure and joy) on the one hand, and the values intended by them on the other. An act of joy is a subjective event, an *Erlebnis* appearing in the immanent time of consciousness, whose object is a something-endowed-with-value that transcends the flowing and yet contingent act of joy itself. In proposing such a description, Husserl is applying, once more, his fundamental distinction between the real-immanent act and its transcendent object—an object that can, in principle, be grasped as identical in a manifold of apprehensions. Now, while the pleasure through which the value manifests itself occurs *at the end* of the striving, it is not *the end* of the striving but simply the subjective apprehension of the actual end of the striving, namely the value itself. Hedonists thus conflate the value-perception with the value itself, and it is only on the basis of this confusion that they believe that the value-perception (of an act of joy, for instance) is the actual and exclusive end-goal of our striving.<sup>6</sup>

## §6

So far, we have reconstructed Husserl's answer to our first question, i.e., the question of how eidetic psychology can refute the core of the hedonistic doctrine and, at the same time, reveal its inner truth. In order to suggest an answer to the second question, we need to say a few more words about the analogy between hedonism and epistemic scepticism.

The most important part of Husserl's criticism to this 'hedonistic eidetics' relates, of course, to the distinction between value-perception and value itself. This mirrors the distinction between the act of perception and the object perceived so faithfully that one is encouraged to rely on this

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<sup>6</sup> There is also a second hedonistic argument, whose refutation involves the crucial notion of an action's motive, and the distinction between the value as *motive* of the will and the evaluating act as *motivation* of the will. We will not dwell on this distinction, for reason of space.

parallel to understand the profound analogy existing between epistemic scepticism and hedonism. Now, we are able to understand why Husserl saw hedonism as *the* antagonist of any satisfactory theory of practical reason. In his 1914 lectures on formal ethics, Husserl had already defined ethical scepticism as the denial of the existence of any ‘good in itself’ and of ‘any unconditioned duty’.<sup>7</sup> At first glance, hedonism might not seem, to fall under this definition of ethical scepticism, for, after all, it seems to uphold the view that there is a *summum bonum*, namely pleasure, and that there is ethical conduct that deserves to be called rational, namely the quest for one’s own pleasure. Yet, just as epistemic sceptics conflate the object with its phenomenal appearance, thereby dissolving any objectivity in the flux of subjective life and thus denying the existence of truth in itself—or, at any rate, of any cognitive access to such truth—so hedonism denies the existence of a good in itself, replacing it with the mere subjective feeling of appreciation that a given subjectivity experiences in relation to a certain object. For the hedonists, strictly speaking there are no values, only pleasurable sensations and subjective states occasioned by certain objects. Nothing has value *as such* or is good *in itself*, and, consequently, no ethical conduct can be qualified as a duty.

The upshot of hedonism is an extreme form of ethical subjectivism, according to which one can only look for what can be a source of pleasure for oneself.<sup>8</sup> Now, this last set of considerations paves the way towards understanding the role of transcendental subjectivity and of the theory of constitution. However, in order to better appreciate this point, a preliminary look at Brentano’s account of moral knowledge and the effects of Husserl’s transcendental philosophy, on a still heavily Brentano-inspired theory of values, is in order.

## §7

In his famous text *The Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, Brentano had developed a systematic parallel between the sphere of judgment and that of emotions (that is, between the second and third class of what Brentano called *mental phenomena*). In particular, in the theoretical sphere, self-evidence is identified as the defining character of certain types of judgments, such as those expressing the principle of contradiction or the content of inner perceptions. According to Brentano, such judgments cannot

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<sup>7</sup> Husserl, 1988, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Husserl, 2004, p. 87.

be reasonably called into question, precisely because of their self-evidence. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, in the sphere of the emotions where an analogous role is played by pleasure. In other words, pleasure plays the same role in the sphere of emotions that self-evidence plays in the sphere of judgments. However, according to Brentano, the kind of pleasure that could fitfully be considered as the emotional *analogon* of self-evidence cannot be identified with any of the pleasures whose emergence depends upon our contingent physical structure, but only with pleasures that are produced, for instance, by a purely intellectual good, such as knowledge. Thus, according to Brentano:

It is a pleasure of that higher form which is analogous to *self-evidence* in the case of judgment. In our species it is universal. Were there another species which, while having different preferences from us in respect of sensible qualities, were opposed to us in loving error for its own sake and hating insight, then assuredly we should not in the latter as in the former case say: that it was a matter of taste, *de gustibus non est disputandum*, rather we should here answer decisively that such love and hatred were fundamental absurd, that such a species hated what was undeniably good, and loved what was undeniably bad in itself.<sup>9</sup>

Here, we find a clear expression of Brentano's own proposed way of saving the 'truth of hedonism', while granting values and goods their objective character: what is good in itself is clearly and distinctly known by us, thanks to a certain (higher) form of pleasure. There is, therefore, a connection between pleasure and the good, but only insofar as the former is our way of knowing the latter. Interestingly enough, according to Brentano, nothing could definitively rule out the possibility that a good, although existing in itself, could nevertheless fail to produce in us a higher form of pleasure:

Here then, and from such experiences of love qualified as right, arises within us the knowledge that anything is truly and unmistakably good in the full extent to which we are capable of such knowledge. This last clause is added advisedly; for we must not, of course, conceal from ourselves the fact that we have no guarantee that everything which is good will arouse within us a love with the character of rightness. Wherever this is not the case our

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<sup>9</sup> Brentano, F. (2006). *The Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong*. New York: Elibron Classics. English translation of *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*. Leipzig: Verlag Duncker & Humblot 1889, pp. 19-20.

criterion fails, and the good then, so far as our knowledge and practical account of it are concerned, is as much as non-existent.<sup>10</sup>

Now, it is precisely this Brentanian conception of the relationship between values as such and our capacity to apprehend values that appears in a new light, once reformulated in the framework of Husserl's transcendental approach. And that brings us to our second question: the specific contribution of Husserl's transcendental account of consciousness to his critical retrieval of hedonism.

Although in the quotation above, Brentano seems only to refer to the fact that some specific instances of a determinate variety of values could contingently be concealed from us, one could also suggest a far more unsettling possibility, that of an entire variety of values to which human consciousness would be, so to speak, 'ethically blind'. Be that as it may, Brentano's realistic approach to ethics does not appear to provide any means of ruling out the latter possibility. Instead, in the framework of the theory of transcendental constitution, what Brentano calls (in a somewhat realistic vein) the 'knowledge of the good' is replaced by an essential correlation between values and goods on the one hand, and a certain 'hedonistic' form of consciousness on the other. From Husserl's point of view, it would not make sense to imagine the existence of a variety of values that are in principle 'invisible' and towards which all possible consciousness would be 'ethically blind', simply because nothing makes sense beyond the a priori correlation between values and a value-constituting consciousness. In Husserl's terms, an absolute, apriori 'pleasure-less' good would be as ethically absurd as the idea of a squared circle in geometry, i.e., an apriori 'intuition-less' and yet geometrical figure. In sum, whereas Husserl's eidetic account of pleasure re-establishes the objectivity of values, with respect to our subjective hedonistic apprehension of them, Husserl's transcendental account of ethics reaffirms the essential 'relativity' of all possible varieties of values to the constitutive consciousness.

We have now reached the final step of Husserl's paradoxical confutation *cum* vindication of hedonism. As we all know, Plato asserted repeatedly, against ethical subjectivism, that it is not because it is loved that something is good, but, on the contrary, because it is good that something is loved. Husserl would certainly have agreed with Plato—except that he would have also added the following clause: ...but nothing *can ever* be good unless it *can* be loved.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

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