

Understanding conative phenomenology: lessons from Ricoeur

Uriah Kriegel

Published online: 27 June 2013
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Keywords Phenomenal intentionality · Conative phenomenology · The phenomenology of agency · Paul Ricoeur

1. Introduction: Phenomenal intentionality and conative phenomenology

The core aspiration of the science and philosophy of mind of the past half-century has been the search for a *mechanistic* conception of mind modeled on our mechanistic conception of matter. The aim is to ultimately understand the field of mental phenomena in terms of a web of lawful causal interconnections among mental states. Many different pictures of the mind are consistent with this general conception, but they all tend to approximate a certain ideal that impresses somewhat as follows. Mental states divide in the first place into two groups: (i) states that are essentially and universally phenomenal though occasionally and accidentally intentional, and (ii) states that are essentially and universally intentional though occasionally and accidentally phenomenal. States of group (i) include prominently perceptual experiences (experiences as of red, as of shrieks, etc.) and bodily sensations (tickles, orgasms). States of group (ii) divide in turn into two sub-groups: (ii₁) cognitive states, characterized by a *theoretical* intentionality, and (ii₂) conative states, characterized by a *practical* intentionality. The theoretical/practical distinction is often cast, within this framework, in terms of the *direction of fit* between mind and world: cognitive states have a mind-to-world direction of fit, conative states a world-to-mind one.¹ The former include prominently belief, supposition, doubt, and expectation; the latter include prominently desire, wish, intention, and preference. The basic mental phenomena are thus phenomenal states, cognitive states, and conative states; other mental phenomena can be exhaustively accounted for in terms of causal and/or constitutive relations to these basic ones.

Recent critics of this general picture have found two kinds of miscue in it. First, the mechanistic aspiration itself is claimed to be appropriate only for phenomena to

¹Talk of direction of fit starts with Anscombe 1957, and is nicely developed in Searle 1983.

which we have exclusively third-person access. With such phenomena, the deepest understanding consists in identifying their specific role within a larger well-behaved system. But when we have first-person access to phenomena, we can grasp their nature not only in this indirect manner, but also by direct encounter with them. To theorize about such phenomena purely in third-person mechanistic terms is to miss out on a whole way of understanding them. Crucially, at least *phenomenal* mental states are certainly such that we enjoy first-person encounter with them, which encounter can certainly afford us *some* insight into their nature.

Secondly, the clean-cut division of mental phenomena into essentially phenomenal and essentially intentional ones—meant as both exhaustive and exclusive—has been claimed to be wrongheaded. On the one hand, perceptual experiences and bodily sensations are not merely occasionally and accidentally intentional; on the contrary, critics have claimed, they are virtually universally and essentially so. Likewise, cognitive and conative states are not merely occasionally and accidentally phenomenal, but on the contrary universally and essentially so.² Indeed, the phenomenality and intentionality of perceptual, bodily, cognitive, and conative states may be two sides of the same coin. This coin, which we may call *phenomenal intentionality* due to its two sides, should be the central currency of a first-person understanding of the mind – just as mechanistic causal relations are the central currency of its third-person understanding.

What emerges is an alternative program for understanding mental life, in terms of first-person encounter with different varieties of phenomenal intentionality. Within this program, three central tasks stand out immediately: (i) accounting for the inherent, essential intentionality of perceptual experiences and bodily sensations; (ii₁) accounting for the inherent, essential phenomenality of *cognitive* states; (ii₂) accounting for the inherent, essential phenomenality of *conative* states.

It is probably a fair sociological observation that the third of these tasks has received the least attention in recent analytic philosophy of mind. At the same time, dedicated discussions of conative phenomenology and the associated experiences of the will in (proto-)phenomenologists' writings are quite rich and go back at least to Chapters 6 and 8 in Book II of Brentano's (1874) *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. The main themes are further developed by Brentano (1889) in *The Origins of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, but receive a much more thorough treatment in his student von Ehrenfels' (1897/1898) *System of Value Theory*. However, the golden decade of conative phenomenology, so to speak, arrives only in the French philosophy of the 1940s, with a succession of impressive treatments in Sartre's (1943) *Being and Nothingness*, Merleau-Ponty's (1944) *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Jean Laporte's (1947) *The Consciousness of Freedom*, and Paul Ricœur's (1950) *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Vol. 1 of his trilogy *The Philosophy of the Will*).

² This requires some qualification. It is often accepted that cognitive and conative states occur unconsciously and non-phenomenally quite often. However, it is insisted that the very identity and existence conditions of such non-phenomenal cognitive and conative states refer back indirectly to phenomenal tokens of the same types of state. There are several ways this sort of referring-back may play out; see Kriegel 2011 Ch.4 for discussion.

Ricœur's book, although all but forgotten in current analytic philosophy of mind, in many ways represents a climax in the study of conative phenomenology in the phenomenological tradition.³ According to Ricœur, exercise of the will involves three main elements or "moments": deciding, acting, consenting. Although they *sometimes* appear in temporal order, this is neither essential nor universal. In spontaneous acts, for example, the deciding and the acting are contemporaneous—yet such acts often qualify as *voluntary* (Ricœur 1950, p. 253).⁴ The essential relation between deciding, acting, and consenting is thus not temporal, but compositional: they are components, or parts, or aspects, of willing. In what follows, I will suggest that Ricœur is right to focus on deciding (rather than desire and intention) as the fundamental act of the will (Sections 3 and 4), but that (i) the role he designates in his account for acting is better played by trying (Section 5) and (ii) consenting is not an additional phenomenal element on a par with deciding and trying (Section 6). The upshot will be a picture where the phenomenology of deciding-cum-trying exhausts proprietary conative phenomenology. I start, however, with some of Ricœur's methodological assumptions (Section 2).

2. Methodological preliminaries

David Chalmers (1996, Chapter 1) claims that mental terms lead a double life, in that they can be used to express two systematically different concepts, grounded in two different conceptions of mentality. One conception characterizes mental phenomena third-personally in terms of their causal and functional relations to the environment and to each other; the other characterizes them first-personally in terms of their subjective feel, their phenomenal character. We may put this by saying that the former focuses on the *mechanical* dimension of mental life, the latter on its *experiential* dimension.⁵ Interestingly, much the same attitude is foreshadowed by Ricœur, whose starting point is a distinction between *empirical* psychology and *phenomenological* psychology. Empirical psychology studies the will from a third-person mechanistic standpoint, phenomenological psychology from a first-person experiential one.

For Ricœur, this starting point has an all-important foundational implication for the study of the will. Consider that our behavior throughout the day is sometimes determined by conscious personal-level processes of deliberation, decision, choice, and so on, but just as often by a variety of unconscious processes: reflexes, habits and instincts, needs, sub-personal automatized processes, and so on. Ricœur takes the former to be voluntary (involve exercise of the will) and the latter to be involuntary. Thus behavior-determination is sometimes voluntary and conscious and sometimes involuntary and unconscious. The involuntary processes are psychologically and evolutionarily more

³ The book combines Sartre's ability to capture in words the finest shades of experience, Merleau-Ponty's occasional flash of brilliant insight, and Laporte's methodical and systematic manner of proceeding. But it is also much more thorough an inquiry into the will than all of the above. This is why I use Ricœur's analysis to pivot my own discussion of the structure of conative phenomenology here.

⁴ All references are to the 2009 reprint mentioned in the bibliography.

⁵ This way of putting things is mine; Chalmers puts it in terms of a distinction between the 'psychological' interpretation of mental terms and their 'phenomenal' interpretation.

basic, the voluntary ones more complex and sophisticated. For empirical psychology, this means that the order of investigation must proceed from the involuntary and sub-personal to the voluntary and conscious.⁶ In truth, however, our very grasping of the involuntary is parasitic of our grasping of the voluntary. It is only in light of our understanding of conscious exercise of the will that we can make sense of unconscious conative processes as belonging to the same mental domain.⁷ Thus although the *causal* order goes from the bottom up, the *conceptual* order goes from the top down. Consequently, if we want to get to the heart of our conception of the involuntary, we must start by elucidating our conception of the voluntary. Ricœur (1950: p. 22) writes:⁸

Not only the involuntary has no proprietary meaning, understanding proceeds from the top down and not from the bottom up... I understand myself first as he who says 'I want.' The involuntary refers itself to wanting as that which gives it motives, powers, foundations, even limits. This reversal of perspective is just one aspect of that Copernican revolution...

Thus although the causal explanation offered by empirical psychology grounds the voluntary and conscious in the involuntary and unconscious, true understanding of this web of phenomena would require a phenomenological psychology that grounds the involuntary and sub-personal in the voluntary and conscious.⁹

Given this reversal of perspectives, understanding the will depends in the first instance on phenomenological analysis of conscious, experiential exercise of the will: conative phenomenology. Following Husserl, Ricœur thinks of phenomenological analysis as *intentional* analysis, whereby the nature of a type of phenomenology is revealed in its *formal object*: "a consciousness is understood by the type of object in which it surpasses itself" Ricœur (1950, p. 23). For each of the three main components of conative phenomenology—decision, action, and consent—Ricœur seeks a proprietary intentional object that would illuminate the phenomenology of the intentional *act*. To this extent, phenomenal intentionality is a cornerstone of Ricœur's inquiry.

Further, following Brentano, Ricœur is keen to appreciate both aspects of phenomenal intentionality: its relation to the object as well as its relation to the subject. A conscious presentation is both a presentation-of and a presentation-to: it always

⁶ This can be seen already in William James' (1890: 487; italics original) seminal work on the will: '*voluntary movements must be secondary, not primary functions of our organism*. This is the first point to understand in the psychology of Volition. Reflex, instinctive, and emotional movements are all primary performances.' Ricœur (1950: 20–1) describes this attitude expressively: '[The] rule that gives the natural sciences their force leads to constructing man like a house, that is to say first laying the foundations for a psychology of the involuntary and then topping these lower functional floors with an additional floor called the will.'

⁷ For more on the notion that our grasp of conscious experience might underlie our understanding of unconscious mentality, see Kriegel 2011 Ch.1.

⁸ All translations from the French are mine, though I have been assisted by Erazim Kohak's excellent 1966 translation into English.

⁹ A similar move is made by Ricœur with respect to our understanding of the normal, well-functioning of the will and our understanding of pathologies of the will. Although empirical psychology tends to appeal to pathologies to illuminate normal functioning, Ricœur argues that our grasp of the pathological is in truth parasitical on our understanding of the normal, which should therefore be the focus in phenomenological psychology. This is one of those themes that are clearly very important to Ricœur, but which I will ignore here.

presents *something* and presents *to someone*. We may call the presenting of *something* (of an object) the presentation's *directedness*, and its presentation *to someone* (to a subject) the presentation's *givenness*.¹⁰ In the next two sections, we take up these two elements in turns.

3. Deciding: I. directedness

Cleaning after a birthday party, Aristide comes across a nice-looking slab of leftover chocolate cake. He likes chocolate cake and would enjoy eating some unceremoniously and unselfconsciously. But he also plans to lose ten pounds by April, and is acutely aware that he ought to be on the guard against fleeting temptations of this sort. The cake is right there—he has to make a decision. He can *feel* the battle of temptation and self-control in him—can feel an inner tension, what James (1890, p. 529) called the “impatience of the deliberative state”—but eventually decides to throw out the leftover piece without eating it.¹¹

The process of deliberation in such an episode has tangible duration to it, but the act of deciding, of making up one's mind, is experientially instantaneous. Yet that instantaneous act is the quintessential conative act, according to Ricœur, and there is certainly something it is like to perform it—a phenomenal character of deciding. To reveal some of this phenomenal character, we engage in intentional analysis: by appreciating the part of the world it shines on, the feel of deciding is itself illuminated. For, following Husserl, Ricœur thinks of phenomenological analysis as intentional analysis, whereby the nature of a type of phenomenology is revealed in its *formal object*.¹²

According to Brentano (1889), the formal object of conative experiences is *the good*. Just as cognitive states aim at the true, so conative states aim at the good. Furthermore, just as cognitive states, as a category, can be *defined* as the *sui generis* states intentionally directed at the true, so conative states can be defined as the *sui generis* states intentionally directed at the good. To say that conative states are not just any states directed at the good, but *sui generis* ones, is to say that their directedness at the good is not reducible to other types of directedness at the good. Thus, a person may *believe* that going to work would be good without quite wanting to. Some philosophers have defined desire (a conative state *par excellence*) as *perception of the good* (see, e.g., Stampe 1986), which reduces the goodness-directed intentionality of desires to perceptual intentionality. By contrast, Brentano

¹⁰ The point foreshadows McGinn's (1988) thesis that phenomenal intentionality is distinctive in being Janus-headed, or double-faced, having both an outward-looking face to do with its relation to what it presents and an inward-looking face to do with who it presents it to.

¹¹ Note that whatever Aristide ends up deciding, it is his decision, taken voluntarily, and so is certainly an exercise of his will. It is therefore misleading to describe one possible decision – to eat the cake – as ‘weakness of will.’ Without reading Greek, I suspect *akrasia* is much better translated as incontinence or imperfect self-mastery.

¹² Ricœur writes: ‘a consciousness is understood by the type of object in which it surpasses itself’ (1950: 23). Thus for each of the three main components of conative phenomenology – decision, action, and consent – Ricœur seeks a proprietary intentional object that would illuminate the phenomenology of the intentional *act*.

would claim that desires and other conative states present the good neither perceptually nor belief-wise, but in a *sui generis* way proper to them.

Two caveats are in order. First, the relevant notion of goodness need not be *moral* goodness; it is, rather, a kind of *basic* goodness of which moral goodness is but one species. Secondly, to say that conative states aim at the good is not to say that they always hit what they aim at. Sometimes we mistake for good what is in fact bad. Still, our conative states are *supposed* to hit the good—they *target* the good.

Even with these caveats in place, however, there is a deep problem with Brentano's suggestion. To see why, consider Ricœur's account of the formal object of decision. According to Ricœur (1950, p. 66), every decision is directed at a *project*. A central characteristic of projects is temporal: they send to the future (Ricœur 1950, p. 73). Now, other conative experiences also have this character of futurity, including commanding, wishing, desiring, and worrying (Ricœur 1950, p. 74). What distinguishes deciding is that it presents the project as *in my power*. This "feeling of power," as Ricœur (1950, p. 78) calls it, is essential to the phenomenology of deciding.¹³ One way to think of this is in analogy to internalism about moral commitments, the idea that such commitments are essentially tied to motivation—unless a mental state involves at least a *pull* to action, it does not qualify as a genuine moral commitment. Regardless of whether such internalism is true of moral commitment, it is manifestly true of decision: unless a mental state involves a pull to action, it is not a genuine decision. This pull-to-action feeling is nicely captured by Ricœur (1950, p. 62, my italics):

What is remarkable is that the decision, cut off from its execution by a delay, by a blank, is nonetheless not indifferent to its execution; when I have decided to make a delicate move, *I feel myself somehow charged*, in the way a battery is charged: I have the power to act, I am capable of it.

This feeling of charge, of readiness, is clearly essential to—indeed definitive of—the phenomenology of deciding. This creates an internal connection to action, as what would *discharge* the decision.

This internal connection to action suggests that the formal object of deciding is better thought of not as *the good* but as *the right*. For rightness is primarily an attribute of *actions*, where goodness is in the first instance an attribute of worldly *states of affairs*. Let me introduce the right/good distinction, then apply it to the intentional analysis of decision. Suppose you see a one-legged beggar on the subway and give him a dollar. We may distinguish (a) the act of giving the dollar and (b) the state of affairs of the beggar having the dollar. You perform (a) in order to bring about (b). What we find natural to say is that (a) is the *right* thing to do and (b) is a *good* state of affairs or scenario.¹⁴ Thus the right is by definition primarily an attribute of

¹³ From Ricœur's discussion, it is not entire clear (to me at least) whether he means this in-my-power-ness to be constitutive of the notion of a project, or to characterize some projects and not others. Accordingly, it is not clear whether it *the project* as such that can be designated the formal object of decision, or just a subset of projects, namely those that are in my power. In the text, I have tried to conduct the discussion in a way that is neutral as between these alternative bookkeeping systems.

¹⁴ Now, it has sometimes been argued that one of these notions can be analyzed in terms of the other. Perhaps an action is right in virtue of leading to a good state of affairs. Perhaps a state of affairs is good in virtue of an ideal subject finding it right to bring it about. On the other hand, perhaps the good and the right are mutually independent and irreducible (and perhaps they are inter-definable).

actions (and clusters of actions, such as projects), while the good is by definition primarily an attribute of states of affairs. With this distinction in place, another important distinction comes to the fore, regarding Aristide's decision not to eat the cake because he wants to lose weight. The desire to lose weight seems indeed directed at the good, presenting the state of affairs of Aristide being ten pounds lighter as good. But the decision not to eat the cake does something else—it presents the act of avoiding eating the cake as the *right thing to do*. More generally, decisions appear intentionally directed at actions, desires at states of affairs. Accordingly, desires aim at the good but decisions at the right.¹⁵

It is true, of course, that both actions and states of affairs can be used to describe the intentionality of both desiring and deciding. You want the beggar to *have* the extra dollar, but you also want to *give* him the dollar; you decide to give him the dollar, but you also decide that he shall have that dollar. Still, the natural order of explanation in each case is opposite: you want to give the beggar the dollar *because* you want him to have it (you want the right in virtue of wanting the good), but you decide that he shall have it *by* deciding to give it to him (you decide the good in virtue of deciding the right). We may say that at the fundamental, non-derivative level, you want the good state of affairs to obtain and decide to perform the right act. Thus due to decision's internal connection to action, its formal object is the right, not the good.

This is not to say that a desire/wanting does not involve an essential connection to action. On the contrary, it is essential to the desire to eat the cake that if no other states or considerations outweigh it, it would lead to eating the cake. But this connection is *hypothetical*: the desire would lead to action *if* certain conditions are met. By contrast, a decision's connection to action is *categorical*: a person who makes a decision is thereby committed to acting on it, *period*.¹⁶ Both, however, involve an essential connection to action.¹⁷

¹⁵ It might be objected that sometimes we decide to do the wrong thing, where this means not just that we decide to do what, unbeknownst to us, happens to be wrong, but that we decide to do something wrong *qua* wrong. A similar objection is sometimes leveled against internalist accounts of moral commitment. My view is that the inverted comma account of moral commitment to the wrong or bad (Hare 1952), however plausible for moral commitments, is the right way to go with decision: decisions we are tempted to describe as directed at the wrong are in fact so directed only in an inverted-comma sense of 'wrong' (namely, wrong by such-and-such standards *other than* the subject's, or more precisely other than the subject's decision's).

¹⁶ A decision can have a hypothetical content (as in my deciding to visit grandma next if my sister does not do so this week), but then this hypothetical content is categorically committed to. Conversely, the content of a decision can be categorical (e.g., to visit grandma next week) but desiring that content commits one to going through with it only hypothetically. Ricœur (1950: 70) too asserts the categorical nature of decision's connection to action, but does not draw a contrast with desire's merely hypothetical connection.

¹⁷ In this they are distinguished from *wishing*. I can wish that the Armenian genocide had never happened regardless of the fact that I can do nothing about it, and as Aristotle points out in Book III, Ch.2 of his *Ethics*, one can even wish for (what one knows to be) a nomological impossibility (e.g., immortality). To that extent, wishing is conceptually severed from action, in a way that sets it apart from desire and decision. My own temptation is to hold that to wish that *p* is nothing but to believe that *p* would be good (perhaps plus some affective element, such as mild yearning). Note that although distinguished from desire by its lack of any pull-to-action feel, wishing shares with desiring the good as formal object. As noted, though, it seems to me plausible that wanting is related to the good by a world-to-mind direction of fit, whereas wishing by a mind-to-world one. Deciding is distinguished from both by having the right as its formal object. (This scheme drops the project as a prospective formal object – it seems insufficiently abstract somehow. At the same time, it is the discussion of the relevance of action to the project that has led us to assign the right as decision's formal object.)

It is noteworthy that the much discussed notion of intention is in this respect more similar to decision than desire. It is true that, like desire, intention bears only a hypothetical connection to action. But unlike desire, intention is fundamentally directed at the right, not the good. For insofar as we can intend that some state of affairs obtain, it is only in virtue of intending to perform some action that would lead to it. Thus the formal object of intention is the right. To that extent, the fact that reductive accounts of intention in terms of desire (Davidson 1963) appear to fail should not be over-interpreted; it may yet turn out that intention could be somehow understood in terms of decision. For example, one might suggest that intention is just the *inertia of decision*: one intends to do something when one has decided to do it and one remains committed to one's decision. More precisely, at a first pass we might suggest the following: *S* intends to φ at time t_2 iff (i) there is a time t_0 , such that *S* decides to φ at t_0 , and (ii) there is no time t_1 , such that *S* decides not to φ (or to not- φ) at t_1 .¹⁸ This is not the place to consider the prospects for such an account, but the epistemic possibility should be pointed out. Note, in any case, that such an account does require that there be no intentions without prior decision—a matter of some contention.¹⁹

Other central conative notions might still be analyzable in terms of desire. Consider the important notion of valuing. Lewis (1989) has argued convincingly that *S* values x iff *S* desires to desire x .²⁰ Although I cannot argue for this here, it is not implausible that most or all conative phenomena can be understood in terms of desire and decision (perhaps in combination with belief/judgment).²¹

There is a further question as to whether desire or decision might be understood in terms of the other, that is, whether one might be more basic than the other. There are many ways to approach this question—let me mention one. Consider again Aristide's two desires (to enjoy the taste of chocolate cake and to lose weight) and one decision (to not eat the cake). The fact that Aristide decided to not eat to cake is connected to the fact that Aristide *prefers* losing weight over tasting chocolate cake. (Preference here is just the ranking of desires: one desire's intentional object is represented in preference as *better than* the other's.) A natural view is that Aristide decides not to eat the cake

¹⁸ One immediate objection is that a commitment to one's decision may slowly dissolve away without any counter-decision intervening in the meantime, resulting in *S* no longer having the intention but still satisfying the analysans. Another objection (presented to me by Jeff Lane) is that *S* may acquire an intention (e.g., to kill a CEO over the next year) under hypnosis, and thus without ever making the relevant decision, resulting in *S* having an intention but failing to satisfy the analysans. There are probably other objections. I am offering this first-pass potential analysis of intention just an illustration of how an approach to understanding intention of in terms of decision rather than desire might proceed. Many qualifications and modifications would likely be needed if this approach has any chance of surviving scrutiny.

¹⁹ I will follow Paul 2012 in holding that every intention presupposes prior decision (and the only way we know what we intend is because we know what we decided). For a contrary view, see Mele 2009 Ch.2.

²⁰ Intuitively, the idea is that to value something is to endorse the notion of desiring, and that such endorsement is plausibly construed in this context as a second-order desire to have a first-order desire toward the thing. Thus, to value work is to desire that one desire work.

²¹ This will surely be resisted on behalf of various conative states, though sometimes also defended for the very same states. Thus, McGeer (2004) argues that hoping involves a type of *sui generis* motivational force not to be found in any other conative state. If this is right, then there are at least three fundamental conative states: desire, decision, and hope. Personally, I am unconvinced by this particular claim, inclining toward a more traditional conception of hope as a conative-cognitive composite (see Martin 2011 for discussion).

because he prefers losing weight over eating cake. But according to Sartre (1943, Part IV, Chapter 1), at least as interpreted by Fernández (2009), the order is actually opposite: Aristide prefers losing weight over eating cake precisely *because*, or *insofar as*, he made the decision he did; had he made the opposite decision, this would have constituted his preferring enjoying the cake. The question here pertains in the first instance to priority relations between decision and preference. But given the analyzability of preference in terms of desire, the question has implications for the primacy of decision or desire.

Here is one way to appreciate these implications. Consider a subject *S*, a range of desires D_1, \dots, D_n , and a decision *C*, such that (i) D_1, \dots, D_n are all of *S*'s desire, (ii) *S* makes *C*, and (iii) *C* is the decision to act on D_i . Let us say that D_i is *S*'s "preference" (or, as a variant, that "*S* prefers D_i ") just when D_i is *S*'s strongest desire. There appears to be an *a priori* connection between D_i and *C*: *S* makes *C* iff *S* prefers D_i . However, a Euthyphro dilemma arises here: does *S* make *C* because *S* prefers D_i or does *S* prefer D_i because *S* makes *C*? There are four interesting answers to this question: (a) "the former"; (b) "the latter"; (c) "neither"; (d) "depends." According to (a), decisions *reveal* preferences—they are *symptoms* of preferences. According to (b), decisions *constitute* preferences: to prefer a desire (i.e., for a desire to be a preference) just is to decide to act on it (this is the Sartrean view). Note that, plausibly, if (a) is true, then deciding can be analyzed in terms of desiring (roughly: a decision is a subject's commitment to act on her strongest desire). But if (b) is true, then plausibly, desiring can be analyzed in terms of deciding (roughly: as a state that issues in a suitable decision when it is the strongest of its kind in a subject).²² According to (c), neither decision nor preference is more basic than the other, so neither can be analyzed in terms of the other. According to (d), in some circumstances one decides as one prefers and in others one prefers as one decides (for example, there might be "mundane decisions" that flow *from* one's preferences, but also "existential decisions" that *constitute* one's preferences); on that view, neither desiring nor deciding is generally more basic than the other.²³

The issue of which of these four views ought to be adopted is too vast to broach here, but to my mind (b) and (d) are by far the most plausible options. To that extent, I am tempted to hold that either decision is the most fundamental conative state, as per (b), or decision and desire share that status between them, in accordance with (d). Both positions are markedly different from the standard functionalist approach (suggested by the label "belief-desire psychology") that makes desire the paradigmatic and fundamental conative state. To that extent, Ricœur's focus on decision rather than desire as the phenomenologically paradigmatic conative state appears quite apt.

²² A 'suitable' decision is a decision to act in a way that one believes would lead to the state of affairs one desires. To a first approximation, then, we might propose this: *S* desires that *p* iff necessarily, if *S* believes that φ -ing would likely lead to *p*, and *S* does not have stronger desire, then *S* would decide to φ .

²³ Remember that this is only one possible entry point to the issue. Another might be through consideration of the interrelations between the formal objects of desiring and deciding – whether the good and the right may be analyzable one in terms of the other. This too is a matter too vast – and too foreign – to broach here, but see Ross 1930 for a classic discussion.

4. Deciding: II. Givenness

There is a phenomenological connection between the feeling of *making a decision* and the feeling of *taking responsibility*. According to Ricœur (1950, p. 83), the connection is simply this: To take responsibility is to make the second-order judgment that one has made the decision. The phenomenal character of feeling responsible is thus just the cognitive phenomenology of judging that it is oneself who has decided.

It is clear from this that the feel of taking responsibility is *separate* from the feel of making a decision. For it is always possible to undergo an experience (such as the experience of deciding) without making an explicit, reflective, second-order judgment that one is undergoing that experience. The experience of deciding only *puts one in a position* to experience responsibility, by *disposing* one to make a second-order judgment.

But this disposition is not all that is built into the experience of deciding. In addition to the reflective second-order judgment that it is oneself who has made a decision, there is also a *pre-reflective* awareness of oneself as the one who has made the decision. This pre-reflective self-awareness of oneself *qua* decider is also built into the experience of deciding, and moreover as an *occurrent* and not merely *dispositional* element. In general, pre-reflective self-awareness is according to most phenomenologists a universal feature of conscious experiences: they all involve awareness of oneself as the subject of experience. This awareness is typically dim and unimpressive, humming in the background or fringe of consciousness—but it is there nonetheless.²⁴ This pre-reflective self-awareness accounts for the givenness of experience, the inward-looking face of its intentional character. In the case of deciding, it takes the form of a dim, peripheral self-imputation of the decision (Ricœur 1950, p. 85). Interestingly, and plausibly, Ricœur (Ibid.) claims that this pre-reflective self-imputation built into the experience of deciding is precisely what disposes the subject to make the second-order judgment whereby she takes responsibility. It is the reason *why* undergoing the experience puts one in a position to make the judgment.²⁵ It is, in other words, the *categorical basis* of the disposition to take responsibility.²⁶

There is an interesting question as to whether this pre-reflective self-imputation is itself conative or on the contrary cognitive. A crude and narrow version of the question can be put thus: is the pre-reflective self-imputation built into deciding a form of *thinking* that one decides, or a form of *deciding* that one decides? The wider question concerns which direction of fit characterizes the self-imputation built into conative phenomenology.²⁷ In the case of *cognitive* phenomenology, it is clear that

²⁴ Outside the rank of phenomenologists, this is quite a controversial matter, but we will not take it up here. Here I am going to dogmatically assume that the view is correct. (For defense of it, see Kriegel 2009 Appendix.) Inside the phenomenologists' ranks, the debate is typically over what this pre-reflective self-awareness consists in, not whether it is psychologically real.

²⁵ Ricœur (1950: 85) writes: 'It is this implication of oneself that must hold in germinal fashion the possibility of reflection, hold the will ready for the *judgment* of responsibility: it is I who....'

²⁶ My own view is that all pre-reflective self-awareness is the categorical basis of the corresponding disposition, when it exists, to be reflectively self-aware. For a related discussion, see Kriegel 2009 Ch.2 (with relevant connections drawn in Ch.5).

²⁷ This question parallels one arising for higher-order theories of consciousness, according to which a mental state is conscious just in case it is targeted by a higher-order representation. Although in the standard version of the view, the higher-order representation is explicitly construed as a *thought* (Rosenthal 1990), it has sometimes been suggested that the higher-order representation is a sort of 'pro-attitude,' that is, a mental state with a world-to-mind or 'telic' direction of fit (see Kobes 1995).

the pre-reflective self-awareness is itself cognitive—there is no pressure to hold otherwise. In the case of *conative* phenomenology, however, there is some such pressure. Even though it is still natural to hold that what is dimly built into the experience of deciding is *thinking* that one decides, this creates a strange bifurcation within the agent: since being a decider is different from being a thinker, the agent would appear to be one thing *qua* decider and another *qua* pre-reflectively self-aware. The decider cannot be the *subject* of the self-imputation, then – she is something of an object to it. Yet there is phenomenological pressure to see the subject as at once the decider and the self-imputer of decision. With his view that the project is what is properly decided, Ricœur (1950, p. 86) writes:

A primordial identification resists the temptation to exile the self to the margins of its acts: the identification of the projecting self and the projected self. Me who wants now (and who projects), I am the same as me who will do (and who is projected). ‘This action is me’ means: there are not two selves, the one who is in the project and the one who projects; I affirm myself precisely as subject in the object of my wanting.

Ricœur (Ibid.) further attempts to cast the conative view of self-imputation in a plausible light:

... the very first implying of myself is not a relationship of awareness, a gaze. I behave actively toward myself, I determine *myself*. The language here too is illuminating: to determine one’s behavior is to determine oneself. The pre-reflective imputation of oneself is active and not speculative.

It is thus not entirely implausible that in imputing a decision to myself, I do in fact decide to be a decider. It is in this sense that I determine *myself* (and not merely my mental states).

This conative view of the relevant self-imputation is not without its difficulties, however.²⁸ For one thing, it seems phenomenologically obvious that, whatever else is the case, experiencing making a decision does involve being *aware* of oneself as making the decision.²⁹ Such awareness of the deciding would require a “theoretical” presentation of it (whether cognitive or perceptual). This impression is supported by consideration of what is involved in decision in general. When I decide to hang a painting in the living room, part of what makes me capable to decide *that* (rather than, say, to hang the painting in the bedroom) is that I have a theoretical representation of what it would be for the painting to hang in the living room. So, if there is also a sense in which I decide to be a decider of hanging-the-painting-in-the-living-room, I must have a theoretical representation of what it would be for me to be a decider of *that* decision (rather than another). This means that, at the very least, deciding that I am a decider must be *accompanied* by thinking, or at least entertaining, that I am a decider—it cannot *exhaust* the pre-reflective self-imputation built into the deciding. The practical

²⁸ One apparent difficulty that I think is illusory is that the conative view would lead to an infinite regress of decisions; I will not discuss it here.

²⁹ More accurately, it is *as* phenomenologically obvious that experiencing making a decision makes one aware of oneself as making the decision as it is that experience in general involves the kind of pre-reflective component phenomenologists standardly hold it does.

representation of the decision, if such there be, must be accompanied by a theoretical representation of the same.

One might suggest a third view, according to which conative phenomenology implicates two distinct pre-reflective “self-imputings”: one cognitive (theoretical) and one conative (practical). But the ensuing picture comes across as a little baroque, casting the experience of deciding as involving three distinct components: a directedness, a conative givenness, and a cognitive givenness. This may be a bit much to swallow in a number of respects, including phenomenological and implementational.³⁰

I close this section without a decisive claim. I have considered three views of the givenness of deciding: as cognitive or perceptual, as conative, and as both. Each has turned out to be problematic. The cognitive view introduces untoward daylight between the agent *qua* decider and the agent *qua* self-imputer. The conative view cannot account for the agent’s being *aware* of her decision experience. The combined view is overly baroque. Yet I would be surprised if none of these views is correct, and some fourth account of the relevant self-imputation was right. Thus the only assertive claim I would like to make at the close of this section is the one I opened with: whatever it turns out to be, the pre-reflective self-imputation built into the experience of deciding is the categorical basis of the experience’s disposition to bring about a reflective second-order judgment that effectively constitutes the experience of taking responsibility.

5. Acting and Trying

“The willing terminates with the prevalence of the idea; and whether the act follows or not is a matter quite immaterial, so far as the willing goes”—so contended James (1890, p. 560). Something about this feels wrong, and according to Ricœur, we can appreciate that “something” already in the phenomenology of deciding. Although deciding always presents a course of action, there is an unsettled feeling about this presentation—a feeling of “something more” needing to come through. “I ‘recognize’ the intention’s emptiness in the act’s plenitude,” says Ricœur (1950: 259). Deciding feels *impatient*: its pull to act is unnerving, strongly calling me to act it out. Not only the decision disposes me to act, but until the decision is acted upon—until the disposition is manifested—there is an ever so light but distinctly unpleasant feeling of tension in my consciousness. Thus by its very nature, a decision desperately wants to be *realized*—realized in action.³¹ Phenomenologically, then, the willing is not *done*

³⁰ It should be mentioned, though, that at one time Brentano (1874 Bk II Ch.4) effectively held that a conscious experience involves *four* components: its directedness at an object, its givenness in presentation, its givenness in judgment, and its givenness in pleasure/displeasure (one has always has some mood about one’s ongoing experience). Still, this great complexity in standard experience is hard to accept, and indeed in a 1911 appendix to a later edition Brentano explicitly changes his mind on the last component, claiming that many conscious states do not involve any givenness in pleasure/displeasure (See Brentano 1874: 276).

³¹ For Ricœur, this relationship of ‘filling’ or ‘realization’ between decision and action finds expression in their respective temporal phenomenologies as well. We have already noted that deciding is phenomenally oriented toward the future. In the very same sense, acting is phenomenally oriented toward the present. Ricœur (1950: 259) writes: ‘The temporal index of action is the present that renews itself incessantly. Whereas the future timing, signified by the project or prediction, can discontinuous and reversible... action by definition participate in advance of existence.’

yet when a decision has been formed; it is done only when the process of realizing the decision is underway.

This might suggest that primitive conative phenomenology cannot be exhausted by the character of deciding; it must be complemented by the character of actually acting. This raises a problem, however. Some actions are entirely mental phenomena—calculating a tip, comparing lunch options, rotating a mental image, and so on. But most actions are not entirely mental phenomena: even when the pensive and sentimental person chases butterflies, picks flowers, or writes a poem, her actions are *overt* and involve a non-mental aspect. The problem is that phenomenology is clearly an entirely mental phenomenon, so it cannot be constituted (even in part) by something non-mental.³²

Ricœur appreciates the force of this worry and responds by arguing that acting too is possessed of *intentionality* (and so, presumably, is mental). His case for this is somewhat underwhelming, however: he notes that action verbs are transitive in the way “representational verbs” are, expressing “a directedness from a subjective pole to an objective pole” (Ricœur 1950, p. 261). He concludes that in a “very wide sense we may well call practical intentionality the relationship of action to the ends of action” (Ricœur 1950, p. 262). However, transitive verbs far outstrip intentional verbs. “The ball hit the glass,” “the ship hit the fan”—these too are transitive reports insinuating a direction from a subject pole to an object pole. Yet these instances of hitting do not exhibit intentional directedness, and neither ball nor ship enjoys conative phenomenology. A stricter test of the alleged intentionality of action is clearly needed.

The best criterion of intentionality we have comes from Chisholm (1957): for a transitive verb to graduate to intentional status, it must fail to support certain inferences, notably existential generalization and substitution of co-referential terms. By the light of this criterion, action verbs do not fare well. From “Anatole moved his hand” (or “Anatole moved his painting”), one can validly infer “there is something that Anatole moved”; so existential generalization is supported rather than failed. Further, from “Anatole moved his hand” (or “Anatole moved his painting”), in conjunction with “Simone’s favorite object is Anatole’s hand” (or “... Anatole’s painting”), one can validly infer “Anatole moved Simone’s favorite object”; so there is no substitution failure either. One would have to conclude that moving, whether proximal or distal, is non-intentional and outside the scope of (conative) phenomenology.

We are faced with a difficulty, then. On the one hand, action is not an intentional phenomenon and thus cannot be part of conative phenomenology. On the other hand, conative phenomenology clearly includes a component that goes beyond the *making* of a decision and involves the releasing of a process of *realizing* the decision. The solution to this difficulty, it seems to me, is to note that although action itself is not intentional and at most partly mental, it plausibly contains a purely mental component that is fully intentional. Wittgenstein (1953, section 621) asked: “What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?” What is left over, it seems, is the purely mental component of raising one’s arm—the mental core of action.

³² I suppose some kind of disjunctivist about phenomenology could deny that phenomenology is an entirely mental phenomenon. Here I will ignore this particular brand of disjunctivism. (This is stronger than just externalism about phenomenology, since the latter can be, and indeed usually is, combined with externalism about the mental that allows the phenomenal to be internal to the mental even if it is external to something else.)

Arguably, this mental core is captured by the notion of *trying*. Indeed, there are reasons to think that trying is an entirely phenomenal state. Or perhaps more cautiously: there is a way of hearing the word “trying” such that a phenomenal duplicate of one is also a trying duplicate. Call this the *phenomenal hearing* of “trying.” My brain-in-vat duplicate is not really typing on the keyboard right now, though it is under the impression that it is. But the duplicate is not only under the impression that it is *trying* to type on the keyboard right now, it really *is* trying to type—at least on the phenomenal hearing of the term. The same goes for other actions: the duplicate does not open a door or ride a bike, but it is trying to. Thus trying is something that phenomenal duplicates shares, even when (only) one of them is unable to act.³³

It might be objected that trying does not really have the phenomenal hearing I am claiming. In reality, my envatted duplicate is under the illusion that it is trying to type but in fact is not trying to type at all. In response, I would say that to my ear, it still seems like there is a(n appropriate) phenomenal hearing of “trying,” but even if there is not, the kind of phenomenon I have in mind is real. Perhaps we should call it “seemingly trying” rather than “trying in the phenomenal sense.” Whatever we call it, this is the phenomenon I am interested in. I will conduct the discussion below in terms of trying, presupposing a phenomenal hearing throughout, but am open to revising the terminology.

Crucially, trying has the right profile to complement decision. On the one hand, trying to do something involves initiating the process of realizing one’s decision. On the other hand, unlike action, trying is genuinely intentional. Thus, from “Anatole tried to move his hand” it does not follow that “there is something that Anatole tried to move” (imagine that Anatole has momentarily forgotten that he had lost his arm in battle). Likewise, it does not follow that “Anatole tried to move Simone’s favorite object” (imagine Anatole is unaware that his hand is Simone’s favorite object).³⁴

How should we think of the phenomenal character of trying? We cannot do justice to this question here, but let me mention in passing some potential entry points into this issue. First, we can use intentional analysis to identify the *formal object* of trying. On the face of it, it seems that like decision, trying is directed primarily at the right: in the first instance, one tries to move a painting, not for the painting to change location.³⁵ In retrospect, this stands to reason, if trying has an intimate connection to deciding: surely one tries what one decided.³⁶ Further illumination might be sought in discussions of the “feeling of effort,”

³³ This Cartesian approach to trying is suggested by O’Shaughnessy (1973: 369): We discover what trying to walk from A to B consists in, by adopting the standpoint of a rational but skeptical onlooker who knows that the would-be agent has a powerful incentive to walk from A to B and whose skepticism here happens to mislead him. That is, we insert maximum rational skepticism into the situation as a separator agency (with Descartes as our inspiration) and see what it extricates (for that will be trying).

³⁴ The same holds for trying directed at worldly objects. From ‘Anatole tried to move his painting’ it follows neither that ‘there is something that Anatole tried to move’ (perhaps his painting was burned down and he merely hallucinated it) nor that ‘Anatole tried to move Simone’s favorite object’ (again Anatole may be unaware that his painting is Simone’s favorite object). Thus both existential generalization and substitution fail, and both for trying directed at one’s body and trying directed at the world beyond one’s body.

³⁵ It is true that the result of one’s action is a change in the painting’s location, but that change is not what is tried (in the first stance) – it is what is desired. What is tried is the moving of the painting – an act.

³⁶ It is worth noting, perhaps, that Ricœur himself seems to hold the opposite view about the intentionality he attributes to action. According to him, action is directed at worldly states of affairs (what he calls ‘pragma’), not bodily motions. He writes (1950: 264): ‘what is “acted”... is the very transformation of my environment, it is the *factum* reciprocal to the *facere*...’ This seems false.

which may be characterized, in Laporte's (1947) terms, as a phenomenal vector of *force* and *resistance*.³⁷ Plausibly, there is an intimate connection between the phenomenology of trying and the phenomenology of effort: trying always *mobilizes* some effort.³⁸ Beyond noting the intentional directedness at the right and the implication of a feeling of effort, we may run up against the ultimate ineffability of primitive phenomenology. Metaphor can still be useful, and so we may metaphorically think of the phenomenology of trying as some sort of non-sensory analog of Wundtian innervation: a sort of invisible, insentient, but still phenomenally luminous current traveling from will to muscle (see Wundt 1874). Other metaphors may offer further tangible grasp of the phenomenon.

It may be objected that focusing on trying rather than acting (as decision's complement) deforms the phenomenology. In the normal go of things, we do not experience ourselves as trying to act but as acting. When I clench my fist, normally (that is, when I am not in a particularly reflective mood) I do not experience myself as trying to clench but as clenching. This is a point Ricœur himself emphasized, arguing that in our actual experience it is action that manifests itself to us firstly and foremostly, while trying is relatively obscured and requires careful and somewhat tutored attention.³⁹ In response, let me point out that conative experience is certainly *as of* acting, that is, as of successfully trying to do something. But this is just part of the *content* of the experience. The experience itself, which vehicles that content, is a trying-experience. Every trying presents itself as successful (that is, as action) in the same way every judgment presents itself as true and every visual experience presents itself as a seeing (that is, as a good case of visual experience). One experiences oneself as *seeing* the world, not as *hallucinating* the world or as being in a state that might be either a seeing or a hallucinating. All the same, one's experience is *in fact* a state that might be either a seeing or a hallucinating. When it is a seeing, the phenomenology is veridical, and when it is a hallucinating, it is non-veridical. Likewise with trying: when it is successful, our experience of ourselves as acting is veridical, and when it is unsuccessful, our experience is non-veridical. But there is nothing about the conative experience itself that guarantees its success. So the experience itself is merely a trying.

This consideration addresses also the related objection that the natural complement of deciding is acting, and not trying, because *what* we decide is normally to *do* something, not to *try to do* something. There are marginal cases in which we decide to try something, namely, cases where we are

³⁷ Dedicated discussion of the feeling of effort has a substantial history, going back at least to Maine de Biran (1812). Following de Biran, it has been something of a recurring theme that the feeling of effort constitutes an introspective proof of the existence of libertarian free will (see, e.g., Laporte 1947 and Campbell 1957). Even James (1890 Ch.26) saw it necessary to concede that in *some* cases of willing a phenomenal element is present in the form of the feeling of effort, and Dewey (1897) followed in his steps.

³⁸ It is of course true that some decisions and consequent actions are effortless, in the sense that there is no special difficulty involved in them. But this is *relative* effortlessness. There is also an *absolute* sense of effort in which we can say that trying always mobilizes *some* effort, although sometimes the effort is so comparatively minimal that we consider the trying (relatively) effortless. One might reasonably hope that understanding the feeling of effort in this absolute sense could shed light on the phenomenology of trying.

1947 and Campbell 1957). Even James (1890 Ch.26) saw it necessary to concede that in *some* cases of willing a phenomenal element is present in the form of the feeling of effort, and Dewey (1897) followed in his steps.

³⁹ Ricœur writes (1950: 389): 'The feeling of effort is not a simple awareness encountered in [mere] description; it proceeds, through reflection, from a more fundamental awareness: the awareness of action.'

skeptical of our chances of success. For example, we may decide to try to run a marathon. But most decisions are unlike that: one decides to order a salad, or send an email, or take out the trash—not to try to order a salad, send an email, or take out the trash.⁴⁰ However, it seems to me that the fact that normally we decide to act rather than to try derives entirely from the fact that every trying presents itself as an acting. The analogy here is with perceptual belief: normally, I believe that I am seeing my laptop and hearing my wife, not that I am having a visual experience *as of* my laptop and an auditory experience *as of* my wife. Such guarded perceptual beliefs are acquired, again, only in conditions of uncertainty. Still, what the belief is *about* is a perceptual experience which may or may not qualify as seeing/hearing. Likewise, what a decision is *about* is a trying, which may or may not be an acting.

To conclude, Ricœur is right, contrary to James, that conative phenomenology involves an element referring to realization in action, an element of moving from disposition to manifestation, from chargedness to discharge; but that he is wrong that conative phenomenology must therefore involve an action-phenomenology. Rather, it is the phenomenology of *trying* that is built into conative phenomenology. Ricœur would protest that in our actual experience it is action that manifests itself to us firstly and foremostly, while trying is relatively obscured and requires careful and somewhat tutored attention.⁴¹ This is true, but is explained by the fact that we often connect to our action not through our conative phenomenology, but through *perceptual* phenomenology, which after all is generally the clearest and most vivid phenomenology and predominates our conscious awareness. It remains that the sphere of *conative* phenomenology proper includes as component the phenomenology of trying, not any alleged phenomenology of action.

It remains that the phenomenology of decision is unlike how James thought of it and very like how Ricœur did: the feel of deciding to φ inherently requires a complement in trying. This marks the deep difference between decision and desire. Since desire's feel of pull-to-action is merely hypothetical, there is nothing phenomenologically problematic about desiring something but trying to do nothing about it. Things are different with decision: given *categorical* pull-to-action feel it is phenomenologically unintelligible to decide to φ without trying to φ . We can see that deciding and trying are, *au fond*, two components of a single phenomenon, which for want of a better term I will call the “phenomenology of deciding-cum-trying.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences for pressing on me this objection.

⁴¹ This comes through in Ricœur's discussion of the feeling of effort, which I take to be closely connected to the phenomenology of trying, as will be seen momentarily. He writes (1950: 389): ‘The feeling of effort is not a simple awareness encountered in [mere] description; it proceeds, through reflection, from a more fundamental awareness: the awareness of action.’

⁴² It may be objected that sometimes we try to do something without first explicitly deciding to do it. But this objection depends on too demanding a conception of decision. It is true that the most phenomenologically vivid, and thus most paradigmatic, decisions are deliberate, thoughtful, and ‘explicit.’ But throughout the day we make a great many more small decisions, ‘thoughtless,’ ‘implicit’ decisions that impose on our ongoing conscious experience only very lightly. These decisions have the same phenomenal character as the more paradigmatic ones, but theirs is much more subdued and peripheral. It simply suffers from lower phenomenal intensity, but is otherwise the same as paradigmatic decisions’. My contention is that trying always implicates a decision, though typically of this phenomenologically minor variety.

6. “Consent”

So far two aspects of conative phenomenology have come through: deciding and trying. The former is perhaps the core act of the will, but has a phenomenal “lack” at its heart, as it calls out for realization but does not contain that realization within it; trying offers its phenomenal “filling,” as the initiation of realization. In these metaphorical terms, we might say that with the combination of deciding and trying, one’s conative experience is phenomenally “saturated.”

Nonetheless, Ricœur maintains that there is one more central component to conative phenomenology—what he calls *consent*. It is not straightforward in the text what Ricœur has in mind with his notion of consent, but at bottom, consent appears to be the will’s relation to that aspect of the world that is outside its control. Ricœur puts this by saying that the formal object of consent is necessity, where by this he appears to mean a kind of practical necessity—*inevitability*. In this section, I present two specific interpretations of the role of consent in Ricœur’s picture of the will, which I call the “complement” interpretation and the “alternative” interpretation. I will argue that both lead to problems for the claim that we have here a distinct third component of fundamental conative phenomenology.

To appreciate the first (“complement”) interpretation, recall Aristide’s dilemma: he wants to eat a piece of leftover cake, but also wants to lose weight; eventually, he decides to throw away the cake. Observe, now, that the only reason a decision is needed, the only reason there is a dilemma here at all, is that Aristide is aware of the conflict between his two desires: he realizes that, the way the world works, one normally cannot lose weight while eating chocolate cakes. This is an aspect of the world over which Aristide has no control—it is “necessity” staring back at Aristide—and Aristide must *accept* it, *consent* to it, if a conscious act of deciding is to take place at all. Accordingly, we do not *fully grasp* the deciding if we have no grasp of the consenting. Consenting goes to the very meaning of decision-making. In this interpretation, what Ricœur has in mind is that understanding decision (and the consequent trying) requires as a component understanding consent. Although surely very peripheral, the feel of consent is one important element in Aristide’s overall phenomenology as he exercises his will in the face of the cake dilemma. Without this element, there is no exercising of the will. For without consent, there is no call for decision.

The problem with consent so interpreted is that there is nothing particularly *conative* about it. To *realize* something, say that the world is set up a certain way, is to have a cognitive representation of the world. Even if such realization is a necessary accompaniment to the conative experiences of deciding and trying, that would not make it conative itself. It still involves a theoretical orientation on the world—a mind-to-world direction of fit. This casts consent as one more non-conative element surrounding conative phenomenology, on a par with (e.g.) the proprioceptive perception of muscle contraction. Consider Aristide’s overall phenomenology during the episode. In addition to the deciding and trying, it involves a perceptual (visual and/or olfactory) experience of the cake, a gustatory imagining of the cake’s taste, myriad background beliefs and desires loitering in the fringes of consciousness, and so on. Many of these may be such that appreciating them is necessary for understanding Aristide’s decision. Arguably, one does not fully grasp the decision if one does not grasp that Aristide is perceiving the cake as nearby and smelling nice.

Regardless, the perceptual experience is not literally part of Aristide's *conative* phenomenology—and neither is his consent.

This suggests to me that this first interpretation of Ricœur's notion of consent cannot be right. For Ricœur (1950, p. 431, my italics) is explicit on the need to construe consent as an experience directed at the world in a *practical* mode:

... [C]onsent is not a *judgment* on necessity, since it does not consider *theoretically* the fact; it does not put it at a viewing distance; it is not an observational perspective on the inevitable, it is a contemplation without distance, better an *active adoption* of necessity.

There must be another interpretation of consent, one that casts it as a genuinely conative act, an "active adoption."

Consider the following thought-experiment. Like Aristide, Adelaide is hit with craving for chocolate cake. Unlike Aristide, however, she has none about—and it is getting late. She decides to drive to her favorite bakery, but discovers that it is already closed. So she heads to another couple of bakeries, which turn out to be closed as well. With a heavy heart, she reconciles herself to the idea of mass-produced chocolate cake, and heads to the nearest grocery store. To her surprise, the grocery store is out of chocolate cake, whereupon she drives to the local supermarket, only to be again disappointed. At this point, she gives up and drives home, exhausted and cakeless. The whole ordeal has taken well over an hour, an hour bustling with a succession of feelings: desire, decision, excitement, disappointment, hope, wish, surprise, frustration, dissatisfaction, more disappointment—and finally, a certain *acceptance* that in this instance the world will simply not yield to her will: she will not have her chocolate cake. In accepting the world's resistance to her will, Adelaide *consents* to the world being the way it is—a world of cakeless Adelaides.

On this interpretation, when consenting happens, trying ceases. The mind no longer attempts to change the world to fit it. Indeed, where trying is the relation between the will and the world when one pursues what one takes to be achievable, consent is the relation that ensues when one no longer takes what one wants to be achievable: "consent is even the opposite of effort; it is expressly will without power" (Ricœur 1950, p. 432). On this interpretation, then, consenting is not so much a *complement* of deciding-cum-trying as a sort of *alternative* to deciding-cum-trying. It is not that an act of the will has three "moments" in it, deciding, trying, and consenting. It is that there are two radically different kinds of acts of the will: deciding-cum-trying, on the one hand, and consenting, on the other.

There are overtones here of the Stoic idea that one ought to divide the world into the part one can control and the part one cannot control, then try to change the former to fit one's desires and change one's desires to fit the latter. These Stoic overtones are manifest in the following passage, which starts with an affirmation of the practical intentionality of the "active adoption" that captures consent (Ricœur 1950, p. 431; my italics):

This active adoption of necessity... is in fact not without analogy to decision; like the latter, the former can be expressed by an imperative: let this be; strange imperative certainly, since it ends at the inevitable; at least in wanting the pure fact, I *change it for me* where I cannot *change it in itself*.

This interpretation, taking Adelaide rather than Aristide as the paradigmatic consent-er, has the exegetical advantage that it casts consent's intentionality as practical rather than theoretical. (At the same time, it has the exegetical disadvantage that it does not integrate consenting with deciding and trying into a single conative phenomenology.⁴³)

However, the resulting view faces a vexing problem. This is that consent appears to be not just a special kind of act of the will—it appears to be a special kind of *decision*! Adelaide *decides* to give up on the sweet dream of a chocolate cake. In accepting that the world will not yield to her desires this time, she decides to *refrain* from certain activities. In essence, she decides *not to try* to find a piece of cake any more. She decides to revise her expectations, and in the bigger scheme of things, decides to find a way to live in a world of cakeless Adelaides. This is a radically different kind of decision—a decision to change one's desires to fit (the uncontrollable part of) the world, instead of the more typical decision to try to change (the controllable part of) the world to fit one's desires. But it is a decision all the same.⁴⁴

Furthermore, as a decision it entrains its own kinds of trying, albeit importantly different ones. When Aristide decides to throw away the cake, he proceeds to try to change the world to fit his desire for slimness, which entails trying to get rid of the cake. When Adelaide consents to cakelessness, she proceeds to try to change her desires to fit a cakeless world. In doing so, she is acting on certain second-order desires, such as the desire to have as few frustrated first-order desires as possible (other things equal). Deciding to act on these second-order desires, and then *trying* to act on them, is what Adelaide's conative phenomenology really comes down to in this instance. Thus consent is not a *sui generis* type of conative phenomenology, apart from the phenomenology of deciding and trying. Rather, it is a *special case* of the phenomenology of deciding and trying—a particularly interesting or instructive special case, perhaps, but still a special case.

I conclude that, whether we adopt the “complement” interpretation or the “alternative” interpretation of Ricœurian consent, the plausible view is that conative phenomenology is *exhausted* by the phenomenology of deciding-cum-trying.⁴⁵ I am quite open to the possibility that there is some third interpretation of Ricœurian

⁴³ This is only a disadvantage insofar as the text suggests that Ricœur means the three to integrate in this fashion. One certainly gets that impression in the 60-page introduction. But in practice, the whole third part of *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (the part devoted to consent) comes across as a somewhat artificial superposition on the first two parts. Ricœur seems to have a whole new agenda in this part, to do with a defense of a vaguely Stoic conception of freedom, that nowise flows from the rest of the book. Arguably, it is only in the context of the latter agenda that the material on consent makes sense: ‘... consenting is not so much noticing necessity as adopting it; it is to say yes to what is already determined; it is to convert within oneself the hostility of nature, [to convert] necessity into freedom’ (Ricœur 1950: 433). If so, perhaps there is no exegetical disadvantage here after all.

⁴⁴ Indeed, to the stoic, the decision to consent is the deeper, more meaningful decision.

⁴⁵ This conclusion may be thought to create a puzzle. If Ricœur is right that conative phenomenology comes in two varieties, then the account of practical intentionality in terms of world-to-mind direction of fit would appear unworkable. For it is not involved in cases of consent. The solution to this puzzle lies in keeping in mind that consensual decisions are fueled by certain second-order desires that *are* supposed by their nature to change that which they are directed at (namely, first-order desires). The lesson is that the labels ‘world-to-mind’ and ‘mind-to-world’ are misleading; better labels would be ‘subject-to-object’ and ‘object-to-subject.’

consent which I have failed to isolate and conceptualize. Such a third interpretation may cast in a more positive light the notion that consent is a third component of conative phenomenology. Until I become aware of such an interpretation, however, I provisionally conclude that conative phenomenology is in the first instance a phenomenology as of deciding-cum-trying.

7. Conclusion

It may turn out that deciding-cum-trying is not the *only* irreducible form of conative phenomenology. As noted in Section 3, the phenomenology of desiring or wanting may turn out to be one as well.⁴⁶ A full theory of conative phenomenology would offer a first-person characterization of the directedness and givenness of deciding-cum-trying and any other basic form of conative phenomenology, and show how all other forms of conative experiences are grounded in them. I have sketched starts on each of these fronts, but their proper development would require a much more extensive inquiry.

There is one final word of wisdom we should take from Ricœur. As noted above, in phenomenological psychology we grasp an experiential phenomenon from the first-person perspective. This means, for Ricœur (1950: 32–3), that when it comes to the will, purely intellectual grasping is bound to be incomplete; one must “actively participate” in willing in order to fully appreciate its nature (see also Arendt 1978). This reflects an inbuilt limitation of Husserlian phenomenology when applied to the conative realm. When we attempt to understand cognitive phenomenology, we as theoreticians enter a reflective state directed at the cognitive, but the reflective state is itself cognitive, so we have not yet left the sphere we are attempting to understand. But when we attempt to understand the conative, we also enter a cognitive reflective state, which this time does sever us from the sphere we are attempting to understand. Thus whereas cognitive experienced is still lived when we try to theorize about it (even from the first-person perspective), conative experience is no longer lived when we do. Therefore, full grasping of conative phenomenology cannot be obtained only through appreciating the right phenomenological theory—one must also *experience* the conative activity.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ There may, of course, be other forms of conative phenomenology that cannot be accounted for in terms of deciding-cum-trying and desiring, though I suspect this is unlikely.

⁴⁷ For comments on a previous draft, I am grateful to Thor Grünbaum and an anonymous referee for *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. I have also benefited from presenting materials from this chapter at the Pratt Institute and at the University of Copenhagen’s Center for Subjectivity Research. I would like to thank the audiences there, in particular Adrian Alsmith, Rasmus Thybo Jensen, John McGuire, Søren Overgaard, Katherine Poe, and Dan Zahavi.

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