

Utter Unreflectiveness

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Jiten Mohanty and I sat together on the plane from New Delhi to New York after the conference on “Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy” in January 1988. At the meeting he had had a conversation with a friend about whether or not one can be conscious of something without any awareness of time and he asked me what I thought. Immediately and without thought, I suggested that one might focus exclusively on an ideal object and while doing so be oblivious of anything temporal. Jiten smiled in his characteristic way and we went on to discuss other matters.

It has been awhile, but I wish to take this opportunity to follow-up on that suggestion, but this time with some thought or, more precisely, phenomenological reflection. I will begin with some clarification of the concept of attitude and then describe how one can be aware of something without being aware of time. I could have drawn on the doctrine of marginal consciousness developed by our shared friend, Aron Gurwitsch, if I had felt need for the support of an authority, but have chosen not to do that.

The following is not an exercise in philology but in phenomenology. That means that my account can be examined by others or even by myself at a later time by reflectively and either seriously or fictively observing cases from conscious life of the sorts mentioned and then *eideating*. When matters are evidenced to be as I describe them, my account will be confirmed, and when my account is mistaken or incomplete, the reader is encouraged to correct or complete it phenomenologically.

Many phenomenologists would say that what one first finds upon reflection are

processes or even acts of sensuous perceiving. I suspect, however, that this is a product of the naturalism that plagues philosophy in our time. For those whose outlook has not been naturalized through study of engineering, naturalistic science, and certain types of philosophy, what one first finds upon reflection are attitudes and these are first of all characterized by their positional components. Ask an American male undergraduate about his attitude toward professional football and typically he replies that he likes it. This is not a passing feeling but an abiding attitude.

Further inquiry and reflection readily discloses that such a student has encountered the playing of that game chiefly representationally through watching television and also that it is a social observation of players and thus, in just these two respects, it is already not an act of sensuous perceiving. But, again, the first thing he probably remarks upon is the positive affective component of liking. Correlatively, he would probably also say, "Professional football is good."

Affective attitudes can be sorted in various ways. For example, they can be sorted according to the temporality of the object. Thus far in the football example, the temporality is vague, that is, it is indeterminate whether games in the present, past, future, or at all such times are referred to. Upon reflection, however, it is clear that football games, when they occur, do occur in time. One can fondly remember this or that past game or, less determinately, just how football was so much more wonderfully played at some earlier time.

Nostalgia, regret, guilt, shame, and pride are easily illustrated retrospective affective attitudes. Attitudes toward the future include hope, fear, and anxiety. And besides prospective as well as retrospective attitudes there are attitudes toward present objects. Ask the student while he is watching a game and he may well reply that he likes what he is seeing.

There are other positional attitudes toward objects in time. Those of the

practical or volitional sort can be negative in being directed at efforts to destroy, prevent, diminish, etc. or positive in being directed at efforts to create, preserve, enhance, etc. Interestingly, however, there are no practical attitudes directly in-tentive to present or past objects, although one can be indirectly positively intentive to them in willing their preservation or restoration.

If one has been exposed to lots of naturalistic science and recent philosophy, one probably tends not only to be naturalistic but also intellectualistic in orientation. This signifies that concerns with the affective and conative components of attitudes tend to be disregarded for the sake of thinking, believing, and evidencing. Having paid respect to the affective and conative attitudes, more intellectual attitudes can now be turned to.

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On the level of common sense thinking, thinking in the cultural as well as the formal and naturalistic disciplines, and even most of philosophy, there are preoccupations with what to call a matter, what to say about it, whether to believe in it or not, and how to justify such believing through evidencing. When this cognitive attitude prevails, one can still find feeling and striving in the background.

Most generally, there are two sorts of objects. There are the real or, better, the temporal objects. For transcendental phenomenologists, these include conscious life in its non-worldly status as well as houses, automobiles, bubble gum, etc. Then there are ideal objects. Normal adult humans are latently familiar with various sorts of them.

Patent familiarity with ideal objects is often produced in introductory logic courses. There one can become adept at recognizing the logical forms that particular judgments and the theories built up from them have. One can also become adept, whether it is accepted or not in the school of the theory of logic

one's instructor subscribes to, at recognizing the universal or eidetic forms words or states of affairs exemplify.

Or to consider a little arithmetic, the number names "one, two, three" are expressive of concepts, indeed formal concepts. When what is enumerated is not specified verbally, they can be reexpressed with symbols, and they can be combined such that there is $1+2=3$, $3-2=1$, etc. Moreover, one can become clearly and distinctly aware of the formal universals of oneness or unity, twoness or duplicity, and threeness or triplicity that are instantiated by the formal concepts expressed by "one, two, three" or habitually bestowed upon matters in the process of counting them.

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One more distinction between attitudes needs to be mentioned. When the student is asked about professional football, he may reflect. It is not improbable that he merely answer on the basis of habit, or indeed, because of what others have said or what he has long been expected to say. But he might also turn to his attitude and observe and analyze it, however briefly and superficially, and thus produce, with the justification of a modicum of evidencing, the statement "I like it" or the correlative equivalent statement "It is good."

Intellectuals, especially in the humanities and some schools of thought in the social sciences, reflect fairly habitually and may not appreciate how a naturalistic scientist does not. An astronomer, for example, does not regularly fret over how stars appear to and are posited by him, or are perceived with or without instruments by which he is aware of them. Then there are the belief characteristics constituted in *doxic* components of his conscious life, the states of stellar affairs constituted in his thinking, and how some objects may be tacitly good or bad or at least handsome, plain, or ugly.

Besides such unreflectiveness in a science, there is unreflectiveness in everyday life. While driving, one can of course reflect on how the road presents itself correlative to one's encountering of it, especially if one is bored while driving (and influenced by phenomenology!), but that is unusual. What is usual is to ignore or overlook not only the encountering and its components but also the object as it is encountered. Then there is simply the road and other cars in one's focus. What is evidenced when one reflects is an utterly unreflective attitude.

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Can one be aware of something with no sense of time, no awareness of objects as located in time, as present, past, or future, or as going on in time whether staying the same or changing? For the present writer, this is difficult to do. He is too habituated to reflecting. But he does recognize that his tendency to reflect is unusually strong and also habitual. And he is nevertheless confident that he could train himself or be trained by others to be utterly unreflective on purpose and, in addition, to be so in a special attitude that is directed exclusively toward ideal objects, such as $1+2=3$, which are not temporal. This possibility is clear.