

The Existential Quality Issue in Social Ontology: Eidetics and Modifications of Essential Connections

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ABSTRACT

The present work deals with the quality issue in social ontology: the fact that social entities not only can exist or not exist, but can also be *more or less achieved* and be subject to *degrees of existence*, and the fact that social entities can be bearers of *varieties of ways of existence*, that is, there are several ways in which a social entity of a certain type can be realized. In accordance with phenomenological eidetics, I show that modifications of essential connections involve *lacks* or *variations* of essential parts of entities, which, respectively, imply degrees of existence and varieties of ways of existence which “enhance” the existence of social entities, and I argue that the *modification issue hits the core of the quality of existence issue*. Lastly, I focus on the *essential connection of tendency* as another case in which eidetics provides meaningful insights into the existential quality issue in social ontology.

1. The Existential Issue

1.1. Claims on “existence” as a mere fact of existing vs. “existence” as quality of the existence of social entities

Social ontology is concerned with the “existence” of social entities, which is intended merely as creation and maintenance in existence of social entities. Social ontology has largely ignored the “existence” of social entities intended as the quality of their existence: the fact that social entities can be *more or less achieved* and, therefore, are subject to *degrees of existence*, and the fact that social entities can be bearers of *varieties of ways of existence*, that is, there are

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several ways in which a social entity of a certain type can be realized. John R. Searle's *Making the Social World*, one of the most exhaustive and brilliant accounts of social ontology, is a paradigmatic example of this typical attitude of ignoring the qualitative issue and dealing only with the conditions of creation and maintenance in existence of social entities.¹

What I mean by “quality of existence” of social entities can be illustrated by some examples.

1.1.1. Examples of “quality of existence” as degrees of existence

Let us look at some examples of “quality of existence” of social entities intended as degrees of existence, that is, as more or less fulfilled social entities.

(i) A social entity such as a group of friends not only can exist or not exist, but it also may exist as a vital and stable group or, on the contrary, as a lifeless and unstable group.²

(ii) A social act³ such as my promise to go with you to see a movie not only can exist or not exist, i.e. not only can be performed or not performed by me, but may also be fulfilled or not fulfilled by me, depending on the fact of whether I actually go to the movie with you or not, and therefore it can exist in a fully achieved form or not.⁴

(iii) Not only can a social entity such as a state promulgate legal provisions, and therefore legal provisions of such a state can exist or not, but those legal

¹ See Searle 1995 and 2010. Searle aims to explain how social and institutional reality is created and maintained in existence, but he fails to address the existential quality of this reality, to degrees of achievement or functioning of this reality.

² See Gilbert 2005 and more generally Gilbert 2013. Gilbert deals with the problem of maintenance in existence of groups in terms of their stability and cohesion. According to Gilbert, the stability and cohesion of groups depend on, among other things, the possibility individuals have of sharing values as the product of a joint commitment: in the case of a joint commitment, sharing values binds individuals together and creates social unity. On this topic, see De Vecchi 2015a.

³ The extension of the concept of social acts coincides in large measure with the extension of the concept of what John L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searle (1969) have called “speech act”. In both cases they are acts which must be addressed to someone (the addressee of the act), must be grasped by the addressee and thus are essentially linguistic – they must be expressed to the addressee in order to be grasped by him. On the concept of social act, see Reinach 1913, §3. On the relation between social acts and speech acts, see Mulligan 1987 and 2016.

⁴ See Reinach (1913), who distinguishes between the performance of the act of promising and its fulfilment. The former does not necessarily imply the latter (on this issue, see *infra*, § 4. Essential connections of tendency).

provisions may be enforced or not, that is, “the sense” of legal provisions may be fulfilled by the actions which enforce the content of the provisions, or not.⁵

These examples of “quality of existence” of social entities highlight a spectrum of possible different levels of achievement, from social entities which are paradigmatically and fully achieved to less fully achieved social entities (until the case of social entities exceeding their bounds of existence, and thereby ceasing to exist).

1.1.2. Examples of “quality of existence” as varieties of ways of existence

Let us turn to examples of “quality of existence” intended as varieties of ways of existence:

(i) Collective social acts: a social act such as commanding, requesting, informing, etc. can be performed by several people and/or addressed to several people – instead of being performed by a single person and addressed to just one person as in the “normal” type of social act.⁶

(ii) Proxy social acts: social acts can be performed by proxy: commanding, informing, requesting in the name of another – instead of being performed by its own subject as in the “normal” type of social.⁷

(iii) Both collective and proxy social acts: social acts such as law-making acts which are performed in the name of the state by an organ of the state (a collective, e.g. the parliament).⁸

These three cases of social acts (collective social acts, proxy social acts and both collective and proxy social acts) represent a variation of the ways of existence of that particular type of social entity that is a social act. These cases exemplify the possibility of extending the set of phenomena falling under the

⁵ See Stein 1925, I: § 2d: 42; En. tr. 2006: 54: “Legal provisions [*Bestimmungen*] are there to be followed. That is how their sense is fulfilled”. Stein here adopts Husserl’s relation between the sense of an expression [*Ausdruck*] and its fulfilment [*Erfüllung*] by an act of intuition (the Husserlian pairing of “sense” [*Sinn*] and “fulfilment” [*Erfüllung*], of “sense-giving acts” or “meaning-conferring acts” [*sinnverleihende Akte*] and “meaning-fulfilling acts” [*erfüllende Akte*], presented and discussed by Husserl in the *Logical Investigations*) as a paradigmatic relation to explain the relation between the sense of the legal provision (the sense of the provision which is also an expression: a proposition, a sentence) and its fulfilment by the actions which enforce the content of the legal provision. See Husserl 1901, in particular the First Logical Investigation. On this point see also De Vecchi 2015b.

⁶ See Reinach 1913: § 3.

⁷ See Reinach 1913: § 3.

⁸ See Stein 1925, I, § 2c: 38–40; En. tr. 2006: 49–52.

case of paradigmatically and fully achieved social acts, and therefore increasing the ways of realizing a fully achieved social act. They “enhance” the existence of social acts, so to speak.

1.2. Quality of existence and eidetics

I believe that the issue of the quality of existence of social entities is a crucial one, and that its neglect represents a serious *lacuna* in the contemporary social ontological debate. In this paper, I deal with this *lacuna* and *claim that eidetics can provide meaningful insights into the quality of existence issue*. By “eidetics” I mean the analysis of *essential connections* which define an entity as the type of entity it is, and make an entity the entity it is. Eidetics is concerned with the *essential legality* that makes any entity the entity it is. The main idea of eidetics is that the essential connections of an entity are the *bounds* which reticulate the *essential parts* of an entity in the framework of a *whole*.⁹ For instance, let us take the social act of promising: promising is realized as a promise if and only if its essential legality is satisfied. Such essential legality prescribes that a promise be connected to other things such as: promisor, promisee, expression of the promise, uptake of the promise, obligation and claim produced by the promise, etc. If only one of these parts is lacking, the promise itself would not exist. Therefore, eidetics implies the idea of a normative sense of “existence”: the idea that the existence of an entity is grounded in the satisfaction of its essential legality.

In this paper, I will briefly focus on what eidetics is, and then show how eidetics can provide meaningful insights into the existential quality issue (degrees of existence and variety of ways of existence) in social ontology. In order to do so, I will focus on the *modifications of essential connections* and on the *essential connections of tendency*, which represent a crucial topic of eidetics. I will point out that the above-mentioned examples of quality of existence of social entities are cases of different kinds of modifications of essential connections.

The eidetic analysis of social entities that characterises the research of early phenomenologists such as Adolf Reinach (1913) and Edith Stein (1925) is the main reference of my paper.

⁹ See Husserl 1901 (Third Logical Investigation) and, about it, Smith 1990.

2. Eidetics

“Eidetics” is a very specific concept of phenomenology, grounded on the phenomenological concept of “essence” [*Wesen, eidos*]. Eidetics is properly the *science of essences*.¹⁰

2.1. The main theses of phenomenological eidetics

What eidetics is and how it works can be briefly presented through the main theses of eidetics.

(i) Thesis on essences and non-empirical data

A parte objecti: there are essences, that is, there are invariant structures (species, types) of “things” – “things” here is intended as any kind of entity: natural entities (physical and psychical, which exist in space-time), ideal entities (numbers, theorems, etc. which are atemporal), etc. Such invariant structures can be the object of our experience. This implies that we experience not only empirical data, but also “non-empirical data”.¹¹ A parte subjecti: there is a specific intentional act through which we experience essences: the act of eidetic intuition [Wesensschau].¹²

(ii) Thesis of the eidetic normativity

The existence of any type of entity is intrinsically normative, in the following specific sense: in order to “exist” as a thing of a certain type (as a sound, as a person, as a promise, as an action, as a dream, as a character in a novel, etc.), any entity must fit the essential, invariant structure that defines its being. Therefore, by “eidetic normativity” I mean the normativity that necessarily characterises the eidos of any entity: in order to exist as a specific kind of entity, any entity must satisfy its essential legality. Any entity is as such a normative entity in this specifically ontological sense of “normative”.

(iii) Thesis on Parts and Wholes and *A Priori* Connections

What does “essential legality” or “essential normativity” mean? It means essential bonds; that is, any entity must be connected to other entities in order

¹⁰ See Husserl 1913, §§ 1-10, and Reinach 1914.

¹¹ Héring 1921: 425.

¹² See Husserl 1913 and Reinach 1914.

to be the entity it is. This implies that any entity is constituted by essential *parts* reticulated in the framework of a *whole*. The idea of essential connections or bonds (which any thing must satisfy in order to be the kind of thing it is) is the idea of essential parts which must be reticulated in the framework of a whole. The connections among the essential parts are *existential dependence connections*.¹³ Moreover, they are *a priori connections*, that is, necessary and universal connections.

Reinach speaks of “*a priori* structures” [*apriorische Gebilde*] of social entities and in this expression sums up the feature of essences (invariant structures), as well as that of essential legality grounded in *a priori* connections.¹⁴

Let us take a rough eidetic analysis of promising as an example of these theses. In order to be an act of promising, a promise must satisfy its essential structure and be essentially connected to its *a priori* parts on which promising as a whole existentially depends: the promisor and the promisee, their correspondent obligation and claim, the expression and the uptake of the act, etc. Unless these parts are in place, a promise is not a promise.

2.2. Eidetic and the existential quality issue

What about the relation between eidetics and its theses, and the existential quality issue? I will sketch here the aspects of this relation that seem to me the most relevant.

(i) There is a *paradigmatic sense of existence* of any entity. This is the case when all of the parts constituting an entity as a whole are actually well instantiated and achieved; in this case, an entity is realized in such a way that its essential legality is fully satisfied.

(ii) There are also *varieties of degrees of existence*. This is the case when the parts constituting an entity as a whole are subject to modifications, which render the being of the entity less full. The being of the entity is less fulfilled and less accomplished with respect to what its essential legality prescribes, and therefore the quality of the existence of such entity is inferior.

Example: there can be a well-formed and well-performed promise, but there can also be a promise lacking one of its essential parts: a promise that is not

¹³ See Husserl 1901, Third Logical Investigation.

¹⁴ Reinach 1913, § 1.

grounded in the will of the promisor to fulfill the promise, and is a pseudo-promise, an empty one, although still a promise (whereas a promise that is not grasped by the promisee is not performed, and therefore not a promise).

(iii) There are also *varieties of ways of existence*. This is the case when the parts constituting an entity as a whole are subject to modifications which maintain the paradigmatic and fully achieved level of existence of an entity: all of the parts constituting an entity as a whole are fully and well realized. Here, modifications regard variations of the parts which do not undermine the paradigmatic degree of existence of the entity. Therefore, such modifications represent an increase in the number of ways of full realization of an entity, and involve an enrichment of the overall quality of social reality.

Example: collective social acts and proxy social acts: with respect to the classical, “normal” social act, the bearers of social acts are modified: there are more bearers with different roles.

3. Modifications of Essential Connections

The point I wish to highlight here is that there can be modifications of essential (*a priori* = necessary and general) connections – as Reinach acutely remarks.¹⁵ Modifications of essential connections imply that one or more of the essential (*a priori* = necessary and general) parts constituting a certain entity as a whole can (i) *lack* or (ii) *be varied* with respect to the canonical, paradigmatic essential structure. Therefore, I claim that just because modifications involve lacks or variations of essential parts of entities, the *modification issue hits the core of the quality of existence issue*, respectively intended both as degrees of existence, i.e. entities which are more or less fulfilled and accomplished, and as varieties of ways of existence which “enhance” the existence of a certain entity.

Modifications of essential connections exemplify how eidetic analysis can provide meaningful insights into the issue of the quality of existence of social entities.

¹⁵ See Reinach 1913 (1989), § 3.

3.1. Modifications implying a lower degree of existence: pseudo-social acts

Here I present Reinach's acute analysis of "pseudo-social acts".¹⁶

(i) The internal experience on which every social act is specifically founded

Let us focus first on the essential part of social acts that is here the object of the modification: the internal experience on which every social act is founded, or more precisely, the fact that, according to its essential legality, every social act is founded on a specific internal experience.

As a matter of *a priori* necessity [*wesensgetzlich*], every social act presupposes as its foundation some internally complete experience whose intentional object coincides with the intentional object of the social act, or is at least somehow related to it. Informing presupposes being convinced about what I inform someone of. Asking a question essentially excludes such a conviction and requires instead uncertainty regarding that about which I ask. In the case of requesting, what is presupposed is the wish that what I request come to be; more exactly, that what I request be realized by the one to whom the request is directed. Commanding presupposes as its foundation not only the wish but the will that the one who is commanded carry out my command, etc.

[...] promising presupposes an inner experience which has the content of the promise as its intentional object. As with commanding, this inner experience is that of intending that something occurs, not of course through the addressee but through the promisor himself. Every promise to do this or that presupposes that one's will is directed to this action.¹⁷

According to its essential legality:

- commanding is specifically founded on the will to carry out the command,
- requesting is specifically founded on the wish that what is requested will be realized by the person to whom the request is addressed,
- promising is specifically founded on the will to fulfill the promise by an action realizing the content of the promise, etc.

¹⁶ Reinach 1913, § 3.

¹⁷ Reinach 1913 1989: 162-166; En. tr.: 22-26; italic mine.

(ii) The modification of the internal experience of social acts

Now, with respect to the essential connection between the social act and the specific inner experience on which it is grounded, what happens in the case of the modification of the internal experience? What happens is that the internal experience, which essentially founds the social act, is lacking in a specific and particular sense of lacking: there is still an internal experience, but it is not the appropriate one, i.e. the right one, for the social act

One will perhaps contest these relationships. One will point for instance to *conventional questions*, which are perfectly compatible with knowing about the content of the question, or to *hypocritical requests*, which are made contrary to one's real wish, etc. *We do not doubt that there are all these things.*¹⁸

So, in the case of modifications of the internal experience of social acts, there can be, for instance:

- conventional questions, where questioning is not founded on uncertainty, as opposed to genuine questions;
- hypocritical requests, where requesting is not founded on a real wish, as opposed to genuine requests;
- insincere promises, where promising is not founded in a will, as opposed to genuine promises.

(iii) Pseudo-social acts and their quality of existence: vacuous existence=lower degree of existence

As Reinach acutely remarks, the point here is to look at these kinds of social acts and to understand what kind of specific social acts they are, that is, how they differ from the “normal” type of social acts, which are well founded in their own proper and specific inner experience.

But one should notice that we do not have here genuine, fully experienced acts of questioning and requesting. There is a certain definite modification of social acts; besides their full performance there is a pseudo-performance, a pale, bloodless performing – the shadow, as it were, next to the bodily thing. One should not think that in such cases there is only the speaking of the words which usually accompany the performance of the acts. There is more than that at stake. The acts are performed, but it is a pseudo-performance [*Schein-vollzug*]; the

¹⁸ Reinach 1913: 162; En. tr.: 22, italic mine.

performing subject tries to present it as genuine.

Social acts which occur with this modification do not presuppose the inner experiences just discussed; in fact, the very nature of a pseudo-act excludes them. A genuine conviction cannot underlie a pseudo-act of informing, genuine uncertainty cannot underlie a pseudo-question, a genuine wish and a genuine will cannot underlie a pseudo-request and a pseudo-command.¹⁹

When social acts are not founded on their own specific internal experience, they are modified in such a way that they become pseudo-social acts: social acts which are not *fully performed*, but just *palely and bloodlessly performed*. In this case, social acts still exist, i.e. they are performed, but *their existence is pale and bloodless, because their performance is merely apparent and not substantial*.

In comparing the quality of existence of social acts to that of pseudo-social acts, Reinach maintains that the former has the solid consistency of a *body*, whereas the latter has the vacuous and empty consistency of a *shadow*.

Therefore, the quality of existence of pseudo-social acts is of a lower degree than that of social acts.

Social act=fully performed act; full existence of the act.

Pseudo social act=vacuously performed; vacuous existence of the act.²⁰

(iv) The relation between degrees of the quality of existence of social acts and individuals' intentionality

Reinach also observes that pseudo-social acts presuppose that individuals have an intentionality which does not fit the kind of intentionality that individuals should have when performing social acts: in the case of pseudo-social acts, individuals do not have the appropriate cognitive or conative states (beliefs, convictions or wishes, will, etc.) which normally found the social acts.²¹ So, for instance, while the social act of informing presupposes a genuine conviction about the content of the act of informing, the pseudo-social act of informing presupposes just a pretended conviction. Informing implies a genuine

¹⁹ Reinach 1913: 162; En. tr.: 22.

²⁰ See the similarity of Reinach's pseudo social acts with Austin's (1962) case of infelicity of speech acts: that of "acts performed but vacuous", the type $\Gamma 1$ in Austin's taxonomy of speech act infelicities.

²¹ See again Austin 1962, infelicity case of speech acts, type $\Gamma 1$: the speaker must have appropriate feelings, thoughts and intentions.

conviction, while pseudo-informing involves a non-genuine conviction, a pretended one that brings about lying.

Only in the first of these cases does one speak of a lie [the case in which the genuine conviction does not underlie the act of informing]. By extending this concept (lying) one can designate the whole group of these cases as the sphere of social dishonesty or hypocrisy, inasmuch as the person falsely presents himself in them as “really” commanding, requesting, etc.²²

More generally, pseudo-social acts, according to Reinach, characterize the social sphere of dishonesty and hypocrisy. The agents of pseudo-social acts pretend to have the appropriate intentional experience they should have – the conviction, the will, the wish etc. respectively of informing, commanding and promising, requesting – but actually do not have it.

3.2. Modifications involving varieties of ways of existence: e.g. collective social acts and proxy social acts

Reinach mentions four cases of modifications of social acts: the first case concerns pseudo-social acts (which I have just spoken of), the second concerns conditional social acts (which I will not deal with here), the third regards collective social acts and the fourth regards proxy social acts. I will now address the case of collective social acts and proxy social acts.²³

3.2.1. Collective social acts

Instead of being performed by and addressed to only one person (the normal and classical type of social acts), there may be the following modification case: “social acts can be performed by a number of persons [*eine Mehrheit von Adressanten*], and can be addressed to a number of persons [*eine Mehrheit von Adressaten*]”.

I will limit myself here to a discussion of the case of social acts performed by a number of persons. Reinach describes the structure of such collective act in this way:

²² Reinach 1913 [1989]: §3: 162, en. tr.: 22.

²³ On Reinach’s account of collective social acts and proxy social acts as modifications of social acts, see Mulligan 2016.

We have to do here with the case where each of the persons performs the act “in union” with the others, where each knows of the participation of the others, lets the others participate, and participates himself: we have *one single act* which is performed by two or more persons together, one act with several subjects.²⁴

According to Reinach, the social act is performed collectively, by a plurality of persons, as “one single act”, if and only if:

- each of the persons performs the act “in union” [*im Verein*] with the others;

- each of the persons knows of the participation of the others, allows the others to participate, and participates herself.

Once these conditions are satisfied, the collective social act is “*one single act* which is performed by two or more persons together, one act with several subjects”. Think for instance of the case of two parents who collectively promise their child to do a certain thing, or of the case of children who collectively request a certain thing of their mother.²⁵

Why do I argue that the modification case of collective social acts (in the particular case of a plurality of persons who perform the act) is relevant for the quality of existence issue? For at least two reasons:

(i) Because collective social acts involve a variation of the way of existence of social acts which increases the ways of existence of fully performed social acts: fully performed social acts can also be collective social acts – and not just the classical, paradigmatic social act whose bearers are single individuals. Collective social acts extend the set of phenomena which fall not only under the *eidos* of social act, but also, and specifically, under the full and well realized instantiation of such *eidos*. By quantitatively increasing the cases of well performed social acts, collective social acts raise the existence of social acts qualitatively; they enhance it, so to speak.

(ii) Moreover, the modification case of collective social acts concerns the possibility of human beings to act together, to cooperate and to perform “one

²⁴ Reinach 1913, § 3: 164; En. tr.: 24.

²⁵ I will not dwell here on the conditions of collective acting identified by Reinach and on the peculiarity of Reinach’s account of collective intentionality with respect to contemporary and best known accounts of collective intentionality, such as of Searle (2010), Gilbert (2013) or Bratman (2014). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Reinach’s idea of collective intentionality is a very strong and specific case of “we intentionality” (“one single act” performed by several persons, those in union with others) which is not reducible to the sum of cases of “I intentionality”, and is therefore more similar to Searle’s account of “we-intentions” or Gilbert’s account of “joint commitment” and “plural subjects” than to Bratman’s singularist account.

single act” with several subjects. In certain cases, (not the cases mentioned by Reinach), the fact of performing collective social acts provides human beings with the possibility of performing acts which a single individual alone would not be able to perform, or would not be able to perform producing the same result in terms of the quality of existence of the social reality. Therefore, collective social acts represent a possibility of improving the quality of existence of human beings themselves also in relation to the social world they inhabit.

Example: think of collective social acts such as law-making acts, which are performed by the organ (= a collective of persons, e.g. parliament) of the state; if the law-making acts were performed by a single individual, i.e. if the law-making acts were “normal” social acts performed by a single individual, the state would be an absolute monarchy or a dictatorial state, and not a democratic state.²⁶

3.2.2. Proxy social acts

The last case of Reinach’s modification of the eidetic structure of social acts that I consider is that of social acts performed by proxy: «representing social acts» [*vertretende sozial Akte*].

There is such a thing as commanding, informing, requesting “in the name of another”. [...] A command in the name of another is one’s own command and yet not really one’s own command. More exactly: the proxy performs the act *quite personally*, but in such a way that the act is presented as ultimately proceeding from another person. [...] the command “in the name of” the other takes its ultimate origin in this person.²⁷

Reinach underlines that proxy social acts, which are accomplished in the name of another person, are characterized by a very interesting duplicity concerning the agent of the act: the act is performed “quite personally” [*höchstpersönlich*] by the proxy [*Vertreter*], it is his/her own act, but the act ultimately proceeds and originates from another person.

It seems to me that in the case of proxy social acts, the interesting points regarding the varieties of ways of existence and the quality of existence issue are the following:

²⁶ See Stein 1925, I, § 2c: 37; En. tr. 2006: 46.

²⁷ Reinach 1913, § 3: 165; En. tr. 1983: 25, italic mine.

(i) Proxy social acts, as well as collective social acts, increase the ways of existence of fully performed social acts: fully performed social acts can also be proxy social acts – and not only the classical, paradigmatic social acts whose agent is a single person who is also the same person the act originates from. In this sense, as I have already remarked with regard to collective social acts, proxy social acts extend the set of phenomena which fall not only under the *eidos* of social act, but also, and specifically, under the full and well realized instantiation of such *eidos*.

(ii) Moreover, proxy social acts show the possibility of human beings to do things together in virtue of the relationship persons have with each other. In the case of proxy social acts, there is no cooperation as in the case of collective social acts, but there is an interpersonal relationship in virtue of which a person delegates and authorizes another person to perform an act in his/her name. This is also an increase of the quality of the social reality overall.

Let us return to the case of both collective and proxy social acts dealt with by Stein in her *State*-book (1925); Stein very likely has in mind here Reinach's account of both collective and proxy social acts as two of the four possible modifications of social acts. According to Stein, law-making acts (acts of promulgating legal provisions [*Bestimmungen*]) are both proxy-representing social acts [*vertretende soziale Akte*] and collective social acts. They are acts accomplished by a collective of persons (the organ of the state) in the name of another collective of persons (the citizens of the state): the latter authorizes and delegates the former to perform the law-making acts personally in virtue of the relationship between the two collectives of persons.²⁸ Law-making acts as both proxy and collective social acts are therefore fundamental for the *quality of existence of democratic states and our social, contemporary world* of which they are a part.

4. Essential Connections of Tendency

Thus far I have only spoken of essential connections as *a priori* (necessary and universal) connections, and of their modifications. However, eidetic analysis also provides us with essential connections, which are neither necessary nor universal, that is, which are not *a priori*. I mean *essential connections which correspond to a tendency – and not to a necessity – inscribed in the eidos of an*

²⁸ See Stein 1925, I, § 2c: 38–40; En. tr. 2006: 49–52.

entity.²⁹ These essential connections are just probable, and are characterized by a degree of constraint midway between the strongest degree of constraint given by the necessity connection and the zero degree of constraint given by the contingent relation.

I argue that the case of the essential connection of tendency is another very eloquent case in which eidetics can provide meaningful insights into the existential quality issue in social ontology.

Let us focus on one of Reinach's examples of essential tendency: the case of the essential tendency of promising to be fulfilled and the situation in which the obligation and claim of the promise can no longer be fulfilled. Here Reinach introduces an extremely acute remark on the quality of the existence of claim and obligation, in the case in which the realizing action becomes impossible.

If the realizing action does not occur at the time at which it should, the obligatory relationship undergoes a change: the claim is «violated». It is further conceivable that the fulfillment of the claim becomes impossible [...]. One cannot say that claim and obligation thereby dissolve. But there does arise a curious antinomy between *the tendency of obligatory relationship to be fulfilled*, and the *factual impossibility of fulfillment*. *The obligatory relationship thereby takes on a distinct kind of meaninglessness. Claim and obligation have become incurably sick.*³⁰

Following Reinach's intuition, there is clearly a full and meaningful sense of existence of claim and obligation, which is brought about by the satisfaction of the essential tendency of the promise to be fulfilled through the corresponding realizing action (the action that carries out the content of the promise), by which the existence of claim and obligation is ended "in a natural way". Otherwise, if the realizing action can no longer occur, claim and obligation are compelled to continue indefinitely in senseless agony.

Reinach's remark opens the classical notion of "existence" as a mere fact of existing to the idea of the quality of existence of an entity: a quality of existence that is inscribed in the very *eidōs* of the entity. This is a feature of social entities

²⁹ On the topic of the essential connection of tendency in social ontology, see: Spiegelberg (1960: 205), who speaks of the fact that social entities are in certain cases characterized by "a law of essential tendencies rather than one of essential necessities"; Di Lucia (2015), on "conditioned a priori"; Smith (1990: § 7 "A priori Structures"), who discusses the case of "laws of a priori tendency".

³⁰ Reinach 1913: 173; En. tr.: 32, italic mine. On claim's and obligation's "senseless agony" see also De Vecchi 2013.

which is neglected by most of the contemporary accounts of social ontology – as I have been arguing in the course of my paper.

There is another case of essential connection of tendency that I wish to mention here in relation to the existential quality issue in social ontology: the case of the relation between values and the law [*Recht*] discussed by Wilhelm Schapp.³¹ Schapp argues that the law is founded in values and characterizes such foundation as just a *probable foundation* given by the *essential tendency (not essential necessity!) of human beings to grasp and to feel values*, i.e. to enjoy values, and, correlatively, by *the essential tendency of values to be enjoyed to the full* by human beings. According to Schapp, these two mutually dependent essential tendencies result in one of the most fundamental and primitive forms of the law: the rational-mutual contract, which is described by Schapp as the process in which the essential tendency of values to be enjoyed to the full, and the essential tendency of human beings to enjoy values to the full, are satisfied through the exchanging and sharing of values between individuals. Thus, the essential tendencies of human beings and values represent a *motivation* for the existence of the law.

Therefore, Schapp opens the perspective of an *existential foundation of the law*, grounded, on the one hand, on the essential tendencies of human beings and values, and, on the other hand, on the relation of motivation between values and the rational-mutual contract. Schapp's existential foundation of the law represents an attempt to inquire into the quality of the existence of social entities.

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³¹ See Schapp 1930 and De Vecchi 2016.

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