



## Contesting the Will: Phenomenological Reflections on Four Structural Moments in the Concept of Willing

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# Contesting the Will: Phenomenological Reflections on Four Structural Moments in the Concept of Willing

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## ABSTRACT

The starting point of this article is the undeniable experience of conscious willing despite its rejection by scientific research. The article starts a phenomenology of willing at the level of the (epi)phenomenon of willing itself, without assuming its embeddedness in a faculty of the soul, consciousness and so forth. After the introduction, a brief history of the philosophy of willing is provided, from which the paradoxical conclusion is drawn that, according to phenomenologists like Heidegger and his followers, the dominance of the will is the main characteristic of the current age, whereas scientists deny the existence of a conscious will at all. Then, four structural moments of the phenomenon of willing are explored in contrast to traditional characterizations in order to rehabilitate and appreciate the phenomenon of willing in contemporary philosophy: the interconnectedness of the one who wills and that which is willed, the transcendence and demand character of that which is willed, the self-involvement of the one who wills and the ampliative nature of the act of willing. To this end, not only sources from the phenomenological tradition but also the affordance theory of the ecological psychologist James Gibson are critically discussed.

## 1. Introduction

The transition to the twenty-first century proved to be a huge watershed in our thinking about conscious willing. It is already known that human action does not always involve conscious decisions; car driving or typewriting is done in a highly automatic way, for instance. By the end of the twentieth century, it had become clear that conscious thought plays a minor role in human action. The social psychologist Ab Dijksterhuis, for instance, showed that unconscious thought is better able to make complex decisions, because of the low processing capacity of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, John Bargh showed that most of our psychological life must occur through non-conscious means, if it is to occur at all, and describes the unconsciousness of willing as *the unbearable automaticity of Being*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dijksterhuis, 'Think Different'.

<sup>2</sup> Bargh and Chartrand, 'The unbearable automaticity'.

These attacks on conscious actions also raised the question of whether free will exists. In *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, Daniel Wegner showed that there is brain activity before both an action and the thought of willing that action.<sup>3</sup> This means that the brain makes decisions first, and then the mind thinks it is the origin of that decision, and then the action takes place. If people think that they made a conscious decision, in fact their brains have already done so. These kinds of discoveries make it highly uncertain whether such a thing as conscious or free will exists at all.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, no specific area in the brain is found which can be said to be the residence of conscious willing. On the other hand, people do undeniably still have the *experience* of willing in their actions.

The fact that the experience of the will is *undeniable* despite its scientific denial makes it worthy of inquiry. What is the status of the will in the age of the unconscious? Is it a necessary illusion for the stability of our relationship with ourselves and others? Or is the will a kind of authorship emotion, associating our acts with ourselves “and so renders the act of one’s own in a personal and memorable way”, as Wegner suggests?<sup>5</sup> Is it possible to bridge the gap between the scientific denial of conscious willing and our everyday experience of willing and acting? Even if it is accepted that the experience of willing is grounded in brain processes, this reduction does not mean that both are identical. From a logical point of view, the epi-phenomenon of willing can only be *grounded* on brain processes when they are non-identical. On the one hand, if they were identical, it would be impossible to discern between the two. On the other hand, if it is impossible to discern between the two, it is impossible to state that the one is grounded on the other. An epi-phenomenon or not, the question about the will is still legitimate in the age of the unconscious.

A *phenomenological* approach is explicitly chosen in this article for two reasons. On the one hand, if the undeniable experience of willing is taken seriously without rejecting the aforementioned research on the will, the only starting point for philosophical questioning is the (epi-)phenomenon of willing – that which shows itself in itself – the *manifest* in our undeniable experience of willing.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, although such a phenomenology of willing breaks open the limits of the traditional conception of phenomenology – Edmund Husserl restricted phenomenology explicitly to an analysis of the ocular, of what can be *seen* – the phenomenological approach in this article remains faithful to it with regard to the structure of intentionality. Intentionality is derived from the Latin *intendere*, which indicates *directedness* towards something. Although all perception, judgement and memory is structured by this intentionality, willing directedness is intentional *par excellence*.<sup>7</sup> Phenomenology already presupposes the phenomenon of willing, i.e. the willing intentionality, and in this article, we take the being of this willing intentionality as the point of departure.

<sup>3</sup> Wegner, *The Illusion*; see Hallett, ‘Volitional Control’; Bode et al., ‘Demystifying “Free Will”’.

<sup>4</sup> In this article, we do not want to contribute to the scientific objections against the rejection of free will. Criticism of free will has a long tradition and did not occur only with the emergence of contemporary neurological insights, just like the conception of unconscious willing is still contested today (see, for instance, Heisenberg, ‘Is Free Will an Illusion?’; Newell and Shanks, ‘Unconscious Influences’). In this article, on the contrary, we take the scientific criticism of free will for granted in order to raise a philosophical question regarding the undeniable *experience* of the will despite its scientific denial.

<sup>5</sup> Wegner, *The Illusion*, 325.

<sup>6</sup> In the remainder of this article, the prefix epi- is dropped, and the concept is just referred to as the phenomenon of willing.

<sup>7</sup> Ricoeur, *Phenomenology*, 15–16.

In the next section, a brief history of the philosophy of willing is provided, from which the paradoxical conclusion is drawn that, according to phenomenologists like Heidegger and his followers, the dominance of the will is the main characteristic of the current age, whereas scientists simply deny the existence of the will.

Then, four structural moments of the phenomenon of willing are explored in order to rehabilitate and appreciate the phenomenon of willing in contemporary philosophy. To this end, not only will sources from the phenomenological tradition be critically discussed, but also the affordance theory of the ecological psychologist James Gibson will be explored. In the penultimate section, the four structural moments of willing are contrasted with traditional characteristics of willing to show their advantage over traditional conceptualizations.

## 2. Preliminary Discussion of the Phenomenology of the Will in the Philosophical Tradition

The first question is where the phenomenon of willing can be encountered. According to Immanuel Kant, the will is “a faculty, ... either of bringing forth objects corresponding to representations, or of determining itself, i.e. its causality to effect such objects.”<sup>8</sup> Kant’s distinction between two capacities of the will is rooted in the philosophical tradition. Plato can be seen as the founder of the concept of the striving will (*boulèsis*) to bring forth objects that correspond to (rational) representations. Besides this first capacity of the will, Aristotle discerns the freedom of the will. According to Aristotle, the human being is the principle, master or cause of his own actions. This distinguishes man from animals and plants. The will is seen as a faculty or ability of the soul, in contrast to the ability to perceive, for example.<sup>9</sup> In modernity, this freedom is found in the ability to make a decision and to act upon that decision by our willing acts. According to Husserl for instance, the act of willing originates from a conscious decision.<sup>10</sup>

If contemporary research on the will is taken seriously, however, the starting point for the question about the will cannot be found in a faculty or power of the soul. This is not only because such a faculty is not found in scientific research. The only thing which is *manifest* in our undeniable experience of willing is the *willing relation* between the one who wills and that which is willed, this *directedness* towards something. Now, it seems to be obvious that the essence of willing as directedness towards something is grasped most purely by distinguishing it from other modes of directedness towards something, like representing or wishing, for instance.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between wishing and willing is founded in the Greek philosophical tradition and relies on the axiom: willing concerns means to an end, not the end itself. Aristotle argues:

And we deliberate not about ends, but about means. A doctor does not deliberate whether he is to cure his patient, nor an orator whether he is to convince this audience, nor a statesman

<sup>8</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> This characteristic of the will goes back to Aristotle. He defines will (*boulèsis*) as a striving (*orexis*) connected to a rational representation and is located in the rational part of the soul. For a comprehensive study on the will in Western philosophical tradition, see Pink and Stone, *The Will*.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl, *Vorlesungen*, 109–10. Although Husserl’s phenomenology focuses mainly on the forms and structures of intellectual consciousness, he also worked on a phenomenology of emotive and volitional consciousness between 1909 and 1914. For Husserl’s phenomenology of willing, see Melle, ‘Husserl’s Phenomenology of Willing’, 169–202.

<sup>11</sup> See Blok, “Massive Voluntarism”.

whether he is to secure good government, nor does anyone else debate about the end of his profession or calling; they take some end for granted, and consider how and by what means it can be achieved.<sup>12</sup>

The end of a person's profession lies outside his or her control, and, therefore, he or she can only *wish* to achieve these ends. Willing, in contrast, concerns the things that are brought about by a person's own efforts; the *means* to an end which are in his or her control.<sup>13</sup> Is this distinction between in-control and out-of-control helpful to characterize the willing directedness towards something?

The same distinction between willing and wishing can be encountered in a modern example of the phenomenology of the will, namely in the work of Edmund Husserl. In his 1914 lecture course on the will, the starting point is also found in the distinction between wishing and willing directedness.<sup>14</sup> In the first instance, however, Husserl articulates another aspect to distinguish between the act of willing and the desiring acts (joy, wish). He shows that both are an act of reaching for ... , but, in the case of willing, something is missing: "Wishing imagines an 'it may be' and willing an 'it should be', in which the 'it should' has to be taken in a certain way. The will, they say, focusses on realization."<sup>15</sup> That which is willed has a positive value not only for the one who wills – values can be seen as motives for willing – but also for what *ought to be* according to Husserl. The will is directed at the actualization of something that *ought to be*, that has to be actualized by the willing act. This can be called the demand character of willing.

This demand character of willing can also be found in Kant's work. According to Kant, willing is the capacity of an actor to determine their own causation and, because he understands the causality of something as the *law of the existence* of that something, the law of willing has the characteristic of an imperative, a "you ought". According to Kant, humans become conscious of the categorical imperative "as soon as we construct maxims for the will"<sup>16</sup>: "This principle needs no search and no invention, having long been in the reason of all men and embodied in their being. It is the principle of *ethics*."<sup>17</sup> Although both Kant and Husserl mention the demand character of willing, the first difference between the two is that, for Husserl, this demand character is embedded in the willed object, whereas for Kant, this demand character is embedded in the act of willing itself.<sup>18</sup> A second distinction is even more important the context of a *phenomenology* of willing; Kant's contention that the categorical imperative as the demand character of willing is self-evident is phenomenologically questionable. Is the law of willing undeniable and immediately evident to the most common reason? Is it always present and can a person confirm it at any time, as in the case of his or her experience of his or her nose and ears? If human being is observed in a completely unprejudiced way, this law is not discovered as a present-at-hand object within it.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle's orientation in general and his distinction between means and ends in particular can be questioned (see Ricoeur, *Phenomenology*, 10). This issue is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>14</sup> Husserl, *Vorlesungen*, 105.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Blok, "Massive Voluntarism", 455.

<sup>19</sup> See Heidegger, *The Essence*, 291; Blok, "Massive Voluntarism", 453.

Kant's conceptualization of willing is therefore dropped here in favour of a return to Husserl's concept of the will. Husserl claims that that which is willed (that which ought to be) is not limited to the means to an end (as Aristotle claimed), but to that which is practically possible to be actualized: humans are not able to will the ideal according to Husserl, just as they are not able to will the past. If willing is limited to the practically possible and therefore is within the domain of a person's control, and this practically possible *ought* to be in willing, contrary to wishing, a common characteristic can be discerned: contrary to wishing, that which is willed is *in a person's control*.

Is it possible to characterize the phenomenon of willing by this "control" humans have in their directedness towards something? That which ought to be (that which is willed) is restricted then to what "I" can actualize in willing as a "practical act", that which is in my control. Husserl says: "But realization means here not merely becoming real but making real, performance of realization. But this is something of its very own, that originates from the peculiarity of the will of consciousness and can only from there be understood"<sup>20</sup>; that which ought to be in willing is restricted to that which is in the control of the one who wills, and willing consists in the practical act of the actualization or presencing of that which ought to be by the one who wills. Here, it becomes clear, not only that Husserl's concept of willing is regulated by the traditional opposition between in-control and out-of-control, but also that the *control room* of willing is explicitly found in human consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

This *subjective* characteristic of willing is also stressed by one of the biggest reformers of phenomenology: Martin Heidegger. For him, willing is not only the "will-to-be-master",<sup>22</sup> but he also conceives of the will as anchored in a "*menschlicher Vorgriff*", i.e. in human being as a subject that is willing something: "With the subjectivity of the subject, will comes to light as the essence of that subjectivity."<sup>23</sup> For Heidegger, will is the main characteristic of modern man, who dominates and controls nature in a technological way; but, for Heidegger, the phenomenon of willing does not primarily indicate an anthropological phenomenon of modern man, but rather the being of beings, i.e. the way the world appears as object of the will (will to power) for a humanity as the subject of willing (will to power).<sup>24</sup>

Based on this short consultation of the history of the phenomenology of willing, the paradoxical conclusion can be drawn that, according to Heidegger and his followers, the dominance of the technical will is the main characteristic of the current age,

<sup>20</sup> Husserl, *Vorlesungen*, 107.

<sup>21</sup> The human subject can also be seen as the origin of valuation according to Husserl. Values presuppose a valuing act of consciousness – traditionally speaking, this valuing act is found in emotive acts – which operates as the motive of willing: "Therefore, willing always implies the emotive act of valuing of a future event that is represented as practically possible" (Melle, 'Husserl's Phenomenology of Willing', 178–79).

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, 'Nietzsche's Word', 234.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger's characterization of being as will is rooted in the German philosophical tradition. Nietzsche already thought of the will as the being of beings: "Only where there is life is there also will; not will to life but – thus I teach you – will to power" (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, 149). Schopenhauer, whose main work was of major importance for Nietzsche's thinking, also understood being as will. Schelling already says in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "in the final and highest instance, there is no other being than willing. Willing is primordial being" (Schelling, *Abhandlung über das Wesen*, 350). Ultimately, this characterization of being as will goes back on Leibniz, who saw it as the original unity of *perceptio* and *appetitus*, so as the unity of representation and willing (see Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken*, 95ff.; Heidegger, 'Nietzsche's Word', 256).

whereas scientists simply deny the existence of the will. The will concerns the whole of being and, at the same time, nothing at all.

In this paradoxical situation, reflection is tossed between the will and the rejection of the will, in which any discussion about the will is crippled. However, this paradox is not only a delightful joke for philosophers, but also a “passion of thought”<sup>25</sup>; the paradox leads to the questioning of the patterns of thinking in which it occurs, to the refutation of philosophical theses and to the breaking open of new paths for philosophical thinking. In the next section, the four characteristics of willing so far introduced are critically reflected upon: (1) the origin of willing is found in the willing subject; (2) contrary to other types of directedness towards something, that which is willed ought to be (demand character of willing); (3) that which is willed is limited to that which is practically possible; (4) the one who wills is in control of that which is willed (self-control of willing).

### 3. Towards a Phenomenology of Willing

#### 3.1. *The Interconnectedness of Willing*

Insofar as Husserl’s phenomenology of the will is rejected in this article, this is not because the relevance of consciousness is rejected in current research, nor because the willing subject is founded in being according to Heidegger.<sup>26</sup> In this, the maxim of phenomenology is followed: to the things themselves! The willing approach should be derived from the *things themselves*, and the only thing which is manifest in the undeniable experience of willing is the *willing relation* between the one who wills and that which is willed in willing, this *directedness* towards something. If the phenomenology of willing concerns the willing relation between the one who wills and that which is willed, this means that the willing directedness cannot be isolated and that this “pure” relation can be compared with other modes of directedness, the representing or wishing relation for instance. This approach is in itself unphenomenological. Willing does not exist without the one who wills and that which is willed.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that the willing relation *presupposes* the one who wills and that which is willed as its constituents. Not only is this derivation rejected by current research, but it is also not compelling; the connection between the one who wills and that which is willed does not necessarily have to be conceived in an extrinsic sense – i.e. that to every willing belongs someone who is willing and something the willing relation is directed at: that which is willed. On the one hand, it can be argued that the one who wills is dependent on that which is willed in willing, insofar as the willing directedness is limited to that which is practically possible. On the other hand, it can be argued that that which is willed is dependent on the one who wills, insofar as the willing directedness towards something is limited to that which is practically possible to be actualized *by* the one who wills; what is practically possible is different for a child and for his father, for instance. The

<sup>25</sup> See “But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow. But the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding to will the collision, although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think” (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 37).

<sup>26</sup> In fact, Heidegger developed a positive concept of willing in the 1930s, before rejecting it completely (see Blok, “Massive Voluntarism”).

phenomenon of willing is then not constituted by human consciousness – the one who wills – or by that which is willed – an intrinsic or an extrinsic value for instance. On the contrary, that which is willed only gives itself through and in actually willing it, just as the one who wills it is only constituted by his or her actual willing of that which is willed; the one who wills and that which is willed are then interdependent and interconnected in actual willing.

However, is it not counterintuitive to give up the primacy of “me” as the starting point of the willing relation in favour of the phenomenon of actual willing? Let us take an example. There is an apple on the table in front of me. Is it self-evident that the meaning or value of that apple is dependent on a person’s willing it? According to Gestalt psychologists, the value or meaning of the apple for a person is not a subjective property that he or she subscribes to apples, but “man behaves in a situation as the situation tells him to behave. ... Each thing says what it is ... a fruit says, ‘Eat me’; water says, ‘Drink me’; thunder says, ‘Fear me’; and woman says, ‘Love me’.”<sup>27</sup> Delicious apples “tell us what to do with them”, they demand us to ... eat them.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the specific meaning or value of an object itself invites or demands specific behaviour (eating, loving and so on).

According to the Gestalt psychologists’ line of reasoning, willing is not primarily based on a valuing act of consciousness (Husserl), but the demand character of the object itself invites or demands a person’s willing directedness to actualize that which is willed. The Gestalt psychologists’ argument can make one at least sensitive to the idea that “I” am not primarily the one who is willing in willing an apple, but that the subject is demanded to actualize the object by this very object; the apple on the table demands such a willing directedness of the one who wills to actualize that which is willed. In other words, eating the apple is something “I” have to do.<sup>29</sup>

A more sophisticated example of the Gestalt psychologists’ line of thought has been developed by the American psychologist James Gibson.<sup>30</sup> According to Gibson, people do not perceive stimulus information from the outside world, which they then process consciously or unconsciously; rather, humans perceive *affordances* in the environment. The word *affordance* indicates the meaning of a thing or organism in the environment that is detected or picked up by the perceiver and allows him to perform a specific kind of action; a chair affords sitting and an apple affords eating, for instance, like a baby affords nurturing and a teacher affords learning.<sup>31</sup> To the extent that this nurturing and teaching behaviour is responsive to affordances in the environment, it can be argued that the child and the student themselves afford the willing directedness of a person to actualize that which is willed, i.e. a healthy child or a graduate student for instance. For Gibson, however, this does not mean that the affordance of the child for the mother is a demand of the child itself, like the Gestalt psychologists suggested. According to Gibson, an affordance is taken *with reference to an animal*; a hard apple affords eating for the mother, for instance, but not for a child without teeth. In the same way, a teacher affords learning for a student, but not for a baby.

<sup>27</sup> Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, 353.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur, *Phenomenology of Will*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World and The Ecological Approach*. Gibson’s affordance theory can be only briefly introduced in the context of this article. See Blok, ‘Being-in-the-World’, for a full discussion of Gibson’s affordance theory from a philosophical perspective.

<sup>31</sup> Affordance is not only an ecological phenomenon, but also a social one, as Reed, ‘The Affordance’, 110–29, has shown.



Gibson is referred to here because the affordance theory gives good reason to think of the origin of willing and action as phenomena that are not rooted in the willing subject – the environment harbours affordances, i.e. possibilities for action for the one who wills – or in an objective quality of that which is willed, i.e. an intrinsic or an extrinsic value. Gibson himself did not research the phenomenon of willing in a systematic way. Where he refers to the concept,<sup>32</sup> he seems to embrace an Aristotelian concept of the will which highlights the autonomy and spontaneity of the one who wills. This concept of willing is inconsistent with Gibson's own affordance theory, and therefore a proper concept of willing is developed in this article, which is consistent with his theory.<sup>33</sup> To this end, Gibson's idea that the mother and the child are constituted by their mutual affordances is taken as a point of departure; what the child affords the mother is reciprocal to what the mother affords the child. This means that the mother, for instance, does not first see the child, is subsequently willing to nurture it and then start to act accordingly. In their mutual affordances, the child affords nurturing and the mother affords crying for milk, and in their willing directedness in response to this mutual affordance their identities *as* mother and *as* child are performatively constituted. This means that affordances have to be conceived of at an ontological level<sup>34</sup>; in their mutual affordance, the child becomes the one who is willing nutrition as that which is willed, i.e. becomes the helpless child, and the mother becomes the one who is willing to nurture the child, i.e. becomes its mother.

With his affordance theory, Gibson provides a model to understand the phenomenon of willing as the interconnectedness and interdependency of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing. Affordance points two ways and, therefore, the origin of will and action cannot be found in a property of an object (an intrinsic or an extrinsic value of that which is willed) or in a property of the subject (a valuation by the one who wills). Willing can be understood as that which the one who wills has to do, in which doing and acting his or her identity is constituted, namely, as responsive to that which is willed; in willing, the mother as the one who wills submits herself to the affordance of the child as that which is willed, and vice versa; and, in their willing responsiveness to each other, a meaningful world is constituted in which mother and child are what they are, i.e. perform crying for nutrition and nurturing behaviour. The origin of willing does not have to be found in the willing subject (Husserl) or in the demand by the object (Gestalt psychologists); rather, affordance articulates a meaningful world in which the one who wills and that which is willed are mutually dependent and interconnected. This is the first discernible characteristic of the phenomenon of willing.

### 3.2. *The Transcendence of that which is Willed in Willing*

How do the one who wills and that which is willed belong together in this willing relation? The affordance of the child – “nurture me!” – for instance, comes over the mother and affects her. She is moved by the affordance of the child, it stirs her and lifts her up *beyond* herself towards the child. This “beyond herself” does not only mean that the

<sup>32</sup> See for instance Gibson, *The Ecological Approach*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> For this reason, a detailed discussion of Gibson's concept of willing is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>34</sup> Blok, ‘Reconnecting with Nature’.

affordance of the child initiates the willing directedness of the mother as that which she has to do. In the affection of the mother by the affordance of the child, the mother as the one who wills and the child as that which is willed are *divided* in the first place, and this division initiates the willing directedness of the mother beyond herself towards that which is willed.<sup>35</sup> This division is important to acknowledge, because a person can will something only when it is not already there; if the one who wills were identical to that which is willed, then there would be no necessity for him or her to will that which is willed. Although the one who wills and that which is willed are interdependent and interconnected in willing, this interconnectedness presupposes the remaining *inter-inter* as the in between, a principal and irreducible difference which pervades willing – between the one who wills and that which is willed in willing. This *inter* or difference between the one who wills and that which is willed is only, if the affordance of that which is willed is *beyond* the one who is willing, transcends the one who wills and therefore awakens and demands the willing directedness of the one who wills beyond him or herself towards that which is willed.

What is in fact beyond the one who wills are *actual* affordances to which the one who wills is responsive, but which are not yet fully realized, and are also *possible* affordances in the environment. Besides a person's *actual* responsiveness to the affordances in the environment, the environment provides possibilities for the willing directedness of the one who wills that have not yet been seized; the possible affordance is always beyond the actual affordance to which a person is responsive. On the one hand, the transcendence of that which is willed can be conceptualized as an unlimited domain or substrate from which possible affordances originate and to which actual affordances return.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the transcendence of that which is willed also makes clear why it initiates the willing directedness of the one who wills beyond him or herself towards that which is willed.

This does not mean, however, that the willing directedness of the one who wills to actualize that which is willed is able to neutralize the transcendence of that which is willed, for instance, when it is fully present.<sup>37</sup> Interconnectedness as the first characteristic of the phenomenon of willing presupposes the remaining *inter-* between the one who wills and that which is willed in willing. This *inter-* or transcendence already occurs in a simple case of a mother and a child; the affordances of the child for the mother will never be neutralized, because actual affordances will be replaced by others over time. This means that the possible affordances of the child as that which is willed are limitless.

What in fact one encounters here is the contingency of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing. On the one hand, the child's affordances for the mother seem to be self-evident, but may be unsuitable or change in another time and place, in a different situation. On the other hand, it is possible that the willing directedness of the mother is responsive to an affordance of the child that is no longer there, or that she holds on to specific affordances of the child, whereas others have already occurred; this contingency is the condition of the possibility not only of a misfit between the one

<sup>35</sup> In this idea of the affection of willing, I am inspired by Heidegger's discussion with Nietzsche about the will as affect (see Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 52–56; Blok, 'Towards the Rehabilitation').

<sup>36</sup> Blok, 'The Human Glanze'.

<sup>37</sup> This is the way Husserl conceptualized the phenomenon of willing in his lecture course on volitional acts (Husserl, *Vorlesungen*).

who wills and that which is willed in willing, but also of willing something new, starting over again in willing, and so on. The remaining transcendence of that which is willed – that demands the one who wills to actualize that which is willed in willing – is the second discernible characteristic of the phenomenon of willing.

### ***3.3. The Attentive Responsiveness of the One Who Wills in Willing (Self-involvement)***

The importance of the affection by the affordance of that which is willed makes clear that the openness and attentiveness of the one who wills for possible affordances in the environment is also a necessary condition for willing, because the movement beyond oneself towards that which is willed is only possible if the one who wills is *attentive* to these possible affordances of that which is willed. This makes clear that the one who wills is in the first place *attentive* to the affection by the affordance of that which is willed, which in the second place constitutes his or her identity as the one who is responsive to that which is willed; the mother is open for the affection by the affordance of the child, which constitutes her *as* mother who is responsive to the needs of the child, and vice versa. Or in other words, that which is willed *is* only insofar as the one who wills is responsive to the affordance of that which is willed, and the one who wills is only *responsive* to that which is willed insofar as that which is willed really demands or affords such a willing responsiveness. To the extent that the self or identity of the one who wills is performatively constituted by his or her responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed, the one who wills is *involved* or *included* in the willing relation.

This self-inclusion indeed means that willing is limited to that which is practically possible, but in a different sense than the way it is encountered in the previous section. The phenomenon of willing makes clear that there is not first a person who wills and then all kinds of things that are practically possible for him or her, but the other way around, that the practical possibilities of willing are limited by the singularity of the self or identity of the one who wills; for the mother, nurturing the child in response to its affordance is practically possible – and this practical possibility constitutes her identity *as* mother – but not for the little brother of the child. The self-involvement in willing is the third discernible characteristic of the phenomenon of willing.

Although the three characteristics of willing so far encountered make clear that the origin of willing cannot be found in the willing subject (and in this respect, confirm current research's rejection of human consciousness as the origin of willing) but in the interconnectedness of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing (first characteristic of the phenomenon of willing), it is still counterintuitive that this interconnectedness puts "me" out of play. Even if it is acknowledged that it is the remaining transcendence of that which is willed that primarily affords or demands the one who wills to do what "I" have to do, i.e. actualize that which is willed (second characteristic of the phenomenon of willing), is it not the case that, for instance, the mother *herself* has a free choice to be responsive to the affordance? Does she not make the *decision* to actualize that which is willed or not? And does the self-involvement of the one who wills in his or her responsiveness towards that which is willed not allude to this specific role on the side of the one who wills in willing?

In a similar vein, Gibson's affordance theory was criticized, because it seemed to be a new type of behaviourism in which the role of the organism, i.e. intentionality, cognitive processes and so on, were missing.<sup>38</sup> Because the affordance was assumed to be objective (i.e. an opportunity for action in the environment), critics were looking for something on the subject side of the affordance.<sup>39</sup> This counterpart of the affordance was found in the concept of *effectivity*<sup>40</sup>; the organism has to *effectuate* intentionally the affordances provided by the environment.<sup>41</sup> Is it not necessary, in a similar way, to acknowledge that the particular role of the one who wills has so far remained implicit in the characterizations of the self-involvement in willing? And is it not necessary to acknowledge some form of effectivity of willing on the side of the subject?

The effectivity of willing has already been encountered implicitly in the preliminary discussion section; willing is composed of both an inner decision or rational choice of the one who wills *and* the willing execution of acts based on that decision. There, the focus directly moved away from this inner decision of the one who wills to the phenomenon of willing, because such decisions seemed to be necessarily connected with a faculty of the soul as the control room of willing, whereas such a faculty is heavily criticized by scientific research. Does this mean that the concept of the self-involvement in willing has to be expanded and that at least the control room of the one who wills (self-control), who takes the decision to be responsive to the affordances of that which is willed, has to be reintroduced?

The effectivity of willing is reminiscent of William James' concept of *fiat* or *consent*. In his *Principles of Psychology*, the will is understood as the attention to prevailing representations:

The essential achievement of the will, in short, when it is most "voluntary", is to ATTEND to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind. The so-doing is the fiat; and it is a mere physiological incident that when the object is thus attended to, immediate motor consequences should ensue.<sup>42</sup>

According to James, willing is not primarily intention but *attention* and contains a fiat as the "act of mental consent" with that which is willed. "There is indeed the *fiat*, the element of consent, or resolve that the act shall ensue. This, doubtless, to the reader's mind, as to my own, constitutes the essence of the voluntariness of the act."<sup>43</sup> In all willing acts, this moment of attention and consent is essential. It is this element of the fiat or consent with that which is willed by the one who wills that also played a major role in Husserl's phenomenology of willing.<sup>44</sup>

This shift from intention to attention in James' concept of willing, which regards the *attention* of the one who wills to that which is willed as essential, and the bodily movement towards that which is willed as inessential, corresponds with the primacy of the openness and attention for possible affordances. James' acknowledgement of the moment of fiat or consent in this attention of willing also helps to conceptualize the moment of the effectuation of willing. The self-involvement in willing consists in (a) the attention of the one who

<sup>38</sup> Kadar and Effken, 'Heideggerian Mediations', 305.

<sup>39</sup> See Sanders, 'An Ontology of Affordances', 103.

<sup>40</sup> See Shaw et al., 'Ecological Psychology'.

<sup>41</sup> Kadar and Effken, 'Heideggerian Mediations'.

<sup>42</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, 561 (emphasis in original).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>44</sup> Melle, 'Husserl's Phenomenology of Willing', 177.

wills for the possible affordances of that which is willed, (b) the effectuation of a person's willing directedness towards that which is willed as a consequence of a mental fiat or consent with the affordance of that which is willed and (c) a person's actual responsiveness to this affordance of that which is willed as a consequence of this effectuation. With this, a control room of willing is reintroduced, i.e. the self-control of the one who wills as primary locus of the effectuation of willing.

The hesitance to accept this self-control (fiat, consent, effectuation) of the one who wills is not because such a control room of willing is rejected by scientific research. The problem is that there is not first the one who wills who is attentive to a possible affordance of that which is willed, and then a fiat, consent or effectuation of his responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed. In the willing responsiveness to the mutual affordance of the mother and the child, the identity of the mother as the one who is willing to nurture the child and of the child as the one who is willing nutrition are performatively constituted. Willing is not primarily the effectuation of the intention of the one who wills towards that which is willed, because the self or identity of the one who wills emerges from this willing directedness to that which is willed in the first place. The self or identity of the one who wills is performatively constituted in his or her *responsiveness* to the affordance of that which is willed (ontological level).<sup>45</sup> No special fiat or consent at the ontic level is needed for this responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed, in which the self or identity of the one who wills is performatively constituted.<sup>46</sup>

This is also confirmed in Gibson's notion of attention:

If perception is essentially an act of attention, as I maintain, and is not to be confused with imagination, hallucination, or dreaming, then the perceiver does not *contribute* anything to the act of perception, he simply *performs* the act. There is a subjective aspect and an objective aspect to every phenomenal experience, but this does not mean that there is some degree of subjective *determination* of objective perception. The old idea that a perception is determined partly from the outside and partly from the inside is nothing but a muddle of thought.<sup>47</sup>

This means, first of all, that the attention for the affordance of that which is willed does not involve any kind of fiat or consent as a contribution by the subject, but actually consists in the *performance* of the willing responsiveness of the one who wills to that which is willed. The attention for the affordance of that which is willed already *involves* responsive

<sup>45</sup> Gorgio Agamben argues that the concept of the will presupposes a strict distinction between being and acting and that this distinction of free will as independent of being originates from the theological paradigm in which the free will of God is not rooted in his nature (being) (Agamben, *The Kingdom*, 56–7). It should be clear by now that the effort in this article is to bridge this classical dichotomy between being and acting in the concept of willing; the being of the one who wills is performatively constituted in his or her willing responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed, and in this respect, only *is* in and through this *willing*.

<sup>46</sup> With the rejection of the necessity of a fiat of willing, the developed concept of willing also avoids Heidegger's criticism. The will is connected not only with a concept of human existence as subject according to Heidegger, but also with calculation and makeability, i.e. machination and lived experience: "Everything 'is made' and 'can be made' if one only musters the 'will' for it. But that this 'will' is precisely what has already placed and in advance reduced what might be possible and above all necessary – this is already mistaken ahead of time and left outside any questioning. For this will, which makes everything, has already subscribed to machination, that interpretation of beings as re-presentable and re-presented" (Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 76). This aspect of the makeability of willing can be traced in the concept of fiat, which originally means 'let it be done', which comes from *feri* (be done, become, come into existence) as the passive of *facere* (to make). Makeability can already be seen as an essential characteristic of willing in Nietzsche's concept of the will to truth as the will to "make beings conceivable" (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, 146), but also in Husserl's phenomenology of the will as "presencing" and "making real" (Husserl, *Vorlesungen*, 107).

<sup>47</sup> Gibson, 'On Theories', 89; Sanders, 'An Ontology of Affordances', 97–112.

action and behaviour by the one who wills.<sup>48</sup> This means, secondly, that it is impossible to separate the *attention* of the one who wills for the affordance of that which is willed from the *intention* the affordance provokes.<sup>49</sup> So where James thought that an actual volitional act was just a “physiological incident” of the act of attention,<sup>50</sup> and with this in fact reduces willing to thought, Gibson makes clear that attention already involves the performance of action and behaviour in response to the affordance of that which is willed.<sup>51</sup>

As a consequence, any *fiat* or *effectuation* of willing has to be rejected in favour of the self-involvement of the one who wills as the third characteristic of the phenomenon of willing.

### 3.4. Willing as Performative Ampliation

This leaves the question of how the act of attentive responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed itself has to be understood, if the shift from intention to attention is acknowledged. Attention already includes action and behaviour in response to the attended affordance of that which is willed, and the remaining transcendence of that which is willed at the same time. The performance of willing does not primarily consist in an intentional act as has already become clear, because the self or identity of the one who wills emerges from his or her willing responsiveness towards the affordance of that which is willed, which in itself transcends the one who is willing and initiates and demands his or her willing directedness to that which is willed. This means that the performance of willing consists primarily in the establishment of the ipseity of the one who wills (self-involvement) as interconnected with that which is willed (first characteristic of willing). How is this self-constituting act of the one who wills understood in such a way that it at the same time remains separated from that which is willed? The first condition for this remaining *inter-* or difference between the one who wills and that which is willed is that the affordance of that which is willed itself transcends the one who wills. Another condition occurs if we realize that, traditionally, willing is characterized by self-interest.

In the modern philosophical tradition – from Kant to Nietzsche – the freedom, self-determination and selfhood of the willing subject is at the centre of philosophical attention. What the will primarily wants is *itself* as a free and autonomous being. Even for Heidegger, in the period when he tried to develop a proper concept of the will himself, it is self-evident that the one who wills (self) is primarily willing *himself* as that which is willed (and not, for instance, the other of the one who wills, the other or the world).<sup>52</sup> Traditionally, the division between the one who wills and that which is willed in willing is self-evidently seen as the cleavage between “self” and (authentic or original) “self”, which initiates the willing directedness of the one who wills to bring the self to the (original) self. This tendency of the act of willing then threatens to neutralize the *inter-* or difference between the one who wills and that which is willed.

<sup>48</sup> Heft, ‘Affordances and the Body’, 1–30.

<sup>49</sup> See “The theory of affordances implies that to see things is to see how to get about among them and what to do or not to do with them” (Gibson, *The Ecological Approach*, 223).

<sup>50</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, 561.

<sup>51</sup> Husserl criticized James for his reduction of the phenomenon of willing to thinking (see Melle, ‘Husserl’s Phenomenology of Willing’). The articulation of the attentive responsiveness of willing as the third characteristic of willing is not reductionist, because the concept of attention involves actual action and behaviour, in which the self or identity of the one who wills is performatively constituted.

<sup>52</sup> Blok, ‘Towards the Rehabilitation’, 296.

But is this self-interest of willing self-evident? Not only is the self-interest of willing not phenomenologically justified, but also it is possible to will the other of the one who wills, the other or the world. The self-interest of willing even has to be rejected, because it undermines the first two discerned characteristics of the phenomenon of willing; the interconnectedness of willing and the transcendence of that which is willed in willing presuppose the remaining *inter-* between the one who wills and that which is willed, whereas the self-interest of willing reduces this *inter-* or transcendence to the self. From a phenomenological point of view, the self-interest of willing therefore has to be rejected in favour of interconnectedness and transcendence as phenomenological characteristics of willing. The one who wills (self) is not primarily willing himself, but the other of the one who is willing, the other or the world as that which is willed.

How is such a non-reductive act of attentive responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed to be conceived? It can be conceptualized as the *ampliative* character of the act of the attentive responsiveness of willing. The psychologist Albert Michotte introduced this concept in his 1963 book *The Perception of Causality*. In this book, he argues that the movement of a given object *causes* a movement in another object, if the passive object *ampliates* the movement of the active object, i.e. if the movement of the active object is extended into the motion of the passive object.<sup>53</sup> “Ampliation of movement ... consists in the dominant movement, that of the active object, appearing to extend itself on to the passive object, while remaining distinct from the change in position which the latter undergoes in its own right.”<sup>54</sup> If the language of subject/object and activity/passivity – which are not suitable to understand the affordance ontology – is renounced, we can argue that the affordance of that which is willed is a type of movement that affects the one who wills to become responsive to that which is willed,<sup>55</sup> and this responsiveness to the affordance can be conceptualized as an *ampliation* of the affordance of that which is willed.

On the one hand, the ampliation of the affordance of that which is willed can be seen as an extension of, or complementing, the affordance, insofar as that which is willed only *is* in the attentive responsiveness of the one who wills to the affordance of that which is willed; that which is willed is real only in the ampliative act of willing, in which that which is willed becomes meaningful for the one who wills and determines his or her subsequent behaviour. However, it is not the objective of the ampliative act of willing to do justice to the affordance of that which is willed, or to find a balance or homogeneity or *adaequatio* between the one who wills and that which is willed in willing. An ampliation of the affordance of that which is willed is not just the extension of the movement of the affordance, but involves a qualitative change.

The qualitative nature of this extension becomes clear if we consider the nature of ampliative reasoning, also called inductive reasoning. Contrary to deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning is ampliative, i.e. its conclusion is extended beyond what is contained

<sup>53</sup> See Reed, ‘The Affordance’, for a full discussion of the ampliation theory in the context of the affordance theory. A critical reflection on Reed’s interpretation of Gibson, which remained largely at the ontic level, is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>54</sup> Michotte, *The Perception of Causality*, 217; see Reed, ‘The Affordance’, 115.

<sup>55</sup> It is therefore not primarily *our* decision to will that which is willed, but willing itself affects and comes over us, namely, in a person’s attentive responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed (see Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 54); Blok, ‘Towards the Rehabilitation’, 294).

**Table 1.** Contesting the will: four structural moments of the phenomenon of willing in contrast to traditional determinations.

Traditional conceptualization of willing	Structural moments of the phenomenon of willing
1. The origin of willing is found in the willing subject or in a demand by the object	1. The one who wills and that which is willed are interdependent and interconnected in willing
2. Demand character of willing	2. The remaining transcendence of that which is willed in willing, which demands the willing directedness of the one who wills towards that which is willed
3. Limitation to the practically possible	3. The singular identity of the one who wills is constituted by his or her attentive responsiveness to that which is willed (self-involvement)
4. Self-control of willing	4. The attentive responsiveness of the act of willing is ampliative by nature

in the premises, and in this respect ignorance-preserving with regard to this conclusion.<sup>56</sup> It can be argued, therefore, that the *inter-* or difference between the one who wills and that which is willed is precisely preserved by the ampliative nature of willing, i.e. the ampliation of the affordance of that which is willed in a person's attentive responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed. This can consist both in the *surplus* of the possible affordances of that which is willed compared with the singular responsiveness of the one who wills, and in the *surplus* of the singular responsiveness of the one who wills compared with the actual and possible affordances of that which is willed. The transcendence of that which is willed shows itself in the ampliative act of willing, in which that which is willed becomes real, but is also criticized, creatively adjusted and extended, temporarily postponed, renewed or even revolutionized. The ampliative nature of willing, which guarantees the remaining difference between the one who wills and that which is willed, is the fourth and last discernible characteristic of the phenomenon of willing.

In Table 1, the findings of this and the previous section are summarized by contrasting four traditional characteristics of the will with the four structural moments of the phenomenon of willing encountered and developed in this article.

#### 4. Conclusions

This article started with the experience of the will as undeniable, despite its rejection by scientific research. Because in fact the *being* of the will – its residence in consciousness for instance – is denied by scientific research, the inquiry started at the level of the phenomenon of the act of willing itself. In such a phenomenology of willing, it is not presupposed that the act of willing is something embedded in the *being* of the one who wills. On the contrary, it turned out that this being of the one who wills is performatively constituted in his or her attentive responsiveness to the affordance of that which is willed; that which is willed *is* only insofar as the one who wills is responsive to the affordance of that which is willed, and the one who wills *is* only responsive to that which is willed insofar as that which is willed really demands or affords such a willing responsiveness. This being of willing is not found in consciousness as the control room of willing.

Although the findings of this analysis are in line with scientific research that rejects the existence of the will – in this respect, the rejection of consciousness as control room of

<sup>56</sup> See Bardone, *Seeking Changes*, 14.



willing can be seen as their common ground – it was not scientific findings but rather phenomenological reasons that are here provided for this rejection. Furthermore, whereas scientific research remains adherent to traditional conceptualizations of the will, to the extent that the point of departure is found in a substrate underlying the one who wills (brain activities and neural networks that constitute the domain of unconsciousness), this article's point of departure was found in the undeniable experience of the willing relation between the one who wills and that which is willed. In this respect, the concept of the will developed in this article can be seen as one that is consistent with scientific findings and may even be reconciled with scientific findings. At the same time, it advances our understanding of the undeniable experience of willing. The being of willing is found in the self or identity of the one who wills, which is performatively constituted by the act of willing. This self or identity of the one who wills is not autonomous or free in the strict sense of the word, as is confirmed by scientific research, but interconnected and interdependent with that which is willed in willing. This does not imply that the act of willing is fully determined by that which is willed. Although willing can be understood as something the one who wills has to do, in which doing and acting his or her singular identity is constituted as responsive to that which is willed, the ampliative nature of willing makes clear that this responsiveness is not fully determined but leaves room for criticism and creativity. This criticism and creativity is no longer the free and autonomous creativity of the human subject, which is the object of scientific criticism, but embedded in the contingency of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing.

The four structural moments of the phenomenon of willing can be considered as general characteristics of the phenomenon of willing, which have to be extended and further explored in connection with related phenomena. On the one hand, the further reconciliation of the four structural moments of the will with scientific findings is up to future research. On the other hand, the implications of the four structural moments of the will for ethics are an important topic of future reflection. One can think of the application of the developed conceptualization of willing in relation to ethical behaviour as a very specific type of willing. Another example is the extension of this conceptualization of willing in relation to embodiment, labour and works of the will. These relevant questions have to be answered by future research in order to further rehabilitate and appreciate the phenomenon of willing in contemporary philosophy.

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