



Husserl's Taxonomy of Action

Nicola Spano¹

Accepted: 7 March 2022 / Published online: 29 March 2022
© The Author(s) 2022

Abstract

In the present article I discuss, in confrontation with the most recent studies on Husserl's phenomenology of acting and willing, the taxonomy of action that is collected in the volume '*Wille und Handlung*' of the Husserliana edition *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins*. In so doing, I first present Husserl's universal characterization of action (*Handlung*) as a volitional process (*willentlicher Vorgang*). Then, after clarifying what it means for a process to have a character of volitionality (*Willentlichkeit*), I illustrate the various types of actions, which Husserl distinguishes as 'straightforward' (*schlicht*) or 'deciding' (*entscheidend*), 'primary' (*primär*) or 'secondary' (*sekundär*), 'inner' (*innere*) or 'outer' (*äußere*), 'immediate' (*unmittelbar*) or mediate (*mittelbar*), 'simple' (*einfach*) or 'compound' (*zusammengesetzt*). Finally, I consider Husserl's discussion of the direction and foundation of action.

1 Introduction

I would like to have a walk if it stops raining. Meanwhile, I amuse myself by playing the piano without even thinking about it. Once the sun comes up, I go outside and, on the way out, I go down the steps very attentively, as the ground is slippery. During the walk, I decide to pay visit to my friend Andrea and, in order to get to his house before it starts raining again, I take the bus. In front of Andrea's door, though, I realize that the intercom is broken, so I throw a little stone at the window to draw his attention. All these actions of mine are volitional, that is, they are actions that I perform because I want to achieve something. If I reflect on it, I become aware that there are many similarities and differences between these activities that I carry out as a consequence of my will. For example, all of them have a goal, they all follow a certain path to fulfilment, and they present themselves as doable: in order to have a walk, I leave my house; in order to visit Andrea, I take the bus; in order to draw his attention, I throw a stone; in doing all this, I am conscious that I can perform these

✉ Nicola Spano
nicola.spano@uni-wuerzburg.de

¹ Institute of Philosophy, Julius-Maximilians University of Würzburg (JMU), Würzburg, Germany

actions. Yet the specific ways in which they are executed differ, as do the modes of their voluntariness: walking is an action that I perform solely through the movement of my body; whereas drawing Andrea's attention is an action that I perform through a bodily movement, i.e. throwing the stone, but it also depends on the physical process that this movement initiates, i.e. the stone flying through the air and hitting the window. In contrast, my playing the piano without even thinking about it, that is, mechanically, so to speak, is voluntary to a much lesser extent than my attentively going down the steps on my way out. Last but not least, I initially merely decide that, if the rain stops, I will have a walk; however, when I get outside, my will to walk is not just a decision to act if something hypothetical happens, but rather a volition that immediately passes into an actual action.

When Husserl analyzes the phenomenon of willing, he has in mind differences and similarities such as those just mentioned, as well as many other aspects that, although often unnoticed, we experience in our everyday practical lives. As Ullrich Melle (2014) reports, between 1909 and 1914 Husserl analyzed volition and action within the context of an encompassing investigation aimed at a systematic description of consciousness in its three main domains: the theoretical, the axiological, and the practical. Although this ambitious project remained uncompleted and fragmented, the scope of Husserl's research is still considerable, covering more than 1500 manuscript pages, which, in 1926–1927, were collected by Ludwig Landgrebe in a folder that he appropriately labelled '*Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins*'. After more than 90 years, this collection is now published under the same title in the *Husserliana Gesammelte Werke*. The aim of this paper is to introduce and discuss, in confrontation with the main studies that have been published in recent years,¹ some of the analyses of action and volition that are contained in the volume '*Wille und Handlung*', which is part of this *Husserliana* edition. To give the reader a brief overview of the richness of '*Wille und Handlung*', which consists of more than 500 pages, let me mention the main tasks performed by Husserl therein: the universal characterization of 'action' (*Handlung*) as a 'volitional process' (*willentlicher Vorgang*) and the articulation of its taxonomy; the static investigation of the foundation of action upon cognition; the description of the different 'modalities of willing' (*Modalitäten des Wollens*) and of the different degrees of 'voluntariness' (*Willkürlichkeit*); the discussion of the distinction between 'volitional causality' (*Willenskausalität*) and 'natural causality' (*Naturkausalität*), and, in relation to it, the explication of how, on the one hand, the will 'intervenes' (*eingreift*) in nature, and, on the other hand, is 'functionally dependent' (*funktional abhängig*) on it; the genetic investigation of the origin of action from 'non-voluntary doing' (*unwillkürliches Tun*), and, in

¹ More specifically, I will take account of some of the most recent studies that focus specifically upon Husserl's analysis of the essence of action and volition, leaving aside the more general studies that address the core ideas of Husserl's ethics, such as those of 'practical and axiological reason', 'normativity', 'value', 'person', 'formal axiology', 'formal praxis', 'freedom', etc. The first group of studies includes the work of Melle (1997), Mertens (1998, 2020), Peucker (2015), Lotz (2016), Staiti (2019), Drummond (2020), among others. The second group includes Hart (1992), Sphan (1996), Crowell (2013), Moran (2014), Ferrarello (2015), Lohmar (2016), Zahavi (2017), Heinämaa (2018), Loidolt (2019), De Monticelli (2020), and Jacobs (2020), to mention a few.

turn, of the origin of non-voluntary doing from tendencies in the sphere of ‘passivity of the will’ (*Willenspassivität*); the characterization of ‘inhibitions’ (*Hemmungen*) and ‘resistances’ (*Widerstände*) as volitional phenomena.

Although my study is only a first step toward the full disclosure of Husserl’s account of action that is presented in the *Studien*, let me state, as an anticipation, some original elements that emerge from the overall examination of ‘*Wille und Handlung*’: Husserl is an anti-volitionist,² who argues for the existence of an agent (motivational) causation,³ and for whom action is not only bodily movement, but also inner experience.⁴ Furthermore, the wide-spread view of Husserl as committed to an overly intellectualistic account of agency, according to which the performance of any action must be governed by the agent’s representation (*Vorstellung*) of the action itself, does not seem to be fully accurate.⁵

That said, in what follows I will specifically focus on Husserl’s characterization of action as a volitional process and the articulation of its taxonomy. This topic is important since it includes Husserl’s unknown analyses of the most universal features and the most fundamental forms of action, and can therefore help the reader into the exploration of the further topics of ‘*Wille und Handlung*’. In greater detail, after clarifying what it means for an action to be volitional process, I will analyze the distinctions that Husserl makes between actions that are ‘straightforward’ (*schlicht*) or ‘deciding’ (*entscheidend*), ‘primary’ (*primär*) or ‘secondary’ (*sekundären*), ‘inner’ (*innere*) or ‘outer’ (*äußere*), ‘immediate’ (*unmittelbar*) and mediate (*mittelbar*), ‘simple’ (*einfach*) or ‘compound’ (*zusammengesetzt*). In addition, I will address the phenomenological issue of the static foundation of action on both evaluative and cognitive experiences. The foundation in question is indeed crucial to understand the relation between ‘*Wille und Handlung*’ and the first two volumes of the *Studien*.

1.1 The Universal Characterization of Action as a Volitional Process

In the section entitled ‘*Die Handlung as Willentlicher Vorgang*’ of the *Studien*, Husserl asks himself what is the most universal essence of an action, and replies:

What is that which is absolutely universal in an action? Apart from such distinctions yet to be considered, what makes up its most universal essence? Well, that it is a process, which is a volitional process. Not: my volition or anyone’s volition taken as a state and, on the other side, a process of external nature or a second process of internal nature, and either my state or my psychological process of the will, a “cause” in the natural sense that empirically motivates the occurrence of the other process. This is a completely new thought. On the contrary,

² For a discussion of this aspect, see section 1.1 below.

³ For a discussion of this aspect, see Staiti (2019), and Spano (2021a).

⁴ For a discussion of this aspect, see section 1.4 below.

⁵ The main advocate of this wide-spread view is Dreyfus (2000). For a discussion of the reason for which his interpretation of Husserl is not fully accurate, see Spano (2021b).

a process with the ontic character of positing of the will, of practical, productive [positing; NS]. And this character goes through and through, although we have a distinct point of inception, the starting point, etc. This belongs to the essence of action. That is, if I represent to myself an action, then I must represent all this.⁶ (Husserl, 2020, p. 13)

According to Husserl, volition is not a mental state that empirically causes an action, understood as a physical process in nature. If I analyze phenomenologically the experience of action, I do not see, for example, the ego's will to drink as a state of the mind that is followed by the physical effect of grabbing a glass of water and drinking it. Instead, a phenomenological analysis of action shows that its most universal feature is that of being a volitional process through and through. When the ego wants to drink and grabs a glass of water, the bodily action of grabbing and drinking remains volitional in each of its phases. As Husserl says: “[i]n every voluntary movement I have a starting point with which this action begins, but the entire movement is not merely ‘arisen from a will’, but is, in its entire course, volitional, in every phase characterized as volitional” (Husserl, 2020, p. 3). Another passage in which he explicitly comments on the essential volitional character of any action is the following: “[...] the process is called action only insofar as it is characterized as a process of the will, namely it is action in and with this character of the will (productive character). Every acting is therefore *eo ipso* a willing [...]” (Husserl, 2020, p. 24).

By referring to the above mentioned passages, Andrea Staiti points out that Husserl is an anti-volitionist, who “has criticized the view of the will as a causal ‘source’ of actions. According to this view, the will is a point-like source of inputs that initiate causal processes in the natural world” (Staiti, 2019, p. 15). Interestingly, Staiti adds that “[b]y contrast, for Husserl ‘will’ does not name the hidden *source* of actions, but rather the ‘extensional’ property of certain processes in the world, i.e., a characteristic that is spread over the whole action in each of its phases” (*ibid.*). In my opinion, the choice of characterizing the will as an ‘extensional’ property of action is particularly enlightening. Indeed, it allows us to understand, through an analogy with the corporeal extension of material objects, the way in which volitionality is the fundamental form of all actions. In greater detail, in *Ideen II* Husserl states that corporeal extension is not a property that exists among other material properties of things, but it is rather the characteristic essential form of existence for material or physical being as such:

The thing is what it is in its real properties, but each one, taken separately, is not necessary in the same sense. Each is a ray of the thing's being. But corporeal extension is not a ray of real being in that same sense; it is not in the same way (properly speaking, “in no way”) a real property. Rather, it is an essential form of all real properties. Better: body is a real determination, but it is a fundamental determination (an essential foundation) and form for all other

⁶ All translations are mine except for those of the *Ideen II* (Husserl, 1952), which are Rojcewicz and Schuwer's, and of the *Logische Untersuchungen* (Husserl, 1984) which are Findlay's.

determinations. In this sense, extension is thus the essential characteristic of materiality [...]. It expresses the characteristic essential form of existence for material or physical being (the essential form for all real determinations in which thingly existence is explicated) [...]. (Husserl, 1952, pp. 31–32).

By analogy, we can say that volitionality (*Willentlichkeit*) is the characteristic essential form of existence for actions, since volition is neither a causal source of action nor a single property of it that exists beside other properties, but it is rather an ‘extensional’ determination that, although not corporeal, temporally spreads over the whole action in each of its phases. Importantly, all other properties of action exist as qualifications of this essential volitional form. Just as “an empty corporeal space is, realiter, nothing” but “it exists only to the degree that a thing, with its thingly properties, is extended therein” (*ibid.*), so an empty volitional process is, realiter, nothing, but it exists only to the degree that an action, with its properties, is temporally extended therein. We know that the thingly properties of physical objects are primary and secondary qualities, such as shape, magnitude, color, warmth, etc. What are, instead, the properties of actions? In order to answer this question, I now turn to the discussion of Husserl’s taxonomy of action, which is articulated by him precisely by taking into account the properties exhibited by volitional processes.

1.2 The Case Study of Straightforward Action

In order to explicate the essential determinations that pertain to any action *qua* a volitional process, Husserl considers the case study of ‘straightforward action’ (*schlichte Handlung*),⁷ namely an action that is straightforwardly executed by the ego without any previous decision-making process, such as, for example, the ego’s simultaneous willing to drink and drinking a glass of water. He writes:

It belongs to the essence of [straightforward; NS]⁸ action to be this type of whole: to be *fiat* and productive action, that is, a springing forth from the *fiat* and, further, to be carried in its appearance by a certain volitional moment of the springing forth and in accordance with the sense of the course of the will [*Willensverlaufs*] [...]. (Husserl, 2020, pp. 12–13)

The *fiat*⁹ and the action springing forth from it can be described both from the noematic and noetic point of view,¹⁰ or, to use Husserl’s terminology in the *Studien*, from both an ontic and phansic perspective, respectively. From the ontic point of view, the *fiat* and the action (*Handlung*) are the ‘positum’ (*Satz*) of a ‘realising positing of the will’ (*realisierende Willenssetzung*) or, as Husserl also calls it, a

⁷ The reader should note, thus, that the analyses contained in this section do not concern the determinations of a particular kind of action, but rather the most essential determinations of any action whatever.

⁸ This passage belongs to the chapter of the *Studien* entitled ‘The Essence of Straightforward Action’.

⁹ As Ullrich Melle notes, Husserl takes the concept of *fiat* from William James, who develops a psychology of willing in his *Principles of Psychology* (Melle, 1997, p. 176).

¹⁰ The noetic point of view focuses on the intentional act of consciousness, while the noematic point of view focuses on the object as experienced in such an act.

‘practical’ (*praktische*), ‘productive positing’ (*schöpferische Setzung*) (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 8, 13; see also Husserl, 1988, pp. 45, 155). In Husserl’s jargon, a ‘positum’ (*Satz*) is the objective correlate of an intentional act of consciousness *qua* ‘posited’ (*gesetzt*) in such an act. That is to say, a positum is the unity of the ‘sense’ (*Sinn*) and ‘validity’ (*Geltung*) that something exhibits *qua* the intended object of an intentional experience (see Husserl, 1950, §133). For instance, if the ego perceives a blue sky, in its act of sensible perception this intended object is posited as having the sense ‘a blue sky’ and the validity ‘actually existing object’. Instead, the validity that pertains to the intentional object posited in act of memory is that of ‘previously existing object’, while in expectation it is that of ‘object coming into existence’. In the case of action, the intended object is posited as having the validity ‘object coming-to-be’ and ‘object practically-to-be-realized’. As Husserl says: “the productive positing of the *fiat* at the beginning of the simple action is such that the process is posited in advance as coming-to-be [*seinwerdender*] and as practically it-shall-be [*seinsollender*] (to be realized practically)” (Husserl, 2020, p. 13). Husserl thus uses the terms ‘realizing’, ‘productive’, and ‘practical’ in association with the positing of the *fiat* and of the action to emphasize that the intentional object of an act of will is posited as a ‘volitional’ process, that is, as a process that the ego ‘brings about’ (*wirkt*) through its ‘doing’ (*Tun*).

Importantly, though, Husserl maintains that there is a difference between the positing of the *fiat* and the positing of the action that springs forth from it:

Within this distinction of the *fiat* as opposed to the moment of the will of the remaining action it is good to distinguish also between willing and actual acting (execution) in the straightforward action, except for the fact that the willing as *fiat* constantly passes over into the willing as doing and is not at all to be distinguished, unless through abstraction, from it. (Husserl, 2020, p. 26, footnote 1)

From the ontic point of view, the action (*Handlung*) *qua* an objective process is characterized by an ‘ontic character of positing of the will’ (*ontischer Charakter der Willenssetzung*), which should be kept distinct from the *fiat qua* the ‘ontic shall’ (*ontisches Soll*) in abstraction. The same holds from the phansic point of view, where the *fiat qua* the act of ‘willing’ (*Wollen*) should be kept distinct from the act of willing *qua* ‘acting’ (*Handeln*).¹¹ Husserl makes this distinction between *fiat* and action, and, correlatively, between willing and acting, since the latter comes to be as a consequence of the former, or, as Husserl also says, ‘as a consequence of the will’ (*infolge des Willens*). Accordingly, Husserl often calls the *fiat* ‘affirmation of the will’ (*Willensbejahung*) or ‘decision of the will’ (*Willensentscheidung*) and describes the relation between it and the acting in terms of ‘fulfilment of the will’ (*Willenserfüllung*) of ‘satisfaction of the will’ (*Willensbefriedigung*): the *fiat* is an empty ‘intention of the will’ (*Willensintention*) that is either fulfilled or disappointed by the givenness of the action (see Husserl, 2020, ch. 2, §2). Furthermore, since the

¹¹ It must be noted, thus, that in order to distinguish the phansic from the ontic analysis of *fiat* and action Husserl uses the verbal nouns ‘willing’ (*Wollen*) and ‘acting’ (*Handeln*); see Husserl (2020, p. 33).

fiat is not the effect of an empirical cause, but is spontaneously performed by the ego (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 5, 9–10), the action springing forth from it is ‘voluntary’ (*willkürlich*).¹² For example, the voluntary action of drinking starts with the ego’s spontaneous performance of the *fiat*, and, in all its phases, from the initial *fiat*, through the movement of the arm, to the final swallowing, it remains a volitional process that the ego intends to realise on the basis of its practical, productive ability to do something.

One may think here that there is an analogy between the fulfilment of the will and the synthesis of fulfilment yielding knowledge in the doxic sphere (see Husserl, 2020, p. 30). However, one should also keep in mind that, in the case of knowledge, the synthesis of fulfilment occurs between an empty intention and a categorial intuition of a state of affairs, which are two independent acts of consciousness. On the one hand, in the case of a straightforward action, the fulfilment of the empty intention of the will occurs *within* the action itself. A better analogy with a phenomenon of fulfilment in the doxic sphere would, in fact, be the coming to self-givenness of a thing in a unitary act of perception, where the empty expectations of the unseen sides of the thing are constantly fulfilled by the new intuitive percepts (see Husserl, 2020, p. 38). On the other hand, the action that fulfills the *fiat* is actively constituted by the ego through its doing, rather than being passively accepted as in the case of perception, where the ego simply turns towards an already pre-constituted perceptual object (see Mertens 1998, p. 128). The analogy with the predicative level of the doxic sphere is, in this respect, more appropriate, since the categorial objects that fulfil empty judgments are not passively accepted but rather spontaneously constituted by the ego.¹³

The empty intention of the *fiat* can also be disappointed. In this respect, Husserl points out that “the *fiat* is never something in itself; it is either the starting point of an action or of an inhibition (of an action)” (Husserl, 2020, p. 47). In particular, when the *fiat* is disappointed immediately, no acting at all springs forth from it (see Husserl, 2020, supplementary text nr. 70). The case of a paralyzed ego, either in a dream or in reality, that tries to move its foot without success, exemplifies this (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 8, 47, 65). Importantly, I contend that these descriptions enable Husserl to inoculate himself from the criticism raised by Karl Mertens (Mertens, 1998, p. 133; cf. Melle, 1997, p. 180). According to Mertens, Husserl does not follow an authentic phenomenological method when distinguishing, in abstraction, the *fiat* from the action. Arguably, though, this criticism does not concern the phenomenological status of any distinction performed in abstraction, since Husserl’s phenomenology is plenty of analyses of non-independent parts of experiences, which, as such, can be separated from the whole encompassing them only abstractedly. Instead, if what Mertens wants to say is that there is no phenomenological evidence that the *fiat* is an empty intention of the will that is fulfilled by the action, then his criticism is

¹² For a discussion of Husserl’s agent motivational causation theory presented in the *Studien*, see Staiti (2019), Spano (2021a).

¹³ For a thorough analysis of the analogy, and the difference between cognitive and practical actions, see Husserl (2020, ch. XI); Husserl (1939, §48).

justified to the extent that one considers, as he does, the *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre (1908–1914)*, in which the descriptions of inhibition (*Hemmung*), and, hence, of disappointment of the empty intention of the *fiat*, are missing. Yet, as soon as one becomes aware of them by reading the *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins*, the phenomenological legitimacy of Husserl's analysis seems to be fully grounded.

Once he has clarified the relation between *fiat* and action, Husserl introduces the more general notions of 'voluntary form' (*voluntäre Form*) and 'voluntary matter' (*voluntäre Materie*) in order not to conflate, in turn, the volitional moment of the action with the action itself. As he says: "[i]n general, it is good to distinguish in every action the voluntary form, i.e. the moment of the will, and the voluntary matter, i.e. the objective process, the event that comes to creation" (Husserl, 2020, p. 28).¹⁴ The voluntary form, Husserl goes on to say, is what confers the 'productive character' (*schöpferischen Charakter*) on the voluntary matter, since it is through the will that the action is posited as something to be practically realized. Within the unity of the action, the moment of the voluntary form that corresponds to the 'current now of the will' (*jeweiliges Willensjetzt*), namely the now phase of the will, as opposed to the phases just been, is called 'creative moment' (*kreatives Moment*). Each creative moment is an intention of the will that is fulfilled by the current now phase of the voluntary matter, thereby giving it its productive character. To the unity of the total voluntary form there corresponds, thus, a unity of constantly succeeding creative moments.

Yet the voluntary form is not exhausted by this succession. In fact, Husserl notes that "the whole volitional consciousness is not only a straightforward continuity, but rather a continuity of continuities" (Husserl, 2020, p. 26). The reason is that each creative moment is a 'spread continuity' (*ausgebreitete Kontinuität*), namely an intention of the now phase of the action that is surrounded by adumbrations of its past and future phases. The total voluntary form, thus, comprehends also: (i) the retentions or, as Husserl calls them here, the 'resonances' (*Nachklänge*) of the past creative moments, on the basis of which the segment of the deed that is flowed off stands as a perfect deed (i.e. as a fully realized deed), and the moments of the will in the now that are directed, as empty expectations, at the future 'matter of the action' (*Handlungsmaterie*) and give it the character of a process to be practically realized. In this manner, the volition of the now phase of the action goes straight through the volition of the successive phase, and, in turn, goes through the later phases, such that it is ultimately directed at the end of the process. Indeed, at the two opposite ends of the series of creative moments there is, on the one side, the *fiat*, which is designated as the 'source point of the will' (*Springpunkt des Willens*) or simply 'creative source point' (*kreativer Springpunkt*), although Husserl also refers to it as an 'impulse' (*Impuls*) or 'starting point' (*Ansatzpunkt*), and, on the other side, the

¹⁴ One should be careful, though, not to understand voluntary form and voluntary matter as referring, respectively, to the noetic side and to the noematic side of volitional consciousness. In fact, each notion can be understood both phansically and ontically (namely, noetically or noematically), such that one can speak, respectively, of voluntary form or matter of the 'doing' (*Tun*) and a voluntary form or matter of the 'deed' (*Tat*). In the latter case, it is also possible to indicate the voluntary form by using the simple expression 'the voluntary' (*das Voluntäre*); see Husserl, (2020: 8).

‘creative end point’ (*kreativer Endpunkt*) or ‘goal point’ (*Zielpunkt*), which, once the action is done, has the ‘character of accomplished intention’ (*Charakter der vollbrachten Absicht*), or of ‘achieved goal’ (*erreichtes Ziel*).¹⁵

If we take the example of drinking again, the ego’s starting *fiat* to drink immediately passes over into the action of moving the arm; yet in this current acting the ego is already directed, through an empty expectation, at the successive phase of grabbing the glass and bringing it to the mouth; in turn, through an empty expectation of the farther future (which, as such, intentionally includes the former expectation), the ego expects that, once the phase of bringing the glass to the mouth is done, it will then follow the end phase of drinking the water, the realization of which will characterize the action as an achieved goal or as an accomplished intention. On the basis of this thorough description of the unity of a volitional action, the following claim from Husserl achieves full clarity: “[w]hat makes up the unity of an action? One will say that it lies in the unity of the will; ‘a’ volition goes throughout all the phases of the will of an action” (Husserl, 2020, p. 6).

2 Primary and Secondary Action

Another type of positing of the will that differs from the *fiat*, and all other creative moments in a straightforward action, is the positing of the ‘secondary action’ (*sekundäre Handlung*). As Husserl says:

It belongs to the essence of action to be this type of whole: *fiat* and productive action [...] And an action in the broader sense can be attached to it as a co-wanted outcome of the creative action, where the “co-wanted” means a certain modified character of the positing. (Husserl, 2020, pp. 12–13)

A secondary action is the ‘natural outcome of becoming’ (*natürlicher Werdenserfolg*), or, which is the same, the empirical causal consequence of a straightforward action performed by the ego, which is, accordingly, called ‘primary action’ (*primäre Handlung*). As an example, one may recall my throwing a little stone against Andrea’s window so as to draw his attention. While my act of throwing is the primary action, which I execute by performing the *fiat* and all the successive creative moments that correspond to the different phases of my bodily movement, the flying of the stone is a secondary action, that is, it is “a physical outcome, which further flows in entirely the same way whether the volition had forerun it or not” (Husserl, 2020, p. 3).

That said, it must be noted that, for Husserl, what makes it the case that an empirically causal process nonetheless shows the character of volitionality is not just the fact that this process follows a voluntarily movement of the ego. Indeed, it may be, for example, that “I have wanted no more than this push, without that I focus my

¹⁵ As I will show later on, there are cases in which the goal of the creative action lies outside of it, and therefore the creative end point does not have the character of an accomplished intention; see section 1.6 below.

intending [*Absehen*] on the expected outcome. Obviously, as I know, some outcome belongs to the push, but it is ‘volitionally’ indifferent to me. It is not included in my willing” (Husserl, 2020, pp. 3–4). Another necessary consideration in determining whether an empirical causal process has the character of a secondary action is, instead, the fact that the physical outcome is the goal of the will or, at least, a path for achieving that goal: “After that the opposite case: the intending [*Absehen*], namely the volitional intending, is directly directed at the physical outcome tied up with the push. In the ball game, I push in order to give the ball a certain orientation, and further, in order to win the game” (Husserl, 2020, p. 4).

To sum up, for Husserl an empirical consequence counts as an action in a secondary sense of the term when the following conditions are both satisfied: (i) this empirical consequence mediately originates from the performance of the *fiat*, precisely because it is the causal effect of the primary action springing forth from the latter; (ii) though this empirical consequence the goal of the action is accomplished and hence receives the ‘character of accomplished intention’ (*Charakter der vollbrachten Absicht*) or of ‘achieved goal’ (*erreichtes Ziel*).

2.1 Inner and Outer Action

One of the most original aspects of Husserl’s account of agency, which sets it apart from the vast majority of the contemporary analytic theories (e.g. Davidson, 1971), is the fact that action is not relegated to the sole domain of bodily movements. On the contrary, Husserl makes a distinction between ‘outer’ (*äußere*) and ‘inner’ (*innere*) action (see Husserl, 2020, p. 126; see also Husserl, 1959, p. 205ff.).¹⁶ Whereas outer actions are all volitional processes that, in the form of bodily movements, take place in the external world, inner actions are all volitional processes that take place inside the psyche, such as when the ego voluntarily remembers or imagines something for the sake of enjoying the represented objectivity. Although these inner experiences are objectifying,¹⁷ the fact that they are performed for the sake of enjoyment bestows on them the essential form of practical volitionality.¹⁸ Accordingly, they are volitional processes that exhibit all the essential determinations of any practical action: they begin with the voluntary performance of the *fiat* and terminate with the achievement of a goal posited as something to be realized practically. It should come as no surprise, then, that Husserl seldomly refers to the living

¹⁶ Importantly, this distinction is internal to the practical domain of consciousness. It should be noted, indeed, that Husserl talks of action also in relation to acts of judgment, which are clearly not bodily movements. For a thorough analysis of the analogy, and the difference between cognitive and practical actions, see Husserl (2020: ch. XI); Husserl (1939, §48).

¹⁷ For a discussion of Husserl’s notion of ‘objectifying acts’, see section 1.7 below.

¹⁸ For a discussion of Husserl’s disambiguation of the notion of ‘tendential activity’, which is closely connected with the notion of ‘volition’, but takes a distinct form in the theoretical and the practical domain of consciousness, see Spano (2021b).

body in his analysis of the essential determinations of action. Not all action is indeed a bodily movement for him.¹⁹

3 Deciding Willing

Let me now introduce another type of volitional phenomenon, which is that of ‘deciding willing’ (*entscheidendes Wollen*). While a straightforward action is immediately executed by the ego, a deciding willing is, on the contrary, the mere decision to perform, in a near or remote future, and maybe only under certain circumstances, an action. For example, the ego can decide to wake up as soon as it is 7 o’clock in the morning. Here the decision to wake up refers precisely to the ego’s action of waking up. A deciding willing can be also the decision to perform another decision. For example, I can now decide that tomorrow morning I will decide whether to go for a walk or not. Yet any deciding willing must ultimately refer to an action. Were this not the case, there would be an infinite regress in which every decision leads to other decisions without any action ever being decided upon. In the example I just gave, my chain of decisions ultimately refers to an action of walking. Husserl, then, considers actions to be more fundamental than decisions, which according to their own essence are founded upon a representation (be it empty or intuitive) of the former (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 23, 35).

Accordingly, the essential aspect that distinguishes an action from a deciding willing is precisely the straightforward or, in exact Husserlian terms, immediate (*unmittelbar*) passing over of the *fiat* into the action. This does not hold in the case of a decision. As Husserl writes:

The intent [*Vorsatz*] differs from the action, the deciding from the acting, due to the fact that in the latter a productive realizing, a creating is linked to striving, or conversely, a continuous striving to the creating of each moment. Yet the *fiat* of the action is also an intent, but one that immediately passes over into the creation. (Husserl, 2020, p. 34)

Husserl calls the positing that characterizes a deciding willing ‘will of intent’ (*Vorsatzwillen*) and the thesis that is posited by it ‘intent’ (*Vorsatz*) (see Husserl, 2020, p. 34). Or, when the decision is, more specifically, the conclusion of a decisional process in which alternative possibilities are taken into consideration, such as for example the ego’s decision to opt for waking up at 8 o’clock instead of 7 o’clock, the positing takes the name of ‘will of resolution’ (*Entschlusswillen*) and the thesis that is posited by it ‘resolution’ (*Entschluss*) (see *ibid.*).²⁰ Like the *fiat*, and all the other

¹⁹ Importantly, though, I do not mean to say by this that the body does not play any relevant role in Husserl’s account of agency. Not only is the body an essential moment of any outer action, but it is also fundamental in order to clarify how, on the one hand, the will can have consequences on nature, and, on the other hand, nature can have consequences on it. For a discussion of this important theme of Husserl’s account of action in the *Studien*, see Spano (2021a).

²⁰ Thus, in my English translation I use the term ‘decision’ to indicate any deciding willing whatsoever and the term ‘resolution’ to indicate the specific deciding willing in which alternative possibilities are taken into consideration before making a conclusion. In English the term ‘resolution’ means indeed ‘a

creative moments of a straightforward action, a decision is also an empty intention of the will that posits an action as something to be practically realized (see Husserl, 2020, p. 36). Yet a decision does not immediately turn into the fulfilling action and, instead, maintains the character of empty intention. As I said, only after a certain amount of time, and possibly only under certain conditions, does it pass over into the decided acting. When this happens, the action not only has the character of a realization of the *fiat*, but also of a realization of the decision. In this respect, Husserl remarks that “the straightforward independent action and the action as an execution of a decision are differently characterized” (*ibid.*). Indeed, the character of ‘execution’ (*Ausführung*) is a new character that belongs specifically to a fulfilled decision: when the ego performs an action that fulfills an earlier decision, there occurs a recollection of the latter that, by undergoing a fulfilling identification with the action, confers the character of execution on the overall action. For instance, when the ego wakes up at 8 o’clock in the morning, the decision to do so, made the night before, becomes fulfilled, such that the ego’s waking up is the execution of this earlier decision.

Andrea Staiti argues that, according to Husserl’s analysis in the *Studien*, decision has no primacy over action (see Staiti, 2019, p. 11). This claim is certainly true if it is taken to mean that, in the research manuscripts collected in ‘*Wille und Handlung*’, Husserl never states that an action counts as an action only if it results from a decision. Not only does Husserl here talk of straightforward actions that are not executions of previous decisions (as he also does so in Husserl, 1988, p. 111), but he also argues, as I pointed out above, that the reverse is actually true, namely that it is decision that always requires, at its foundation, the representation of the action decided upon. Staiti’s criticism of Crowell, who argues, on the contrary, that “the key to Husserl’s analysis of willing is his claim that intention-in-action has the same categorial structure as decision-will” (Crowell, 2013, p. 264), seems to be justified. However, Crowell might also mean not that, for Husserl, an action is always the execution of a decision, but rather that Husserl understands the structure of action to be somewhat analogous with the structure of decision. As I discussed in this section, that could be indeed the case, since decision is also described, through an analogy with the *fiat* and all the other creative moments of a straightforward action, as an empty intention of the will that posits a process as something to be practically realized, and which, once executed, passes over into it. The fact remains, though, that action and decision can be said analogous *only to this extent*.

Footnote 20 (continued)

conclusion reached after pondering something’. That said, it is also important not to confuse the ‘will of resolution’ (*Entschlusswille*) and the ‘decision of the will’ (*Willensentscheidung*). Whereas the former term refers to the positing of a specific deciding willing, the latter term is occasionally used by Husserl to designate the positing of the *fiat* that starts a straightforward action (see Husserl, 2020: 9, 33, 182, 436). Another term that is often used by Husserl to refer to the positing of the *fiat* as opposed to the positing of a decision (at least in the simple case of it, see Husserl, 2020: 36–37) is ‘affirmation of the will’ (*Willensbejahung*). For possible phenomenological accounts of rational decision-making, see Rinofner-Kreidl (2011), and Drummond (2020, 2021).

4 Simple and Compound Action

Actions and decisions can be, in turn, ‘simple’ (*einfach*) or ‘compound’ (*zusammengesetzt*), or, which is the same, ‘immediate’ (*unmittelbare*) or ‘mediate’ (*mittelbare*). According to Husserl, an action is simple or immediate when it is not made up of further independent actions. For example, my uninterrupted action of walking to Andrea’s house, although it has different phases and hence, in a certain sense, has different parts, is not made up of many independent actions that I could perform on their own. In fact, each phase of the action requires, in order to count as a part of the action at all, the original *fiat* that posits the whole process as to be realized practically (see Husserl, 2020, p. 41). In Husserl’s mereological language, a simple action is, thus, made up of ‘non-independent parts’ or ‘moments’.

Instead, when there is a multiplicity of *fiats*, each directed at a distinct goal, which are put into a whole through a connection that the will creates (see *ibid.*), the ego brings about a compound or mediate action, whose essence is precisely that of being “a plurality of independent actions joined together” (Husserl, 2020, p. 6). For example, if I do not just want to walk to a single place, but instead I want to walk to different places, I perform a compound action, which has my independent actions of waking to each different place as parts. However, it must be noted that the performance of a multiplicity of *fiats* is not a sufficient condition for the action to be compound. Indeed, for Husserl there are also cases in which a multiplicity of *fiats* are performed, and yet, the action remains simple.²¹ As an example, he considers a bodily movement in which, rather than distinguishing a plurality of independent actions joined together, one can observe that one and the same volition is altered:

I want to move the hand in a circle and I do that. Or, I move it in a circle as intended, then I want again a new circle, or I alter the will and, during the circle following the first will, I alter and perform a series of semicircles, etc. In any case, a new volition cannot belong to each phase. I have then discrete parts inside of the action, which thoroughly has the primary productive character, such that a new starting *fiat*, a new *impulse* belongs to each section. (Husserl, 2020, pp. 5–6)

By altering the volition of moving my arm, I perform many *fiats* within the same simple action. Each *fiat* is directed at the section of the action corresponding to a different geometrical form of the movement: through the initial *fiat* I intend to realize a circle, through the second *fiat* I intend to realize a semicircle, and so forth. Accordingly, each geometrical form of movement, i.e. a circle, a semicircle, etc., represents the goal of a specific part of the action. Yet the fact remains that the action is simple and not compound.²²

²¹ See section 6.1 below for a discussion of whether there can be compound actions in which there is only one *fiat*, such that the performance of a multiplicity of *fiats* is, in fact, not even a necessary condition for their constitution.

²² Arguably, everything said applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to deciding willing. However, although Husserl explicitly states that there are simple and compound decisions, he does not give any description of the latter.

5 Possible Relations Between Goal and Path in a Simple Action

Now that the general difference between simple and compound action is clear, I turn to the analysis of the possible relations between goal and path within a simple action. Before discussing all the different cases, though, let us see first what are exactly the goal and the path of an action. For Husserl, the ‘goal’ (*Ziel*) of an action is what the ego really wants to happen, the real ‘intention’ (*Absicht*) of the will that the ego endeavors to realize through its own doing. For example, when I walk towards Andreas’s house, the goal of my action is not walking but visiting Andrea. My walking is, in fact, the ‘path’ (*Weg*) to the goal, that is, the ‘realizing becoming’ (*realisierende Werden*) of the action that perform so as to achieve the goal.

That said, there are three possible relations between path and goal in a simple action: (i) goal and path are distinct; (ii) goal and path coincide; (iii) the goal lies outside of the action. The first case is represented by all actions in which the realizing becoming is different from the intention, as in the example of going to visit my friend Andrea that I addressed above. Instead, if I want the entire walk to Andrea’s house, then goal and path coincide, because what I really want is nothing but that walk itself. Of course, in cases of this sort it is still possible to distinguish conceptually path and goal by saying that the former is, strictly speaking, only a ‘real’ (*reel*) moment of the latter. After all, a piece of walk is only a real moment of the whole walk. Husserl is fully aware of that and specifies that path and goal coincide insofar as “each creative phase of the action is itself a phase of the goal, which itself consists precisely in the productive becoming” (Husserl, 2020, p. 40). Finally, examples of the third case are all the activities in which the ego accomplishes its goal by means of a secondary action, like when, in the game of billiard, I push the ball. My intention here, i.e., scoring a point, is not the creative end point of the primary action of pushing, but rather the end point of the secondary action, i.e., the falling of the ball in one of the pockets of the table.

The fact that Husserl explicates the case in which the goal lies outside of a simple action by referring to the relation between a primary and a secondary action may make one wonder whether the union of the two still count as a simple action, or rather makes up a compound one. To support the thesis that the union in question makes up a simple action, one could point out that, for Husserl, in compound actions there must be as many *fiats* as there are independent actions that make up the compound (see Husserl, 2020, p. 41). Since a secondary action does not spring forth from a new *fiat*, it does not comprise a compound together with the primary action. Were this the case, Staiti’s claim that “an action, which can be simple or composite and, accordingly, break down into a primary and a secondary component” (Staiti, 2019, p. 9) would then turn out to be incorrect. However, I share Staiti’s position and contend that, in his statement, Husserl implicitly meant that there must be as many *fiats* as there are ‘simple’ independent actions which make up the compound. There are, indeed, passages in which Husserl associates the natural consequence of a creative action with cases of compound actions (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 43, 48), thereby supporting the idea that the union of a primary and secondary action yields a compound action. If one supports this latter thesis, then he or she must agree that

when Husserl argues that, in a simple action, the goal can lie outside of the action, he is referring, in fact, to a simple sub-action (*Teilhandlung*), which is considered in abstraction from the compound action to which it belongs. More importantly, he or she must agree that the performance of a multiplicity of *fiats* turns out to be neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for the performance of a compound action.

6 Possible Relations Between Path and Goal in a Compound Action

What holds for simple actions also holds for compound actions, both with regard to the fact of having a path and a goal and with regard to the possible relations that can obtain between the two. As Husserl says, “inasmuch as the compound action is an action, it has its *fiat*, its goal and its path” (Husserl, 2020, p. 40); furthermore, “it is clear that in compound actions goal and path can coincide in the same sense that we have discussed in simple ones” (Husserl, 2020, p. 42). The only exception is the lying of the goal outside of the action. In the specific case of a compound action this cannot indeed happen, since the further action in which the goal is supposed to lie is included in the compound.

A paradigmatic example of the possible relations between path and goal in a compound action is, once again, one going for a walk: I first walk from my home to the park, I then go to Andrea’s house, and finally I go back home. These are three simple actions, each having its own path and goal, joined together into a compound action, which has, in turn, its own overall path and overall goal. The overall path is the ‘collective’ (*Kollektivum*) of the paths of the simple actions, while the overall goal is the collective of the corresponding goals. Moreover, if my overall goal is the entire walk, then it coincides with the overall path, namely the sum of the three simple walks. On the other hand, if my overall goal is not the entire walk, but simply to be first at the park, then at Andrea’s house, and finally back at home, then overall goal and overall path do not coincide, like the goals and paths of each of the simple actions: staying at a place is completely distinct from going to it.

7 Means and Purpose in a Compound Action

In the case of a compound action, path and goal can also take the more specific forms of means (*Mittel*) and purpose (*Zweck*). Husserl understands the concept of ‘means’ in terms of a ‘mediating goal’ (*vermittelndes Ziel*) (see Husserl, 2020, p. 43). A mediating goal is a goal that satisfies the following two conditions: (a) it is not what the ego really wants, namely the real intention of the will; (b) it is ‘for the sake of the purpose’ (*um des Zweckes willen*), namely it is a goal conducive to a further goal which lies outside of the action (see *ibid.*). Accordingly, a purpose is a goal that satisfies the following two conditions: (c) it is distinct from the means; (d) it is located in a different action from that in which the means lies. For example, let us consider the following compound action of working out. I may achieve the goal of weighing 80 kg as a means to the goal of winning, by the action of competing in it, a judo contest within a specific weight division. Within the same compound

action there can also be a plurality of means or, which is the same, of ‘intermediate purposes’ (*Zwischenzwecke*) (see Husserl, 2020, p. 45). For instance, my action of competing in a judo contest may be, in turn, ‘for the sake of the purpose’ of promoting myself as a judo master.

Finally, it must be noted that, due to (c), means and purpose are not present in all compound actions (see Husserl, 2020, p. 44), but only in those in which path and goal, or at least some of them, are distinct. Furthermore, due to (d), means and purpose cannot be found in simple actions, since simple actions, by definition, do not contain a purpose.

8 The Foundation of Action

I now address the question of the phenomenological foundation of action. This task is important in order to understand the way in which, in the *Studien*, Husserl’s analysis of volitional phenomena is situated within the context of an investigation aimed at a systematic description of consciousness in its three main domains: the theoretical, the axiological, and the practical. The unity of these domains is in fact based on the foundational relation among theoretical, evaluative, and volitional acts of consciousness.²³

In the *Logische Untersuchungen*, Husserl makes a distinction between ‘objectifying acts’ and ‘non-objectifying acts’, or, which is the same, between ‘primary intentions’ and ‘secondary intentions’ (see Husserl, 1984, p. 515).²⁴ Whereas all evaluative and volitional acts are secondary intentions, all cognitive acts of consciousness such as perceptions and judgments are primary intentions. Primary and secondary intentions take their names from the fact that the latter owe their intentionality to the foundation on the former (see *ibid.*). Indeed, primary intentions are ‘representations’ (*Vorstellungen*)²⁵ that provide the secondary intentions founded upon them with an objective reference. As an example, the experiencing subject can take delight in something, e.g. the blue sky, through the foundation of the non-objectifying act of joy upon the objectifying act of perception that represents such an object.

²³ Husserl’s account of the foundation of practical and evaluative acts on cognitive acts is one of the most debated topic in the literature. Recent works on the topic are those of Drummond (2013); Rinofner-Kreidl (2013, 2015); Caminada and Summa (2015); and Staiti (2020, ch. 3), among others.

²⁴ The use of the term ‘secondary intention’ in place of ‘non-objectifying act’ has the advantage of doing away with the prefix ‘non-’, which can be misinterpreted as an indication of the thesis, mistakenly attributed to Husserl, according to which evaluative and volitional acts are not intentional. On the contrary, these experiences are essentially characterized by intentionality for Husserl, since they exist always and only as founded on representations (*Vorstellungen*), i.e. primary intentions, which provide them with an objective reference (see Husserl, 1984, p. 388; Staiti, 2020, p. 85, already stressed this point). The experiences that lack intentionality are in fact not volitions and evaluations, but rather sensations and sensational complexes (see Husserl, 1984, pp. 382–383).

²⁵ A ‘representation’ (*Vorstellung*) is a theoretical act of consciousness that presents an object as being such and such to the experiencing subject. It must be noted that the presented object is not contained, as a part, in the objectifying act. Intentional objects are not *in* consciousness. For Husserl’s phenomenological disambiguation of the notion of ‘representation’, see Husserl, 1984, 5th *Logische Untersuchung*, §37.

That said, it remains to clarify the precise sense in which secondary intentions are ‘founded’ on primary intentions. The phenomenological notion of ‘foundation’ indicates the manner in which objects can relate to one another as wholes to parts or as coordinated parts of a whole (see Husserl, 1984, 3rd *Logical Untersuchung*). In greater detail, this notion concerns the mereological relation characterizing the so-called ‘non-independent parts’. For Husserl, an independent part is given when “in the ‘nature’ of the content [i.e., part] itself, in its ideal essence, no dependence on other contents is rooted” (Husserl, 1984, p. 239), that is, when “this essence by itself, i.e. considered in a priori fashion, requires no other essence to be interwoven with it” (*ibid.*). Examples of independent parts are things such as heads and windows (see *ibid.*, p. 241), namely all objects that can be what they are independently of the whole in which they might be included. On the contrary, “a non-independent object can only be what it is (i.e. what it is in virtue of its essential properties) in a more comprehensive whole” (*ibid.*, p. 253). Husserl’s example is that of color: “the color of this paper is a non-independent ‘moment’ of the paper. It is not merely an actual part, but its essence, its pure Species, predestines it to partial being: a color *in general and purely* as *such* can exist only as a ‘moment’ in a colored thing” (*ibid.*, p. 241).²⁶ In this respect, a non-independent part is said to be ‘founded’ on the whole that includes it. If we consider this last example, the color of a paper is founded upon the paper. Furthermore, the concept of foundation can be generalized to include not only relations between parts and wholes but also between coordinated parts of a whole. In this case, there are two possibilities: (i) the relation of foundation is reciprocal; ii) the relation of foundation is one-sided. Two parts are reciprocally founded when they cannot be what they are independently of one another. Husserl’s famous example is that of color and extension: “no color is thinkable without a certain extension, and no extension without a certain color” (*ibid.*, p. 270). The foundational relation is one-sided when a part is founded upon another part, but this latter part can be what it is independently of it. An example of a one-sided foundation is precisely that between primary and secondary intentions. Indeed, we have that: (i) these experiences are parts that make up a complex intentional experience; (ii) the foundational relation between these parts is one-sided, since primary intentions can be what they are independently of the secondary intentions, while the reverse does not hold true. For instance, one cannot take delight in the blue sky unless he or she also perceives this object; yet, one can perceive the blue sky without taking any delight in it.

Last but not least, it must be noted that, although volitional and evaluative acts are secondary intentions that, as such, must be both founded on cognitive acts, for Husserl the relation between volitional acts and evaluative acts is, in turn, that of a one-sided foundation. Volitions are thus *immediately* founded on evaluations and *mediately* founded on cognitions. The reason is that through a volitional act the subject intends to practically realize something valuable (Husserl, 2020, pp. 69, 136;

²⁶ Other names Husserl uses for the idea of ‘Independent Part’ are those of ‘Independent Content’, ‘Piece’, and ‘Concrete Part’; while he refers to the concept of ‘Non-Independent Part’ also as ‘Non-Independent Content’, ‘Moment’ or ‘Abstract Part’.

see also *ibid.*, ch. XII, §2;), and, therefore, an evaluative act is presupposed for the constitution of this axiological objectivity. However, the reverse does not necessarily hold true, since it is not always the case that the subject intends to practically realize what it experiences as valuable. For instance, even if the subject experiences a sunny day as delightful, it does not want to practically realize such a day, if only because this is not in its power. One can understand, then, the principle behind the order of the three volumes of the *Studien*: the volume on theoretical consciousness comes first insofar as theoretical experiences provide the foundation for evaluative experiences, the analysis of which is thus collected in the second volume. In turn, evaluative experiences provide the foundation for volitional experiences, the analysis of which is collected in the third volume.

9 The Problem of the Direction and Foundation of Action in the *Studien*

Studien with the notion of foundation in full view, I now turn to the discussion of the foundation of action as discussed by Husserl in the *Studien*. This discussion is particularly relevant since, in his trailblazing article on Husserl's phenomenology of volition Melle duly notes that the question of the exact direction of the will, and, correlatively, of its foundation, is a cause of great concern for Husserl, especially when he considers the phenomenon of deciding willing (Melle, 1997, pp. 182–183). However, in the manuscripts that Melle takes into account in his article, most of which are now published in §15 of the Husserliana volume *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre (1908–1914)*, Husserl does not consider the question of the exact direction and foundation of the will as extensively as he does in the *Studien*. I, therefore, aim to show that, in the research manuscripts collected in this new Husserlian edition, one finds a clearer and more thorough account of the direction and foundation of the will.

As Mertens already pointed out (Mertens, 1998, pp. 131–132), Husserl argues, contra Alexander Pfänder, that volition does not necessarily require a thematic self-consciousness (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 71–72). The intention of the will, both in the case of a decision and in the case of a straightforward action, is usually directed at the action itself, and not at the ego's will of the action. If a volition were always and necessarily directed at a further volition, there would be in fact an infinite regress (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 35, 442, see also Husserl, 1988, §15). For instance, if the ego wants to move to a certain location and immediately does so, what it wants is to reach the location, and not to will to reach the location. Or, to give an example concerning a decision, rather than a straightforward action, if the ego decides to move from the countryside to the city, what it decides is to move to the city and not to will to move to the city. Given that, although the representation of the wanted process is a necessary foundation for the volition, it is not necessary that the process in question is already represented as an action. As Husserl says, "I can and must represent the future process, but the process is not the action" (Husserl, 2020, p. 36). In fact, the will characterizing a straightforward action is ultimately founded upon a mere perception and, in more detail, upon the perceptual moments of retention, primal

impression, and protention through which the past, present, and future phases of the action are intended as an objective process (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 27–29).

However, in the case of a decision some difficulties remain with respect to its foundation. Husserl himself claims that deciding willing is founded upon a representation of the action that the ego decides to execute (see section 1.5 above). Therefore, one may expect that any decision necessarily requires the representation of a full action and not just of a perceptual process. After all, it is only by means of a future action that a decision can eventually be executed. In this regard, Melle points out that Husserl does not seem to find a satisfactory solution to the issue, but limits himself to say that here we find “very difficult relations that one must ever again think through” (Husserl, 1988, p. 109). Yet in the *Studien* the father of phenomenology seems to have a clearer view of the matter. In the case of a decision, he says, the ego may fully represent the action through phantasy, instead of representing it as a mere perceptual process. Yet this is by no means necessary. If the ego’s intent is simply a decision to perform an action and not, as occasionally happens, a decision for the will to perform an action,²⁷ an intuitive or empty representation of the perceptual process suffices (see Husserl, 2020, pp. 14, 36). Of course, what is intended through the will is not just a process that is ‘coming-to-be’ (*seinwerdender*), but, as I said before, it is a process that is ‘it-shall-be’ (*seinsollender*), that is, intended to be realized practically. The crucial point, though, is precisely that the practical, productive character is bestowed on the perceptual process by the will and it is not already presupposed in its founding representation.

10 Concluding Remarks

My paper is intended to articulate Husserl’s taxonomy of action in the *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins*. In doing so, other than analyzing the different types of action, I address some problematic issues of Husserl’s account that Melle, 1997, Mertens, 1998, Crowell, 2013, and Staiti, 2019, raise and debate. These issues are the direction and the foundation of action, the phenomenological legitimacy of the distinction between action and *fiat* in abstraction, and the validity of the analogy between decision and action. I hope these analyses will help the reader into the exploration of the further topics covered by Husserl in ‘*Wille und Handlung*’.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank the Husserl Archives in Leuven for giving me access to Husserl’s research manuscripts, which were still unpublished at the time of writing. I would also like to thank Prof. Julia Jansen, the editors and the anonymous reviewer, whose insightful comments and suggestions were crucial for improving the article.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL. This research is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)—Project-ID 446126658. Open access funding provided by the University of Würzburg, which participates in the nationwide DEAL contract with the publisher Springer Nature.

²⁷ For example, I decide that I will do everything I can in order, not just to desire, but to want that I make physical exercise regularly.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Crowell, S. (2013). *Normativity and phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*. Cambridge University Press.
- Caminada, E., & Summa, M. (2015). Supervenience and the theory of experience: Assessing the explanatory and descriptive power of a formal concept. *Metodo. International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy*, 3(2), 7–18.
- Davidson, D. (1971). Agency. In A. Marras, R. N. Bronaugh, & R. W. Binkley (Eds.), *Agent, action, and reason* (pp. 1–37). University of Toronto Press.
- De Monticelli, R. (2020). The phenomenology of rational agency. In C. Erhard & T. Keiling (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of phenomenology of agency* (pp. 362–375). Routledge.
- Dreyfus, H. (2000). A Merleau-Pontyan critique of Husserl's and Searle's representationalist accounts of action. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 100(3), 287–302.
- Drummond, J. (2013). The intentional structure of emotions. *Logical Analysis and the History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse*, 16, 363–371.
- Drummond, J. (2020). Deliberating, choosing, and acting. In C. Erhard & T. Keiling (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of phenomenology of agency* (pp. 376–387). Routledge.
- Drummond, J. (2021). Voluntary action, chosen action, and resolve. *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2021.1977092>
- Ferrarello, S. (2015). *Husserl's ethics and practical intentionality*. Bloomsbury.
- Hart, J. G. (1992). *The person and the common. Life studies in a Husserlian social ethics*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Heinämaa, S. (2018). Two ways of understanding persons: a Husserlian distinction. *Phenomenology and Mind*, 15, 92–103.
- Husserl, E. (1939). *Erfahrung und Urteil*. L. Landgrebe (Ed.). Akademie Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Husserl, E. (1950). *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*. In M. Biemel (Ed.). Husserliana III/1. Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E. (1952). *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. M. Biemel (Ed.). Husserliana IV. Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E. (1959). *Erste Philosophie II (1923–24): Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*. R. Boehm (Ed.). Husserliana VIII. Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E. (1984). *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Teil. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*. U. Panzer (Ed.). Husserliana XIX. Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E. (1988). *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre. 1908–1914*. U. Melle (Ed.). Husserliana XXVIII. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Husserl, E. (2020). *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins, Teilband III. Wille und Handlung Teilband III. Wille und Handlung. Text aus dem Nachlass (1902–1934)*. U. Melle & T. Vongehr (Ed.). Husserliana XLIII/3. Springer.

- Jacobs, H. (2021). Husserl, the active self, and commitment. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 20(2), 281–298.
- Lohmar, D. (2016). Human freedom—A Husserlian perspective. *Dialogue and Universalism*, 3, 11–24.
- Loidolt, S. (2019). Experience and normativity: The phenomenological approach. In A. Cimino & C. Leijenhorst (Eds.), *Phenomenology and experience: New perspectives* (pp. 150–165). Brill.
- Lotz, C. (2006). Action: Phenomenology of wishing and willing in Husserl and Heidegger. *Husserl Studies*, 22, 121–135.
- Melle, U. (1997). Husserl's phenomenology of willing. In J. G. Hart and L. Embree (Eds.), *Phenomenology of values and valuing* (pp. 169–192). Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Melle, U. (2014). Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins: Husserls Beitrag zu einer phänomenologischen Psychologie. In M. Ubiali & M. Wehrle (Eds.), *Feeling and value, willing and action: Essays in the context of a phenomenological psychology* (pp. 3–11). Springer.
- Mertens, K. (1998). Husserl's phenomenology of will in his reflections on ethics. In N. Depraz & D. Zahavi (Eds.), *Alterity and facticity* (pp. 121–138). Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Mertens, K. (2020). Phenomenology of willing in Pfänder and Husserl. In C. Erhard & T. Keiling (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of phenomenology of agency* (pp. 15–28). Routledge.
- Moran, D. (2014). Defending the transcendental attitude: Husserl's concept of the person and the challenges of naturalism. *Phenomenology and Mind*, 7, 30–43.
- Peucker, H. (2015). Hat Husserl eine konsistente Theorie des Willens? Das Willensbewusstsein in der statischen und der genetischen Phänomenologie. *Husserl Studies*, 31, 17–43.
- Rinofner-Kreidl, S. (2011). Motive, Gründe und Entscheidungen in Husserls intentionaler Handlungstheorie. In V. Mayer, C. Erhard, M. Scherini, U. Meixner (Ed.), *Die Aktualität Husserls* (pp. 232–277). Karl Alber.
- Rinofner-Kreidl, S. (2013). Husserls Fundierungsmodell als Grundlage einer intentionalen Wertungsanalyse. *Metodo. International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy*, 1(2), 59–82.
- Rinofner-Kreidl, S. (2015). Mereological foundation vs. supervenience? A husserlian proposal to re-think moral supervenience in Robert Audi's ethical intuitionism. *Metodo. International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy*, 3(2), 81–124.
- Spahn, C. (1996). *Phänomenologische Handlungstheorie. Edmund Husserls Untersuchungen zur Ethik*. Königshausen & Neumann.
- Spano, N. (2021a). Volitional causality vs natural causality: Reflections on their compatibility in Husserl's phenomenology of action. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-020-09724-9>
- Spano, N. (2021b). The genesis of action in Husserl's Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins. *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2021.1909426>
- Staiti, A. (2019). Husserl's account of action: Naturalistic or anti-naturalistic? A journey through the Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins. *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 17, 8–21.
- Staiti, A. (2020). *Etica Naturalistica e Fenomenologia*. Il Mulino.
- Zahavi, D. (2017). *Self and other*. Oxford University Press.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.