The essence of essences – the search for meaning structures in phenomenological analysis of lifeworld phenomena

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Abstract
Phenomena may preferably be appreciated as essences, and describing phenomena and their essences is a common methodological goal in phenomenological research, e.g. in the area of health and well-being. Consequently it is important to explore the meaning of essences, thereby answering the questions, What are phenomenological essences? How do they come to be? What are their characteristics? In this article I suggest some possible answers to these questions through an analysis of Husserl's philosophy and especially his understanding of intentionality. Further, I want to show that the analysis of essences in empirical research never can be separated from the context of the phenomenon. Here I draw on the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and especially his philosophy of “the flesh”.

Key words: Phenomenology, lifeworld theory, essence, structure of meaning

Introduction
Phenomena may preferably be appreciated as essences, and describing phenomena and their essences is a common methodological goal in phenomenological research. Consequently, it is important to explore the meaning of essences, thereby answering the questions, What are phenomenological essences? How do they come to be? What are their characteristics? My aim in this article is to suggest some possible answers to these questions.

The origin of essences
The idea of essences is central in Husserlian philosophy, but Husserl had a philosophical analysis in mind and in order for this idea to be valid in empirical phenomenological research, it has to be interpreted. We have to “lay out” the idea of essences and see how an understanding from an empirical point of view could make the original meaning useful for empirical purposes. Husserl’s (1973; 1998; 2001) general answer to what an essence is, however, does not give us a problem. An essence could be understood as a structure of essential meanings that explicates a phenomenon of interest. The essence or structure is what makes the phenomenon to be that very phenomenon. That is, the essence or structure illuminates these essential characteristics of the phenomenon without which it would not be that phenomenon. Following Husserl, it must be stressed that grasping essences is by no means something mysterious or enigmatic. As Natanson (1973) says:

The word essence has a bad name in philosophy partly because ordinary parlance gives it the connotation of mystery. The ‘essence’ of something is an almost occult quality, a hiddenness of things. Husserl takes the opposite task: essences are simply aspects or qualities of objects-as-intended. An older tradition speaks of ‘whatness’ or ‘quiddity’. // The phenomenologist believes that essences do not lurk somehow behind or within objects but are the objects grasped in its intentional character, grasped as being this or that. (Natanson, 1973, pp. 13–14.)

Seeing essences belongs, instead, to the everyday world, the everyday experiencing of the world. Husserl (1998) says:

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The truth is that everyone sees ‘ideas’, ‘essences’, and sees them, so to speak, continuously; they operate with them in their thinking and they also make judgments about them. It is only that, from their theoretical ‘standpoint,’ people interpret them away. (Husserl, 1998, p. 41.)

We see essences continuously; i.e. when we experience the world, we see essences. When I lift my gaze from the keyboard and look out of the window of my study, I see apple trees and horses. In order for me to see these phenomena I must, per se, in an immediate way grasp their essences. I cannot say that I see an apple tree or a horse without grasping the essence of these phenomena that which makes the apple tree an apple tree, and not a plum tree or a bush, or that which makes the horse a horse, and not a cow or mule. I cannot even separate an apple tree or a horse from their essences. When we attend intentionally to a phenomenon, when we understand that phenomenon and what it is, we are involved with essences. An exploration of Husserl’s ideas of intentionality makes clear that when the phenomenon presents itself as something, it presents its essence. Being intentional means seeing phenomena, their meanings, and their essences, in one way, or another.

“Phenomenology is the study of essences”, Merleau-Ponty (1995, vii) says in his famous preface to Phenomenology of perception. We shall return to his philosophy later, but for now we will let him support our understanding of the warning from Husserl above, that there is a risk that essences are “interpreted away”. Essences belong to the world that is “already there” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. vii), they belong “already” to the lifeworld and the everyday manner of which we live our lives, being researchers or not. Consequently, essences are not something that we as researchers explicitly add to the research. They are there already, in the intentional relationship between the phenomena and us.

Being in the intentional relationship, essences are not produced or constructed by us as intentional subjects. We cannot conceive the perceiving subject as a consciousness, which “interprets”, “deciphers”, or “orders” a sensible matter according to an ideal law which it possesses. Matter is “pregnant” with its form... (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 12)

Following this reasoning, we must say that essences are not the outcome of interpretation it is not the researcher who gives a phenomenon its meaning. Neither are essences something that only lye within the realm of the object itself, ready to describe. Instead, the meaning is disclosed in the researching act that takes place between the researcher and the phenomenon. In this context, it is interesting to note that the word “phenomenon” means “thing as intended”. Essences thus belong to the in-between world, that “single fabric” that connects us with everything else in the world, with other subjects or objects. Essences belong to the “flesh of the world”, as Merleau-Ponty (1968) later on described his main idea.

Illuminating essences

As human science or social science researchers and, in particular, if we work within a phenomenological approach, we aim at essences of phenomena that are present in lifeworld descriptions of any kind, for example interviews, or written narratives, focusing particular phenomena. These descriptions must be “rich” in order for essences to be found, i.e. they should include many aspects, and nuances of the phenomenon (see Dahlberg, Drew & Nystro¨m, 2001). In other words, there should be a wealth of variations of the phenomenon.

If we again begin with Husserl’s (1973) words, the process of illuminating essences begins in particularity. This process, he says, is based on the modification of an experienced or imagined objectivity, turning it into an arbitrary example which, at the same time, receives the character of a guiding “model”, a point of departure for the production of an infinitely open multiplicity of variants. It is based, therefore, on a variation. (Husserl, 1973, p. 340.)

The basis lies in the fact that all phenomena, concretely experienced or imagined, can take different forms, if we think of, imagine, or in other ways intend them. In the example above, the phenomenon, horse can have various forms in my mind. Being at home, I can watch the horses given in my perception in the field outside my window. All have four legs; they have manes and tails, straight standing ears, big eyes, almost mimic-less faces. One is big, middle brown and with black mane and tail. She has a big belly and her moves are dignified. One is dark brown, slender and long-legged, and she is smart in her movements. The third is “dark white” all over and lanky. He behaves very differently from the other two and is “bumpy” and “jumpy”, and seems to “tease” the other two most of the time. In my analysis of the horse essence, I can also think about other horses, others that I am familiar with or have seen at other places. Further, I can imagine all possible horses, large and small, fat and skinny, lazy and lively, brown, gray, and black, with long or short tails, and bushy or tiny manes. Even if these possible variations are endless, there is with Husserl’s words,
an original “model” there that guides the variations and sets its boundaries. For example, there is a “stop” when the horses in the example suddenly become donkeys, zebras, or toy horses. Thus, something remains throughout that “consciousness game,” namely the essence, which makes a horse a horse and thus differentiates it from a donkey, a zebra, or a toy horse, may it be longer ears, certain stripes, certain feet or tails. Husserl explains:

It then becomes evident that a unity runs through this multiplicity of successive figures, that in such free variations of an original image, e.g. of a thing, an invariant is necessarily retained as the necessary general form, without which an object such as this thing, as an example of this kind, would not be thinkable at all. (Husserl, 1973, p. 341.)

There is a general form of the phenomenon, Husserl says, an essential meaning or essence to the phenomenon, which makes the phenomenon what it is. If the essential meaning changes in a certain way, it is a different phenomenon.

However, described in this way, one could believe that essences stand opposed to particularity, which Natanson (1973) explicitly argues. To deepen our understanding of the relationship between particularity and generality we turn to Merleau-Ponty (2004) who describes the idea of essences differently:

... when I perceive a table, I do not withdraw my interest from the particular way it has of performing its function as a table: how is the top supported, for this is different with every table? What interests me is the unique movement from the feet to the table top with which it resists gravity; this is what makes each table different from the next. No detail is insignificant: the grain, the shape of the feet, the colour and age of the wood, as well as the scratches or graffiti which show the age. The meaning ‘table’, will only interest me insofar as it arises out of all the ‘details’ which embody its present mode of being. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp. 94–95.)

Talking about understanding a work of art, Merleau-Ponty says that its meaning “is not free, so to speak, but bound, a prisoner of all signs, or details...” (2004, p. 95). The meaning of a phenomenon, i.e. a horse, a table, or a piece of art, cannot be revealed to us in another way than in its totality and its relationships with its particulars. Or, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, we must say that a phenomenon’s totality is of its particulars, or the reverse: a phenomenon’s particulars are of its totality. According to Merleau-Ponty (1968) all phenomena and their meanings belong to “the flesh of the world,” characterized by a reversibility that replaces the ontological dualism that has dominated most philosophy and science of the western world. Once more talking about art Merleau-Ponty says:

Essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible – a painting mixes up all our categories in laying out its oneiric universe of carnal essences, of effective likenesses, of mute meanings. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 169.)

In the human science or social science research context that we are, Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “the flesh” and “reversibility” is best understood in terms of figure and background. As we have already discussed, the essence as figure can be seen to stand out against its background, the particulars. In other words, one could say that an essence is always understood against its horizons, the phenomenon’s inner and outer horizons. Going back to the horse example, we can easily say that, on the one hand, the particular horses’ colors do not belong to the essential characteristics of horses, which could be brown, black, grey, white, yellow, or a variety of different mixes of these colors. However, the color of the animals outside my study window certainly is of interest. If one had been black and white in stripes, I would have doubted that it was a horse and had immediately looked in the paper for an advertisement of the loss of a zebra from a circus, because zebras do not live wild in Sweden. In this example, the horses’ color could be understood as the phenomenon’s inner horizons, and thus a background against which the horse essence figure stands out. Part of that background is also the outer horizons, i.e. the horse field, the stable, and the paddock, that all belong to the horse milieu and help me understand the horses as horses. To another person, e.g. an observer, these horizons could further contribute to an understanding of how we keep the horses and what we use them for.

The stable can also be made figure against the field, the horses, and the manor house as background. Then one could watch it as a piece of carpentry, but also as a building, that makes a whole picture with the horses and the house. Against this background, the stable building also gets its meaning as an enough big and functional building for the group of horses.

To work in terms of “figure and background” is also important for the methodical and concrete work with the interviews or narratives or other lifeworld descriptions that we use in research. Searching for the essence, that most invariant structure of mean-
ings for an actual context, we typically work with the different meanings that are present in the descriptions. We try to discover a pattern of meanings that partly is made up by differences and similarities among these meanings. However, in this "wading about" in the multitude of meanings it is important that we work actively with the emerging meanings, taking up one meaning and watching it as a figure against the others as background, then taking up another one making it a temporary figure, and so on. In one moment, an explicit tentative meaning is a figure, in the next the same part of the text and its meaning is part of the background. In the exploration and illumination of more or less hidden meanings we ask questions to the texts that we work with, we "interrogate" the text, as Gadamer (1995) puts it. This dynamic work up of the lifeworld descriptions supports the seeing of the pattern of meanings, and thus the essence.

In the research report, one describes the whole structure, with its most essential part(s) and the horizons. This could be termed that we describe the essence and its constituents, the meanings that constitute the actual essence. We could also talk about individualizations of the essence, as Husserl (2001) does. The constituents are individualizations, or particulars of the structure, and thus the essence must be seen in every constituent. At the same time the description of the constituents gives the contextual flavor to the essence description and the full taste of the description is given with quotes from the original source of the meaning in the first place, e.g. interviews.

It is preferably to first present the essence, the essentials of the phenomenon, and then the constituents, otherwise it is hard to see what the constituents are constituents of. To give an example, less concrete now than tables and horses, we shall look at the central part of the findings in a project aimed at describing a new understanding of violent encounters in psychiatric care, based on interviews with patients (Carlsson, Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Ekebergh, 2006).

The violent encounter is characterized by a tension between 'authentic personal' care and 'detached impersonal' care offering encounters characterized by potential withdrawal. When there is violence 'in the air,' patients want an authentic personal encounter, that is, a straightforward, unfeigned and sincere engagement, in which they experience that unrestricted respect which a carer should show another human being who is not a patient. In these encounters, the carers are present and seem to be able to give of themselves, and they don't seem afraid of caringly touching the patients. The patients need the carers to allow themselves to be affected, touched and moved by the patients and their suffering. Such encounters offer an authentic invitation to the patients, who thereby are assured of the carers' good intentions, and such encounters do not make room for further violence.

On the other hand, patients fear detached impersonal care and encounters characterized by potential withdrawal. These are encounters that are uncontrolled, full of risks and 'rootless' insecurity, and of potential violence. The patients fear being abandoned by their carers, and their feelings of insecurity are heightened if they cannot discern whether the encounters carers are inviting them to will be caring or not. These detached encounters make room for violence.

Patients are often already in an exposed position due to their suffering and need of care. Their vulnerability and fragility affect their ability to receive and to endure care. Our findings show that the violent encounter, from the patient perspective, is absent of caring. They experience carers who avoid the presence of their patients and, so to speak, disappear into non-encounters. They fear the possibility of these non-encounters that bring about an obvious risk of an inner violation that is characterized by the feeling of not being worthy of the presence of the carer. The patients dread situations lacking respect and dignity. Wanting 'undisguised' and true encounters, they try to be flexible and to please the carers in order to attract their attention. When these encounters do not happen and they instead meet carers that seem to be elusive shadows, avoiding them and their suffering, in order not to be crushed by the inner violation, the patients let their defences 'fall', and they become threatening and/or violent. This reaction is activated in the patient as an answer to the (threat of) inner violation and the desire to survive it, and ultimately they are aimed at keeping the whole person together.

The following description of constituents further elucidate the meaning of the phenomenon and the tension (or, movement) between 'authentic personal' caring and 'detached impersonal' caring characterized by potential withdrawal: Invitations to genuine presence; The primacy of caring stability; Unbearable violation; Uncontrolled insecurity full of risks; Displaced caring focus.
Each constituent is described in its full depth and the ambition is to show all possible nuances that were present in the original data. When there are meaning nuances that are best described by the patients’ voices, excerpts from data are presented. Let me give an example from the interviews with patients explicating the meaning of “unbearable violation”:

My most lasting memory from these moments is the encounter with an expressionless, blank face with expressionless cold eyes staring back at me. // I feel that he treats me as if he is of greater worth than I am, I am like garbage to him that you can just shove away in a corner. // Can't you come out and talk to me, I need to talk! I don’t know what they were doing but they sat there looking, then I started yelling and I took that disgustingly ugly green vase and .... The reason was that I wanted to talk.

The full description of the meaning structure, i.e. the most essential description and the constituents, gives the whole range of description from its most abstract to its most concrete instances, given the actual context.

**Finding essences through a phenomenological attitude**

Describing essences is a clarification of phenomenological attitude. In Husserl’s (1977) words, it is about the still mute experience, which we are concerned with leading to the pure expression of its own meaning. Accordingly, we should be aware that the meaning that we discover belongs to the phenomenon, and we should avoid supplying the understanding with meaning that does not belong there. We must pay attention to how, in what way, we make phenomena and their meanings explicit. Since every phenomenon of the world is related to everything else in the world, it is sometimes complicated to see that particular phenomenon that one is looking for. The “flesh of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) means that all phenomena and meanings are interconnected and it can be hard to see where one phenomenon ends and the next begins, where one meaning is and whether it is connected to one phenomenon or another one instead. Furthermore, as researchers we are also part of the same world as we are investigating. We are never able to investigate a reality “outside the window,” as sometimes research instructions make us understand. We are of the same flesh, as Merleau-Ponty says, we belong to the same world as the phenomena that we want to explicate, and consequently it can be hard not only to distinguish a particular phenomenon from its con-

The world of perception, or in other words the world which is revealed to us by our senses and in everyday life, seems at first sight to be the one we know best of all. For we need neither to measure nor to calculate in order to gain access to this world and it would seem that we can fathom it simply by opening our eyes and getting on with our lives. Yet this is a delusion. In these lectures I hope to show that the world of perception is, to a great extent, unknown territory as long as we remain in the practical or utilitarian attitude.

In our everyday lives, we do not problematize what we experience but take for granted that what we see is what it seems to be. We simply assume that the house we see in front of us is a house and not a false front. Looking out of my study window I assume that the horse I see in the green field is a horse; and moreover, that it is one of my horses. However, it could be that I have left my glasses in the kitchen when making some coffee and not until I find them and put them on my nose, I see that it is not my horse, that it is no horse at all, but a moose! Now, in these everyday situations it could be annoying to make mistakes like this. If the mistakes were more serious than in the example mentioned, it is still of a different quality to make these and similar mistakes in science and in research; not least when our research findings, are meant to affect the care and therapy of suffering people. Then, as researchers, without falling in the trap of an absolute false-truth distinction, we have to find a way to be more sure about what we say is. If we argue, for example, that we are describing old patients’ satisfaction with care, there has to be satisfaction with care – it cannot be that they are satisfied only to the degree that they think is within reach for them because they are old and they know that the society is short in money; that they are relatively satisfied in the expression’s most profound meaning (Dahlberg, Fryklund, Jacobson & Jälthammar, 1999). As researchers, we then have to know how to practice the phenomeno-
Thus, we are not these objectivistic scientists that subjects involved in the research, "embodies", or stand meaning as something that is intertwined in another's experience. Merleau-Ponty (1968) under- enon, but in research also in inter-subjective rela-

Tations. Not least, there is the great challenge enance, and for a long time I worked hard to find a better term for research. Marked by my existence on a horse ranch I then found the term “bridling,” which was used in Swedish (tyglande) the first time in the research of the role of reflection in caring science education (Ekebergh, 2001), in English the first time in the study of violent encounters (Carlsson, Dahlberg, Lützen & Nyström, 2004), and later on in an epistemological article (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003). With the term “bridling” we can cover first of all the meaning of “bracketing” (Husserl, 1998; Giorgi, 1997; Ashworth & Lucas, 1998), that is, the restraining of one's pre-understanding in the form of personal beliefs, theories, and other assumptions that otherwise would mislead the understanding of meaning and thus limit the researching openness. The term “bridling” moreover covers an understanding that not only takes care of the particular pre-understanding, but the understanding as a whole. We bridge the understanding so that we do not understand too quick, too careless, or slovenly, or in other words, that we do not make definite what is indefinite (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003).

Bridling means a reflective stance that helps us “slacken” the firm intentional threads that tie us to the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1995). We do not want to cut them off and we cannot even cut them off as long as we live, but we must, as Merleau-Ponty encourages us to, loose them up in order to give us that elbow room that we need to see what is happening when we understand phenomena and their meanings.

The search for meaning is a question of diving below the surface and finding the deeper underlying and intentional meanings that are being born, first in the relationship between subject and phenomenon, but in research also in inter-subjective relationships. Not least, there is the great challenge of understanding and explicating the meaning of another's experience. Merleau-Ponty (1968) understands meaning as something that is intertwined in “the flesh of the world, and following his epistemology we could say that the researcher, as well as other subjects involved in the research, “embodies”, or “gives body to” the phenomenon. As researchers, thus, we are not these objectivistic scientists that distantely register meanings, as a widespread understanding of research says, but immensely involved in the explication of meaning. Bridling then means to scrutinize the involvement with, this embodiment of, the investigated phenomenon and its meaning(s). Bridling means to reflect upon the whole event when meanings come to be.

Consequently, the work with meanings and essences is about adopting a certain phenomenological attitude. Bridling, as that phenomenological attitude in research, means to be “actively waiting” for the phenomenon, and its meaning(s), to show itself and is an activity characterized by a kind of “non-willing” or “dwelling” with the phenomenon. It is important that we emphasize this, because it is by no means something that could be understood as a methodological technique.

Open and verbal essences

I have often been confronted with objections to the idea of phenomenological essences, centered in the conviction that essences per definition by Husserl are universal. Husserl discusses universal essences, but he also talks about open essences in relation to his understanding of the lifeworld as infinite, and he makes clear that “No thing has its individuality in itself” (Husserl, 2000, p. 313). He says that essences leave open possibilities for further exploration. Even in other texts (Husserl, 1970, 2001) he describes how the lifeworld and intentionality is characterized by its open horizons. Merleau-Ponty (1995) argues that Husserl is misunderstood, that he never radically wanted to split between essence and existence, and explains the idea by saying that “Husserl’s essences are destined to bring back all the living relationships of existence, as the fisherman’s net draws up from the depths of the ocean quivering fish and seaweed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, xv). This is an understanding of essences that may work in human science or social science research.

Meaning is infinite, always contextual, and recognized as expandable and expanding (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 1995). Consequently, essences are also open, infinite, and expandable and they are never finally completely explored and described. Meaning emerges in relation to “events” of the lifeworld, and when the lifeworld changes, meaning changes as well. Again, to make the whole structure of meaning explicit is important in that it covers the most essential parts as well as the concrete events of the phenomenon in research. In that way, it is possible for the reader to judge how far and in what way a research result can be generalized.
Moreover, the infiniteness that characterizes meaning has to do with the infiniteness of language. Being is "wordly," Heidegger (1998, p. 204) says. Words help us understanding existence and its meanings and words that describe essences serve the same function. One central aim of human science and social science research is to verbalize the more or less silent and hidden parts of human existence. We put into words, explore and describe existential phenomena such as suffering, wellness, learning, alienation, anxiety, loneliness, and their essences, their meanings and characteristics. However, when we in research describe a phenomenon through others' lived experience we have to be aware of language, both its advantages and disadvantages, its contributions and limitations. Some words can lead us closer to a phenomenon and its essence; other words can lead us away from it, even if they in the dictionary are presented as synonyms. Not least, this becomes evident when I as a Swede must communicate my research in English. Still, however, despite all problems with it, language is the vehicle that communicates meaning and allows us to understand the lived experience.

First, the relationship between language and thoughts and the meanings involved is not a simple, uncomplicated relationship. Merleau-Ponty concludes a philosophical discussion of language by saying, "... language makes thought, as much as it is made by thought" (Merleau-Ponty, 1991a, p. 102). The meaning of words and the thought expressed by them are always in a dynamic relationship. Language cannot be separated from thought (or meaning), and language is not merely the expression of an already formed thought (or meaning), i.e. it is not only language that is altered in relation to thought (or meaning). Rather, thought as well as meanings can be discovered, and understood differently, through their expression in language (Merleau-Ponty, 1991a,b), which we can view very well in for example good psychotherapy as well as in good research interviews. The reciprocity of good communication is explicated by Merleau-Ponty, who says that it is not

... by a mind to a mind, but by a being who has body and language to a being who has body and language, each drawing the other by invisible threads like those who hold the marionettes. Making the other speak, think, and become what he is but never would have been by himself. (Merleau-Ponty, 1987, p. 19.)

Gadamer holds a similar position, saying that a genuine dialogue "is concerned with creating the opportunity for the other to awaken his or her inner activity..." (Gadamer, 1996, p. 137).

In research we talk to people and we watch them in, for example, everyday living. Their narratives or their bodily gestures and activities convey meaning that we can understand linguistically. Similarly, we can understand the meaning of a picture through language, when we, for example, have a silent conversation with ourselves as we gaze upon it.

However, there is always also the risk that we by language separate essences from existence (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1995). It can be tempting to arrive at high theoretical levels with the analysis, e.g. researchers might want to create theories from their research. That is of course possible, but according to what has been pointed out so far in this article, researchers must be sensitive to their original lifeworld descriptions, the phenomenon, and its open horizons. Phenomenological analysis, like all research analysis, means to in some way making definite what is indefinite, i.e. we make an incision in "the flesh of the world" and we have, then, to be sensitive to the research activity and what it does to the phenomenon.

As researchers we stand and fall with our own and others' language ability. We must be alert and aware of language when interviewing, for example, or when making observations. Again, we must emphasize the crucial importance of rich data if we are to find meaningful descriptions and want to explicate essences. In the research process, non-verbal meanings are more or less "translated" into verbal language, by the informant as well as the researcher. In a similar way we translate, or as Giorgi (1997) puts it, transform the original descriptions into the language of the scientific discipline.

With respect to openness, this means that whenever we communicate in the encounter with the phenomenon, with the research subjects, or with the lifeworld descriptions, in one way or another, we have to deal with language and words. Consequently, as researchers, we must have good enough knowledge of language in the way that we must have words for, and be sensitive enough to nuances, to describe the full spectrum of meaning, and that essential structure of meaning that hopefully emerges within our research.

What is an essence?

Coming to the end of this analysis and this article, we have to ask a crucial question: What more do we
know about essences now? What is an essence? While doing this analysis and writing this article, I have tried to practice the approach to essences that it is about. In an open-minded and bridled way, I have tried to explicate, illuminate, disclose, and clarify the essence of essences, and at the same time translate and transform the philosophical epistemological language to an empirical language hopefully understandable for researchers in the human science and social science fields. From the start, I assumed that it was going to be a complex work, but I never knew the depth of it and especially I could not foresee the particular questions that I had to ask along to road. Consequently, some of the answers are very surprising to me.

I thought in the start of this project that I should illuminate essences of phenomena. What I found was that essences are their phenomena; the phenomena are their essences. Phenomenology shows that everything is experienced as something, i.e. everything has its own style An essence is, simply, a phenomenon’s style, its way of being, and thus the essence cannot be separated from the phenomenon that it is the essence of. Consequently, we cannot talk about the relationship between a phenomenon and its essence, e.g. a table, in the same way we talk about the relationship between two phenomena, e.g. a table and a chair. Moreover, we cannot talk about essences as characteristics in the same way as we talk about characteristics of “things,” i.e. we could talk about the table as having four legs, being made of wood, and painted blue, without grasping its essence at all. We must make the table a figure and at the same time make something else, e.g. chairs, a dining room, background in order to see the essence of if, but that is not enough. In research, we can never follow a method as we follow a path that has been staked out on beforehand. Research means to discover new questions along the way. That which has been figure must suddenly be made background, against which something else becomes figure, and in that incident, without assuming it, there could emerge a new background, against which the phenomenon’s essence, its style of being, its particular structure in relation to the rest of the world, becomes explicit.

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