

Waiting – a Touchstone for Phenomenology

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Waiting is a topic that is all too familiar to us all, usually from circumstances which are not experienced as positive. Every day we spend countless minutes, sometimes even hours waiting: at traffic lights, bus stops or train stations, in queues at the canteen, in shops or public agencies. Waiting is thus a decisive factor when it comes to the temporal structuring of our life-world, and so it is not surprising that it has long been a research topic for diverse academic disciplines such as philosophy, economy or psychology. Each of them contemplates this polymorphic phenomenon from its own perspective, thereby producing a variety of definitions of waiting. Sometimes these definitions point in the same direction, but often enough they diverge considerably and sometimes even contradict one another: is waiting active or passive, autonomous or heteronomous, solipsistic or social?

Regarding the definitions of waiting suggested by scientists so far, one may well doubt if they really apply to the same phenomenon. In order to clarify this Babylonian confusion, one would need to go back to the underlying essence of waiting – assumed there is such a thing. According to its own claim, phenomenology should be competent to do so by reflecting on the fundamental acts of consciousness of the waiting individual. In this sense, waiting can be understood as a touchstone for phenomenology. The presentation makes an attempt to develop a phenomenological (and this means: exhaustive) notion of waiting which may serve as a “neutral” basis for empirical research on the subject.