Historicity and Axiology: Temporal Implications for Axiology

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Abstract:

To develop the axiology of moral (or ethical) values, phenomenological analysis must look at temporality in a way that is unfamiliar to it. This way is through knowledge and experience of the actual historical past, from which it has been separated by the Heideggerian conception of historicity and its classical Husserlian analysis of time consciousness. The development of historical studies helps to make this possible. A simple sample model of the diachronesis of the awareness of ethical significance, value, and obligation is presented. It moves the analysis from a presentist focus to the field of experience in which subjects develop moral agency. Two concepts, historical phenomenology and interpersonal values-making, are advanced as the bases of a research program. It will amplify the potential of phenomenology to understand ethical goods such as empathy and will also encourage interactions of ethics, philosophy of history, and phenomenology.

Keywords: empathy; ethics; historicity; moral philosophy; philosophy of history; social ontology; temporality; philosophy of time; transgenerationality

1. Introduction

If the principles of moral value are universal, then judgments of moral value must depend on them. If on the other hand there are no universal principles of value, then moral values would float free of authority or grounding. This is a very simple statement of the age-old problem that moral philosophy has had with the binary of the one and the many. It is by this route that ontology and even epistemology cris-cross moral philosophy, turning it into a muddy field, as if it were a natural waterway that every season of heavy metaphysical rain makes sodden. To solve this, Kant, stressing the unity of reason, proposed a form of universal authority of reason for moral judgment that each person can and must make her own in creating what Christine Korsgaard calls one's practical identity (Korsgaard 1996, 102-130). Phenomenology from its start, stressing the variety of reality, aimed to conceive a universal capability that obviates the skewed control that such universal reason exercises over the manifold world. But just how normativity extends throughout human life, in all

its activities, productions, expressions, and communications the practices of phenomenology has never quite made clear. They, and other approaches, have advanced our understanding and acceptance of the omnipresent moral valence of human action; but their advance is itself obviated by, among other causes, the intuitive and practical sense that facts and values are different sorts of things that do not have the ability to interpenetrate one another. This is the obsidian lump of positivism in each one of us. Although "Hume's guillotine," dividing values from facts, has been dulled, or disassembled, or disposed of in a number of effective ways, something remains that moral philosophy has not so far fully and really confronted. This something is, I contend, the diachronesis of the movements of the affairs of moral agents — that is, in a word, history.[1]

As historical events occur and are then received into both recollection and study, people are embedded in a proliferating web of ethical obligations arising from past events that form their current situations. Sometimes we listen to the voices of past persons, becoming aware of these obligations; sometimes these press upon us after long dormancy; sometimes, very quickly; not seldom, or not at all. But we nonetheless are connected to the potential to prescribe for ourselves what it is right and wrong to do because we are part of the moral community that our history creates. In this paper, I will show a part of how *stretching* a phenomenological approach to the collective making of ethical significance across temporal moral change out from the narrow constitutive present to historical diachronesis can help to generate a robust, prescriptive axiology of ethical values and goods upon temporal interpersonality.[2]

By "axiology" in relation to ethics I mean the philosophical discourse concerning moral values, that is, judgments of right and wrong and just and unjust. By "prescription" and "prescriptive" I mean the understanding that moral values have a force that obliges personal actors to govern themselves accordingly, which is what we generally mean by "moral obligation."

To do this requires first an evaluation of the limitations in the phenomenology of time and historicity, followed by my proposal of an approach that overcomes these limits. This approach comprises two concepts: *historical phenomenology* and *interpersonal values-making*, developed in the central sections of this paper. I will conclude by considering the implications of this for a prescriptive ethics and for social ontology

2. Historicity and historiography

One of the most consequential insights from phenomenology that Martin Heidegger made was his separation of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) from what the English translators call historiology (*Historie*). The issues pertaining to time, history, and humanity having expanded over the course of his early seminars (Heidegger 2007, 63-90), this distinction became a foundation for his illumination of historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962, 441-443). Historiology is the study of past events. The English word historiography most commonly refers to a study of the scholarly work on an historical topic. But philosophers of history increasingly follow Azevier Tucker's suggestion that we use historiography to mean writing about history and, by extension, the study

and knowledge of the past (Tucker 2004, 10ff.). Historiology and historiography therefore denote generally the same things within the philosophical discourse to which this paper pertains. In Heidegger's use of this distinction, historiography is possible only because of *Dasein*'s historicity and so not wholly delinked from it; but historicity itself refers us to temporality as the condition of the possibility of human existence, being-with-others, and thus of history, and not to any particulars of historical actions, events, or structures as objects of scientific knowledge (Heidegger 1962, 434, 436, 447). *Mitsein* as the whole historical world is consistent with the aloneness of *Dasein* since it is constitutively fundamental (Heideger 1962, 307-308), but to be immersed in historiography seems to come as close to inauthenticity (Heidegger 1962, 120-121, 283-284, 438-439, 448) as does immersion in everyday chatter. Also, *Dasein* is more concerned with the future than the past (Heidegger 1962, 281, 433, 437). Persons share *Geschick* but not much else.

And yet Heidegger's segregation of the empirical and inductive study of positivities is unexpectedly in partial agreement with the traditional scientism of academic historians, by which the discipline seeks to describe what past events "really" were. The lexical and conceptual separateness in which Heidegger enveloped the profound relations of historicity and temporality even gives historians some freedom to ignore historicity. To the extent that philosophy of history has been committed to rejecting speculative *grands recits* in favor of a positivist approach to historiography, Heidegger's profound *coup* contributed to the avoidance of any axiology in our relationship to history. Perversely, it yields ground to positivism — ground that even non-positivist constructivists and narrativists are reluctant to reclaim because historicity and temporality were created as value-oriented concepts by being lopped off from the factuality of the past.

As it turns out, even narrativism and constructivism follow Heidegger along the borderline that positivism fortified. They have not changed the basic schema, but they and various historiographic approaches have chipped away at the edges. These research methodologies have done so much that we know now that Heidegger was wrong to regard historiology as a friend of nihilistic technology that helps to hide our kairotic temporality. For example, Hayden White proved that historiographic accounts have as much of the affective depth of literature as they do of hard factuality (White 1987), Eelco Runia showed us how to take account of our deepest communal wounds in understanding the past (Runia 2014), and Frank Ankersmit linked the historian's calling to both narration and to trauma-based art (Ankersmit 2005). Within the phenomenological tradition, Paul Ricoeur and David Carr saw the deep link between narration and the temporality that constitutes being human (Ricoeur 1990; Carr 2014). Beside these, expansions of the topical range of historiology that Heidegger could not have foreseen have truly enriched our understanding of past and present life-worlds. These sophisticated approaches include, among others, histories of sexuality and gender, the study of popular culture, environmental history, micro-history, and the history of emotions, as well as the advanced affordances of structuralism and its successors, critical theory, class analysis, electronic imaging, and other methods and technologies. Frequently this kind of work relies on the staggering increase in the amount of data and the accessibility of archives, the skillful and sensitive use of which

can take us deep into the intimate lives of past others; this goes to show that even data can advance the humane sensibilities of empirical research in history.

All these developments mean that the practice of historiography is now vastly more sensitive to the context of being human than the more straightforward causality that Heidegger understood to be the object of inquiry by *Historie* in contrast to the possibilities of existence inherent in *Dasein*. If he were confronted with these developments, Heidegger nevertheless might say that they are changes of comparative standpoints that need not alter his approach to the ground of historicity. But we can propose that these developments make history more deeply human, closer to what it really is for us to be alive.

The value for Heidegger of splitting historicity from historiology is that it enabled him to advance the human into Being itself and away from beings in the natural world that science takes as supporting or even including human life and that "metaphysics" takes as overwhelming and governing it in the supernatural sphere. Heidegger's original move to split these, although it served him well in developing some of his most consequential ideas, is, I suggest, one of the principal reasons for the uneasiness of that kind of phenomenological axiology in which, despite the forms of ethical care for others in the work of Levinas and Sartre, the possibilities that history affords have largely been closed off, especially as the problem of individualistic versus collectivity-oriented understanding continues to vex social ontology as well as phenomenology

This has not gone unchallenged. I have already referred to the work of Ricoeur and Carr. The eminent philosopher of history Ethan Kleinberg has integrated ideas of both Levinas and Derrida into an approach to our experience and knowledge of past temporality that has thick political and ethical direction (Kleinberg 2017). A thorough re-consideration of Levinas' ideas about history is well overdue, as previous work on this matter does not match the potential of the topic (Caygill 2002, 134; Nelson 2014; Schroeder 1996, 77-78).

But the job of re-connecting actual history to phenomenology has not been accomplished for a reason deep inside the enterprise of phenomenology. Standardly, phenomenological analysis holds that the sensuous objects of consciousness are not sense-perceptions but mind-independent entities, that consciousness exists through its primordial integration to the world and of the world to it such that distinctions of the real and the unreal under the naturalistic attitude occlude our awareness of the primordial constitution of consciousness, and that this analysis allow us validly to examine the normative ocean in which consciousness exists. Thus, the world is to be understood at this level for what it means to a subject, to collective subjects, and universally to humankind. The middle term here — groups of subjects — has been the topic of considerable and constant debate as to how to align it with the traditional focus on the *célibataire* subject as the locus of consciousness and, on the other hand, with the universal constitutional structure of consciousness. The difficulty arises from the intense development of primordiality — or what Heidegger once called "the *à quo*" — as the framework for understanding consciousness. The problem this produces has two layers.

From and for such the search for the primordial, the noema is real, and the noesis is no less

real; and this lay-out is a massive advance on any reductionistic theory because it does lighten the impact of the problem of the one and the many by deflating the opposition of the human or divine subject over against the manifold of the world. However, social groups or collectives are more thoroughly miscegenate the two sides of this and related binaries. The historical activities of humankind form an immense middle term between the primordial consciousness ineliminable from all being human and the I to which we must attend as the purest and essential actor. Furthermore, it is in the relations of persons to one another on every scale that the mark of normativity infiltrates all our thinking and feeling. Therefore, the first layer is that the status of values arising from or attached to the history of interactions with noemata is separated from the primordial fundaments that obtain no matter what goes on or does not go on in our individual and collective lives by the ceaseless provision of ongoing challenges and consequences for us coming from intentional objects. This results in no interpersonal or social axiology. The second layer lies in the view of time: a view that, regarding retention and protention as interdependent wings of the present in which consciousness necessarily exists and moves, cannot include the past and future as such that collectives require and without which society is not intelligible. I will further address this layer below.

Not only quotidian moral judgments are troubled by this. Even the universal worth of human existence cannot be affirmed on the basis of its primordial constituents except by further deliberations, or operations, or authority, or belief. In a sense, any and all history, any and all motion and change, any and all coming-to-be and passing-away, any and all meaning-making temporality has always put this problem on the table. Today it is an existential issue such that we face as never before.

I hold that somewhere in some adaption of phenomenology and robust social critique lies a possibility for grasping a well-wrought prescriptive axiology that both historical theory and philosophical ethics pass by. But the possibility is so far unrealized in the moral situation of the human community to which theory today must respond. On the one side, philosophy of history has done little of this work, with some exceptions I have mentioned and some others I have not catalogued here. The field has largely been content to regard itself as more or less exhaustively divided between "speculative" philosophy of history and "critical" philosophy of history. The former refers to superannuated but still sometimes-tolerated large-bore explanations of the meaning and purpose of human history. The latter refers to endeavors to understand evidence, events, and historiographic accounts as epistemology. The term in this usage does not refer to Critical Theory, which, with the exception of the work of Walter Benjamin, is barely recognized in the field even though the first generation of the Frankfurt School were philosophers of history; or to critical forms of theoretical endeavor understood as committed to leftist activist critique. Instead, it refers to an approach to historical knowledge that grows out of philosophy of science. Most of the disciplinary field is content to let positivists and constructivists fight it out (Trouillot 2015, 1-30). Beyond this impasse, innovations admitted into the field include animal and other non-human histories and problems of the alterations of human temporality in the Anthropocene (e.g., Domańska 2020; Simon 2019). Although these are promising because they take seriously issues of moral agency, nonetheless in sum there is little help for axiology

based on the phenomenology of historicity to be had from contemporary philosophy of history, although it would serve everyone well were it otherwise.

For its part, the ways in which philosophical ethics takes up temporality result in a gaunt understanding of diachronesis and quite dehydrated sorts of moral philosophy. One prominent effort is the so-called "pragmatic genealogy" associated with Bernard Williams and more fully developed recently by Mathieu Queloz (Queloz 2021). This fails the goal I have specified on three grounds. First, it is not properly phenomenological, that is to say, it lacks the virtues of sensitivity to human existence that we appreciate in phenomenology. Although it seems to attach a time line to its accounts, in the end it looks solely at reasons and justifications, which in turn take on the structure of logical operations. This is at least partly because, second, it has no views of temporality to speak of. Third, the genealogies it produces are to actual historical accounts like a toy model train is to an actual train: simplistic, of inadequate scale, and not adequately powered. One finds a more satisfying effort in "descriptive ethics," inspired by the work of Wittgenstein and Iris Murdoch and other thinkers (Murdoch 1970), as developed by, among others, Alice Crary and Nora Hämäläinen (Crary 2007; Hämäläinen 2016; also Critchley 2007). It is in some cases influenced by linguistic or phenomenological narrativisms. Descriptive moral philosophy uses facts in narratives that can be excused from formal stricture and that support rather than are supervised by ethical commitments, such as we find in fiction. It produces accounts that, while more interesting than "pragmatic" concept analysis in so far as they include actual human motivations, do not establish any axiology. What we can call a phenomenological-historical approach can remedy these defects.

3. Temporality and ethical values I: historical phenomenology

By what route (if any) to or through "history" can we increase the valence of a phenomenological axiology and thereby contribute to the growth of moral consciousness and philosophical ethics? How can the manifold of history stand with the trans-temporal availability of principles of moral value? I have referred to a cluster of large concepts and theories such as history, historicity, time, temporality, process, and diachronesis. Before fitting a set of versions and portions of these concepts to theorize the task at hand, I will propose a simple phenomenological analysis of a process of moral awareness as a sample of what I aim for.

The model I use below is my own invention as a sketch of the moral change by which an agent deliberating a moral dilemma makes a decisive choice on which she stakes an important part of her identity as a decent person. It is wholly an experiment and a suggestion of what we can do if we take the temporal diachronesis of moral life into account. Begin by regarding subjects as moral agents in constituting interpersonal or social outcomes, actions, or entities, focused on their lived experience. Starting with this, consider the following schema as a model of moral change:

> An action or event —> an observed situation —> a moral quandary —> attention to it —> penetration into it —> understanding of it —> commitment concerning it —> surrender to the need for a decision or action in response to the original action or event

A situation or event becomes an ethical problem or question by getting the attention of some actors. Thereafter increasing numbers of people become aware of the situation. The degree of interest increases the epistemic and affective resources for solving the problem, penetrating it until a relevant community reaches an understanding sufficient for action. The actors choose and exercise their social commitments based on their higher-order commitments. "Surrender" here denotes that intense form of deep commitment to a cause or goal which plays such a large role in human history.

For this model agents are regarded as capable of communication in any medium that is intelligible to others, though sometimes at the cost of great effort. It also regards agents as conscious, or at least increasingly conscious, of their intersubjectivity, at any degree of experience, skill, or neurological capacity whatsoever in their relations with others. As a process, it covers both "primary" and "secondary" intersubjectivity, that is, the range of abilities to regard others as completing one's self or as existing independently of one's ego (Gallagher 2009, 293), including both ego-centric subjectivity and also the matured states in which arise the more consequential states of ethical awareness.[3] Indeed, it is necessary to this story of moral change that this sequence, when applied to the joint activity of two or more persons sharing an interest, experience, need, or shock that ignite the process must cease to be neatly linear, as the agents move through it at different paces and because the development of this awareness by each agent affects the development of the other agents along this path.

The interest of this model, or any model like it, is that it introduces a phenomenological narrative of temporal extension that is stretched out and multiplied by the various courses it takes in individuals and groups that are part of the social effort or entity to be inscribed into the historical point of view, which is thoroughly particularized, as each agentive entity works along different temporalities that ought not to be reduced by axiology, phenomenology of intersubjectivity, or social ontology any more than by bad monocausal historiography or by rationalist metaphysics. Its value to the present inquiry is that it directs our attention to a process over time deformalized by human intentionality and by the huge cast of players in every human situation.

Following this schema of moral change, the subject or subjects discovers in events coming to their attention "temporal structures that call for narration" (Ricoeur 1990, 59). In doing so, they then artefact their own narration(s), borrowing perhaps from older received or remembered narratives but also inevitably somewhat altering them. The "call for narration" thus stems from temporality as the mode of our existence in which we act. But the "call" might be soft or loud, gentle or demanding; the point is that as lived by subjects it grows through their agency. What I call "penetration" is the lived experience of passing through a boundary that encloses one's self away from others. This rebarbative border might be conceptual or affective or social. Also, it can reject admission, no matter how much attention falls upon it, rather than fall to urgency. The metaphor also allows us to say simultaneously that the subject penetrates the matter at hand and that it penetrates her, both at one and the same time. When the results of this mutual ingression are processed, a person starts to have understanding such that compassion takes root in her subjective

experience. Thus, in each of these three states the urgency of the moral call has intensified, become louder and more persuasive. A common way of expressing this is to refer to conscience, in which moral demands that bind us meet the will as felt in our intuitions and practices of freedom in ways that are likely always to be, as they have been, paradoxical.

"Conscience" also covers commitment and surrender, because it is conventionally understood to begin somewhere in the later stages of what here is called understanding. Indeed, this is one of the difficulties in understanding conscience: it has the character of instantaneity, or "fulguration," the Latinate theological word for what we commonly call the "spark of conscience," that instant in which the heart turns. This has value, for it does match the many experiences of conscience; but what is wanted is not a mystery or a generalized term but instead a way to understand values by a closer inspection of lived experience, since axiology is an opportunity for the phenomenological method. Doing this requires, in particular, looking at the generation of values stretched out into "slow motion," or, more correctly, in the diachronic processes of the life-world. So in order to open the whole stretch of the process for reflection I distinguish commitment from its prerequisite of insightful awarenesses; and I distinguish it as well from surrender, which is a greatly under-theorized part of the formation of ethical values.

One chief value of this simple notional framework is that it focuses inquiry in phenomenological axiology on temporality. It opens up the temporality of the moral agent as a phenomenon of her consciousness by theorizing that she would roughly follow a stretched-out pattern in coming to be impressed by the urgency of a moral quandary, whether the quandary is private, as in something familial, or is political and social in nature. But this framework next shows us that because even the most interior moral awareness is activated by reflection on the contents of consciousness there must be not just one but several temporalities in play. This is because embodied consciousnesses relies on several temporalities, such as the fluctuations of the organism's material constituents, or the activity of the unconscious, or the time-scales of social groups of different sizes (such as a family or a religious denomination). From this we quickly see that any exterior condition imports another temporality, such as those of the economy or of the weather. Processes in general have this quality of ramifying interconnections; indeed, it is almost impossible to think of process without including this feature.

Another of its values for normative ethics is that it shows what a rich sphere of emotions and decisive factors we can observe through a phenomenology of moral life. I have referred to surrender, a concept from spiritual traditions also found in Twelve Step thought; it is affectively and intellectually profound. The processes by which information about moral problems sharpens from awareness into deep understanding are not propositional entailments nor are they patternless passions. They lead to the normative force we call moral obligation, or prescription, which is not reducible to either logic or appetites, neither form nor chaos. It is in fact only through philosophical grasp of these moving forces in moral life that we can justify, or even explain, what this kind of obligation, and willing reception of its necessity, can possibly exist and exist as one of the most important features of human existence.

It is now easy to see that in the case of ethical challenges that pertain to collectives of subjects so many temporalities intersect that we ought to call them a polyphony.[4] Whether the subjects as moral agents respond as collectives of individuals or in a more fully corporate manner, the several temporalities of each combine with the temporal processes of other groups as well as those of external events. What the phenomenologist and the moral philosopher ought to observe in this development is that the temporal distension intrinsic to consciousness ceases to be linear and becomes spiraling polyphonic temporalities. At this point the more classical analyses stemming from Husserl — echoed as well by Freud and Aby Warburg (Didi-Huberman 2018) — might balk, holding that retention and protention are meant to analyze solely the subjective experience of time itself as a universal medium (Brentano 1988; Husserl 1991). For Husserl this was a necessity because by understanding the inherence of time in all consciousness we could move from the Cartesian ego as a precipitate of the world and its "permanently solipsistic science" to "the tremendous realm" or "infinite field of the transcendental experience" with its "harmonious flow" (Husserl 1973, 29-31). This flow is the flowing present in which I "empathetically presentify" myself to the world and the world to myself (Theunissen 1984, 80). We are one and the same I in the present and Other in our pasts, though Husserl treats the relation of an I to its own pasts in a complex, rather than an eliminative, way because we proliferate into others and into our pasts and futures. Temporal immanence in the present is the "ultimately valid apodicity" that potentiates the I (Theunissen 1984, 153-154, citing a ms. note by Husserl). From the my home base ego, I fill myself in by fill myself out and outwards. My "transcendental historicality" is mine, based in my "uniqueness" (Husserl 1970, 208, 218).[5]

Here is the core of the mistake I described above that unnecessarily separates axiology off from phenomenology. For limiting temporality to universal subjective time excludes the transgenerational relations within which human life takes place. Under this view, historicity is mine, not that of past and future others as well as mine. If we fully admit, rather than exclude, our predecessors and our successors in their generations, we immediately take them in as persons to whom we might have moral responsibilities. The possibility of any such responsibilities requires consideration, and that is exactly what we do as we move from initial attention to deciding whether or not to commit ourselves to responsive actions or beliefs.

The Husserlian style of analysis of time and self centers upon the present (although the extent of this in his work as a whole is the subject of debate [Staiti 2010]). Heidegger's objection to what Derrida called Husserl's "Living Present" is part of Heidegger's critique of Husserl (Derrida 2016, 139-140). The desirability of connecting the present to the past and to the future is indeed, as Husserl understood, very much like the desirability of working philosophically to connect individual subjective intentional contents to collective intentional contents. At root these two might very well be just the same thing if we sufficiently simplify the matter or abbreviate discussion of it. But phenomenology — not to mention humankind as a whole — has not in general developed this to the level of transgenerational human community.[6]

The diagesis of moral life that I present above, running from quandary to decision, includes a group of developments — those I call understanding, penetration, commitment, and surrender — that we must see in poly-temporality rather than in linear time. Actors hesitate, are distracted, grow discouraged by inwards and outward influences. The weight of a moral claim might take years or centuries to provoke enough persons to respond, as contingencies roll through the lives of persons and communities. It can, as well, take minutes, or even seconds, for an agent to travel from awareness to thorough, sometimes profound, attentive action. But even inside the passage of minutes a polyphony of temporalities unroll themselves in the meeting of external and natural contingencies with the paths of memory in the persons concerned in any given issue.

To this diagesis then must be added two closely related key elements that control the raveling movement of temporalities: memory and communication among persons. Memory in persons that enters the transgenerational stream of communications is the faculty that helps to create society and therefore history. In classical phenomenology, it enables the continuity of consciousness, but it also enables the interdependence that makes societies into intergenerational enterprises. Memory studies have highlighted this and moved attention from the self to group remembrance, but the consequences of this for moral philosophy seem to have been overlooked. For memory is also one of the sources of the failure of coherence in the histories of human affairs because it brings with it repression that yields misdirection and the affective forces of disruptive conflict. Whether it is connecting or disconnecting persons in their moral relations, it is extended through imagination into responses to moral claims. Attention to an observed situation, for example, becomes a process of understanding that progresses to deeper penetrative understanding and thence to commitment because the imagination powers memory in enhancing moral life. Jeffrey Barash argues that "imaginative associations" are formed into symbols that embody and transmit the meaning of memories, especially collective memories (Barash 2016, 47). This is true of the inward deliberations of individuals as well, in which "symbolic embodiment" likewise makes ideals, fears, and needs into powerful presences drawn from past and future. Usually, as Barash points out, symbolization of this sort occurs spontaneously, often at the edges of awareness. But all such "work" is the work of persons, in whom memory and consciousness inhere. It is their labors as agents in the normative web in which we conduct our lives. In this way, recollection of a situation yields a locus by which "symbolic incorporation raises remembrance beyond personal experience to confer upon it significance and communicability in the collective sphere" (Barash 2016, 58).

Communications among persons, often prompted by the sharpness of private memory and based on the forms of intelligibility, such as symbolization, that human cultures have developed, feeds moral issues that reside in memory into the hermeneutic of collectives and of humankind. Communicated memories of moral issues, thoughts, and feelings, do not rest on a transcendental ground. Instead, they build the ground that counts: the deliberation that results in actions that change human affairs through moral progress and moral regress. The rich flux of expression and response is historical, all history being social.

If temporality is to help us understand moral life, we must consider it not only as individual time consciousness but as the bigger sky of the history of human societies. Now, this observation might seem a simple one. But its consequences are that under thus view we are less hampered by the constitution of the subject and, by extension, even less hampered by the metaphysics of subjectivity in either its empirical or its supernatural basis as against the manifold world. The authority for moral value moves reliably from coherent conclusion to the search for answers and from the unity that makes meaning in one way to the plural sphere in which we persons make meaning in other ways, even if persons carry a touch of the divine within themselves.

4. Temporality and ethical value II: Interpersonal values-making

Stretching over persons and groups and through time, the polyphony of temporality into account suggests that linear time is of little use in the matter of the phenomenology of ethical value. The value of some sort of demechanized time for a phenomenological ethical axiology is that the model of polyphony for temporal implication in our common fragility and vulnerability reveals an existential condition by which to take an ethical stance toward others based on shared finitude. Temporal implication permits joint attention — through fear, or hope, or joy, or grief, or love, for example — and by consequence permits "participatory sense-making" (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Gallagher 2009). The presence of others shapes our attention to the world (Gallagher 2009, 302). "Our perceptual access to the other's affective expressions" is an aspect of intersubjectivity that lies at the basis of and is active throughout all intersubjectivity (Gallagher 2009, 293). Understanding others involves understanding the world (Gallagher 2009, 303). This concept is in certain respects more important than joint attention. It involves more complicated capabilities, experiences, and processes of subjects. But most importantly for present purposes, it suggests that values arise through interpersonal processes rather than as logical conclusion of "engineered" concepts. The fact that ethical values can and usually do come to be through process of collectives of subjects, in degrees of concentration ranging from association in the unconscious to fanatical mass political movements, means that stating that I am "always and already deeply interlinked with" my predecessors and successors "in various social relations of generativity" and yet "still confined as a historical observer," though true, does not suffice to clarify the co-standing of these two aspects of subjects or even to show how they can co-stand at all (Szanto 2020, 299). Scheler's "co-determination" or Gurwitsch's "consociate partnership" simply point to different aspects of the problem (Szanto 2020, 296, 298).

In order to understand this well, conceptions of the effect of communicated, intelligible memory in the development of moral deliberation should be distinguished from theories of empathy and sympathy used to explain the co-standing of subjects. There are many such theories, but they all involve feeling another as one's self in some way. Empathy and sympathy surely are often parts of moral change. But observe that they are subjective states rather than communications. As such they might contribute to linking persons to one another, but they denote states rather than processes. Because they are static, in general, approaches to these and related concepts do not much advance analysis for two chief reasons.

The first is that the as concepts they lead to denying that the "phenomenal fusion or breakdown of individual boundaries" can be achieved by strong social interaction (Léon, Szanto, and Zahavi 2017, 4856). This is not factually true. People lose themselves in all kinds of objects and socialities. While it might nonetheless be true that the I cannot fully and finally lose itself by its essence, the commitment of phenomenology to this principle of the holistic individual detaches inquiry from the manifold of historical processes that ring all the changes on our relations to ourselves. For even "lost" experiences and alienation can be extremely rich. These, as well as more integrative or unalienated experiences, do lead people to their deepest selves; conversely, too, the most rapturous and rigid experiences of inwardness can open onto the cosmic ocean in which the self disappears and yet generate axiologically rich praxis. If indeed we have ways of sharing emotion, whether by social extension, or by fusion, or by some other alteration of the solitary I, the diachronic processes that achieve this arise out of the specific character of human temporal implication as it incessantly varies temporalities, rather than out of the essence of the I. If the path that Husserl sought from solipsism to intersubjectivity on as large as scale as possible — that path through the contradictories which phenomenology so often attempts to balance in social and ethical fields of inquiry — really exists, it must be sought outside of the terms that originally create the double-bind. Our character as temporal selves can be universalized only in the ways permitted by the consequences of lives we have lived with actual other people who have lived, rather than through new names for the same thing and also rather than by elaborating embodiment or enactivism in terms that are not fully diachronic or processual. This is the reason to reconnect historicity with history, which is, as narratives and meta-narratives, the very act, the many wonderful acts, of collective creation of ethical significance.

The second reason follows from this conclusion. Connection to history shows the source of ethical values and also helps to create them. Our ongoing understanding of the past is a real part of the force of past persons on us through what they did and what happened to them. The fluctuating losses and gains of a subject in the courses of her history and of the broader histories of which she is a part are precisely that force of human temporal implication that gives rise to ethical values. In the paragraph above, I referred to "ethical significance." It is the transgenerational range of history that gives an axiology for phenomenological analysis that we can develop through *interpersonal values-making*. This refers to the difference between meaning (or "sense) and importance or significance; I have in mind the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. Meaning is necessary to but not sufficient for an axiology. Significance is the further understanding that arises from and reaches beyond the basic sense-making of consciousness that a presentist analyses of time-consciousness as "now-points" explains (De Warren 2009; Staiti 2011). In the web of temporalities that inform the history of human life and behavior, persons develop significance in the context outside of their egos and even through and beyond intersubjectivity. It moves out of the constitutive or "fundamental" always on-going time-consciousness into more complex and interdependent interpretations of existence developed by attention throughout spans of time. This attention to increases or decreases in the urgency an action becomes the ethical values the subject holds. Such time-relative urgency is much of what

ethical significance is. The reality of life with others generates the responsibility, or irresponsibility, of each to some or many others along temporal lines that are just as ongoing as the fundamental present and continue in a creative tension with it that characterizes human history. Our responses in every present create significance, which exists in the historical web of sociality. Phenomenological axiology is in reality a part of that, diminished if this way of thinking falls short in recognizing the transgenerational level of deliberation and choice of moral values.

We might re-conceive the necessary irreducible solidity of the individual at the basis of this. The way of doing this that I suggest here is to hold that meaningfulness is the heart of a life-world and making meaning requires interpersonality. Centering interactions with it, "some of which liberate us, and some of which enslave us" (Gallagher 2009, 304), we might begin to re-conceive the social aspect of the individual, not to lose the moral weight of autonomy our responsibility but so as to analyze social entities through the ways in which they shape the individual with whom they stand in putative contrast as ontologically constitutive, influence our participation in collectives, generate the vast array of communications and expressions that groups use and are shaped by, process experience, make meaningfulness in lives and in life, and develop along the polyphonic temporality of actual history.

5. Prescriptivity and social ontology

In a recent essay, Jan-Ivar Lindèn writes that "the temporal reality of history concerns the relation between significance and meaning" (Lindèn 2023, 243). The actual complex polyphony of our interdependence, though founded on contingency, points us in a direction opposite to that in which Heidegger found authentic meaning through finitude organized by death as the great individualizer. To the contrary, the flow of contingent circumstances itself, just because it is multiple, changing from one hand to another in the sphere of the pluralistic manifold that if our life-world, is the movement from *Sinn* to *Bedeuting*, from intentions and limited contexts to meaningfulness in broader and deeper modes.

The development is by definition cumulative. But it need not and very often does not equal progress in the sense of leading agents to choose a more just and kinder world. Moral change can be decline, as I or anyone might judge matters according to their principles. Communicated living memories plus the farther range of understanding the historical past, moves us from intra-generational to inter-generational to transgenerational moral life and whatever sort of knowledge or wisdom inhabits it, just as it does in the sphere of technical an scientific knowledge. The kind of intrinsic meanings that moral life has for us — deep within us, always in front of us, inherent in the normative web of societies and culture — though irreducible to facts or quantified versions of material reality, does share in common with bodies of rationally organized knowledge the power of the way that epistemic bases expand. Whereas bodies of information about the physical world and, to a lesser extent, of the social world tend to augment exponentially — or at least to appear to do so, although with periods of halt, retracing, and regress — moral life has an analogous way of moving because it is part of our history, though it moves without the rationalized pattern that the sciences more often seem to have.

Because we no longer can credit philosophy of history with creating or expressing the cohesive intelligibility it seemed to posit in place of the stable metaphysics of previous shapes of philosophical thought, as Hegel and his successors thought (also as his predecessor Kant thought, in a less distinct but still powerful framework), we are not thereby entitled to walk away from any hope of moral impact from that sum of human behavior which is history. Normative ethics as a systematic enterprise on the one hand and phenomenological investigation into human feeling as a yet more basal study of human actualities on the other both have yet to take on the way in which grasping the diachronesis of moral life can help us to align demands of the universality of moral prescription and the demands of many local loyalties and projects. And philosophy of history must, if it is to be in accord with this project, expand in an unaccustomed direction and in unfamiliar ways.[7]

This point of view requires a more robust and concrete conception of the past than we usually find in phenomenology, or even in process philosophy, much less in analytic philosophy of time. Husserl of course recognized that time and ethics stand together, but our task is to expand our understanding of the depth and power of their relations. But even interpretation of the whole body of his work that finds a greater place for the past in the constitution of consciousness does not re-link consciousness to its creativity as history (De Warren 2009). At most it seems Husserl considered how one's own whole life history can be a foundation for ethical value (Staiti 2010). Pastness becomes merely abstract when the focus is on the way the present is freshly renewed by its futurity.

And yet it is, I argue, the road by which to develop phenomenological axiology because historical studies have been so broadly enriched in their moral implications that they can begin to break free of the "natural attitude," and both historical studies and phenomenology therefore can in concert of some sort enrich ethical axiology. Despite the shyness, justified to an extent, of most academic historians toward both fundamental philosophy and toward expounding history as any sort of ethical guide, or *magister vitae*, the situation of global society and culture after post-modernism calls upon historians for such ethical engagement as against the dehumanization imposed by late-stage global hyper-capitalism. If we can create linkage of phenomenology and historiography, the reward will be a prescriptive axiology for phenomenology grounded in the actual life-world of the sum of human behavior. When taken in the direction of immanent critique, as distinct from critique of norms, we might want to call this critical phenomenology, on the model of the critical social ontology of Rahel Jaeggi or Sally Haslanger (for example) as opposed to standard general social ontology (Jaeggi 2018; Haslanger 2012). But if we are afraid to state an affirmative program of moral prescription and remain instead in the shelter of the empirical, descriptive, and social-scientific character of social ontology, we will not have brought out what history as a moral study can do for us.

Finally, the question remains as to why it is worthwhile to call this axiology prescriptive. Prescription seems unnecessary or harmful because we commonly want to resist moralizing and moralism. Yet phenomenology pursues erasure of the bright line between description and prescription by seeking to know what holds us together as persons and what binds us as societies and

as humankind, none of which can be shown by naturalistic science, rather than the foundations that traditional rationalist metaphysics and science alike seek. And so, if the past — its persons and the world they give us — upholds every society and every one of us, then it is a way to seek to know what we ought to do in so far as we can come to know this not as an objective ground but as our moral necessity. But if our actual history of moral imagination, deliberation, and action creates the prescriptive force we know as moral obligation, then the difference between genesis and validity, or between the temporality of moral life and the more abstract conceptions of rightness and wrongness and of justice and injustice will daunt us less in feeling ourselves confident on secure ground in prescribing for ourselves what is the nest right thing to do. An historical phenomenology can help us to figure out how the facts of history can still teach us, even now amidst so much lost faith.

To follow this line of thought is to help lay a foundation for here is an existential axiology on which phenomenological inquiry and philosophy of history can meet to assist, extend, and enrich each other. This is a path for research. Investigating the reality of the past helps us to see just how individuals and collectives interrelate, rather than to oscillate between these two aspects as binary. It illuminates the specific and actual development of human moral connection in a way that supports a universal approach to the ethical value of these forms of solicitude for humankind in a way that, in my view, the moral psychology of empathy and sympathy cannot do. And it amplifies the force of our transgenerational moral obligations that Walter Benjamin and others explain, making them exemplars of what prescriptive ethics can be and do. These implications require discussions beyond what the present occasion affords. It is a start to those discussions to show how stretching phenomenological inquiry over historical time enables its approach to ethical values and goods.

Endnotes:

1. In this paper I use "ethics" and "moral philosophy" interchangeably (although I prefer the latter term), and I likewise especially use "moral" and "ethical" interchangeably.
2. I prefer the term "interpersonality" to "intersubjectivity" because as a personalist philosopher it serves better to connote the range of life-world and especially the moral agency of persons, as well as because it veers away from the complications of "subjects" and "subjectivity." I use this word in what follows except where the discussion of phenomenological approaches is better served by using the term "intersubjectivity" that is the technical term traditional in and specific to phenomenological discourse.
3. What it excludes is very intense degrees of learned, willful, or tragic alienation from the moral instrumentality the world offers and from human community (including nihilism).
4. My use of this word is inspired in part by Ethan Kleinberg's "Reflections on Theory of History Polyphonic" (Kleinberg 2022/2023).
5. Jeffrey Barash makes this point when he says that memory — and, I take it, history too because of its contingency — "could hardly furnish an absolute basis" for the unified constitution of the subject that Husserl sought. He adds later that "an adequate theory of social time" is required for understanding collectivity (Barash 2016, 74, 88).
6. Within the last few years, however, Hans Ruin's *Being With the Dead* has made an important re-direction toward a transgenerational phenomenology and consequent ontology by developing concepts that found human sociality on our relations with past persons (Ruin 2019). Ruin relies on anthropology, to which phenomenology is akin, as it is indeed also akin to the study of history.

7. Or at least partly unfamiliar: the struggles of neo-Kantianism with "historicism" covered an earlier version of this territory, one that we who live after the disruptions if the previous century cannot again travel in our efforts to grasp the power of moral obligation and to affirm the reality of moral goods and harms. Sophie Marcotte-Chenard (2022) recounts the debate between Dilthey and Rickert in that period and helpfully suggests that "historicism can be partly freed from its negative connotations when understood not as relativism, but as pluralism" (Marcotte-Chenard 2022, 2) — a provisional and incomplete conception that requires something like the approach I outline to affect philosophy of history, much less moral philosophy.

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