

Chapter 1

ARISTOTELIANISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY

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Aristotle might well be called the first phenomenologist of moral experience. Recall, for example, his careful attention to the “phenomena,” to common opinions about happiness or—as a phenomenologist might put it—to happiness and the virtues as commonly understood. Recall too his meticulous, dialectical considerations of these phenomena, considerations reminiscent of imaginative variations and designed to achieve insight into the nature of happiness and the virtues. Recall, even more importantly, his account of moral intentionality—of the unified role of practical wisdom, the emotions, and “perception” in moral experience—and, finally, his distinction between merely voluntary and chosen actions, the former *aimed* at an end (e.g., satisfying hunger), but the latter undertaken *in the light of* an end (e.g., eating low-fat foods for the sake of health). In discussing the relation between Aristotelianism and phenomenology, therefore, we could well and fruitfully explore the various ways in which Aristotle himself and the contemporary advocates of a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics develop phenomenological themes and methodologies in their work.¹

¹I have in mind here, among others, thinkers (and works) such as Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981]; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988]; and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990]), Martha Nussbaum (*The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986]; “Aristotelian Social Democracy,” in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson [New York: Routledge, 1990], 203–52; “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy. Volume XIII. Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988], 32–53; revised and expanded in “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], 242–69), Nancy Sherman (*The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989]; *Making a Necessity of Virtue:*

I shall not, however, follow this path. Since it is a great strength of phenomenology that it can retrieve classical issues and insights, I shall instead consider the ways in which some phenomenological approaches to moral philosophy manifest such Aristotelian themes as *eudaimonia*, moral intentionality, deliberate action, and the relation between moral action and communal life. However, since phenomenology retrieves classical insights in ways capable of responding to modern criticisms of the classical tradition—thereby preserving what is best from both periods—I shall also examine phenomenology’s retrieval of themes arising from modern criticisms of eudaimonistic approaches to ethics, in particular Kantian deontology’s concern with the issue of obligation.

Aristotle’s ethics is centered around the notion of the good realized in action. The ultimate good for Aristotle is human happiness, i.e., a flourishing human life, as realized in the exercise of the virtues. The phenomenological tradition, on the other hand, is fundamentally axiological in character. With respect to moral matters, its dominant tendency has been to offer first a theory of value rather than an account of the good life for humans. While the notions of “good” and “value” are no doubt related, the exact nature of this relation must be clarified. In that context, I must confess at the beginning to a dislike for talk about “values,” as if values were objects to be discovered as pieces of the furniture of the world. The word “value” is, first of all, a verb. Values are not things in relation to which we appraise other things; rather, things are valued insofar as they are recognized as good (or apparently good) in some respect. It is, as we shall see later, only in the light of valuing things that are similarly good that we achieve an awareness of *the* “value.” Hence in the first instance, we should understand phenomenological axiology as a theory of *valuing* (rather than of values as such).

This point about the language of “values” accounts in part for why my discussion will center itself on the contributions of Husserl rather than on those, say, of Scheler and others like him who think that values are a priori objects grasped independently of and prior to valued things. To put the matter another way, I believe that among the phenomenologists, Husserl most and best embodies Aristotelian themes and tendencies. My aim, however, is not to provide an interpretation of Husserl; that is done elsewhere in this volume. I aim instead to provide, as it were, an “Aristotelian reading” of (a largely Husserlian) phenomenology and thereby to focus our attention on those aspects of the phenomenological tradition that illuminate moral phenomena with an “Aristotelian light.”

Aristotle and Kant on Virtue [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]), Sarah Broadie (*Ethics with Aristotle* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991]), and Rosalind Hursthouse (*On Virtue Ethics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999]).

1. VALUING

We turn first, then, to the evaluative experience. Phenomenological axiology is rooted in Brentano's two claims (1) that we apprehend what is valuable in things in "emotive" acts (*Akte der Gemütsbewegung*), a class of acts defined primarily by acts of loving and hating—or, less strongly, liking and disliking—but broadly enough to encompass feelings, desires, and volitions, and (2) that these emotive acts are grounded in "presentations" of the object.² We can understand the second claim in terms of what Husserl describes as the "noematic sense" of an object or, as I shall call it, its "objective sense."³ Husserl's point is that a thing is always encountered in a determinate manner and in a particular kind of act. There are two aspects to this claim. First, the same thing can be experienced in the same determinate manner in acts of different kinds: I can see the green car, remember it, wish for it, and judge it to be green. Second, any single thing can be experienced with different determinations. I experience the car as green, as stylish, as well engineered, as getting good gas mileage, as expensive, and so forth. There is a hermeneutic *as* in experience; I experience X as a, b, c, and so on.⁴ The determinate manner (*Weise*) in which the thing is experienced—its objective sense or content—is distinguished from how (*wie*) it is experienced, i.e., as the object of perception, memory, judgment, and the like.

Husserl adapts Brentano's second claim about presentations grounding evaluative acts. For Husserl this claim means that the evaluative experience is founded on the objective sense within the evaluative experience itself. The phenomenological priority of the "mere" presentation or objective sense, while compatible with the temporal priority of a non-evaluative experience, does not

²Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and L. L. McAlister, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1995), 45, 80, 276.

³Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. Karl Schuhmann, *Husserliana* 3/1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 205; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 216–18. First references to volumes of Husserl's *Gesammelte Werke* (*Husserliana*) will be full references along with references to any English translations. Subsequent references to any volume of *Husserliana* will be noted as "Hua" followed by the volume and page numbers.

⁴This point corresponds to Husserl's identification within the noematic sense of what he calls the "Identical," the "determinable X" that is the "bearer" of "properties" and the "subject of predicates"; cf. Hua 3/1, 297–304 (309–16).

require it. Such non-evaluative experiences are no doubt possible. I might simply notice things in the visual field, attend to their color, register them as trees, grass, or stones, and so forth. Indeed, at one extreme the theoretical sciences pride themselves on their separation from the evaluative and the practical; they pursue a “pure” cognitive truth. The great bulk of our everyday experience, however, is not of this unmixed character.⁵ Our everyday encounters with things are governed by interests that lead us to explore and to value things in particular ways, to a determinate degree, and for a variety of purposes.⁶ Our ordinary experience, in other words, is permeated by practical and evaluative dimensions. And while I might, for example, daily notice the architectural features of a building and come subsequently to appreciate and value them, I might just as easily, in my first encounter with the building, be “struck” by its beauty. In either case, the same objective sense is present in and underlies the valuing.

Things and circumstances can from the beginning appear to us as good or bad, likable or not, useful or not, pleasurable or not. More specifically, and more importantly for our present reflections, actions and agents can from the beginning appear to us as noble, fine, virtuous, generous, honest, just, patriotic, compassionate, hospitable, friendly, base, evil, wicked, vicious, petty, rancorous, spiteful, inhospitable, mean-spirited, treacherous, traitorous, and so on. Given that the great bulk of our ordinary experience is from the beginning evaluative, we can say that in most cases the founding presentation will in fact be a kernel—the objective sense—within the concrete valuing experience rather than an individuated, temporally prior experience to whose presentation of the thing an affective response, a valuing dimension, is subsequently added. The objective sense presents what Husserl refers to as the “logical” properties of the thing, properties of the sort apprehended in cognition and predicated in simple, unmodalized, categorical propositions.⁷ The “logical,” purely descriptive properties can be

⁵In fact, perhaps not even “pure” theoretical inquiry is free of an evaluative dimension, for it makes sense as a project only to the degree that the scientist thinks this pursuit worthy, although the theorizing activity does not itself pursue truths about goods and the valuable properties of things.

⁶Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ding und Raum: Vorlesungen 1907*, ed. Ulrich Claesges, *Husserliana* 16 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 125–38; *Thing and Space: Lectures 1907*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 104–14. Cf. also John J. Drummond, “Object’s Optimal Appearances and the Immediate Awareness of Space in Vision,” *Man and World* 16 (1983): 182–83.

⁷Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. Marly Biemel, *Husserliana* 4 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), 10; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the*

presented apart from the valuing of the thing having those properties. The founded or valuing moment could be stripped away such that we no longer experience the thing as valuable. Yet we would still experience it in a different kind of (non-evaluative) act—perception, say—but now as a thing without worth for us.⁸

In summary, then, essential to the founding of evaluative experiences on presentations is, first, that a purely descriptive objective sense belong to the evaluative experience as its core, and second, that the experience of the worth of the thing build itself upon this core so as to form a unity with it.⁹ Combining this notion of foundation with Brentano's first claim that emotive acts apprehend what is valuable in things, it follows that the concrete valuing experience has both a founding presentational or "cognitive" moment and a founded "feeling"-moment. A constellation of logical properties belonging to the thing arouses a feeling.¹⁰ The value-property of the thing having those logical properties is the correlate of this feeling tied to cognition or, so to speak, of a "sentiment of the understanding."¹¹ In other words, the feeling builds itself upon and unites itself with the presentational moment directed to these logical properties such that the overall character of the experience is an affective response to the worth of the thing.¹² Within the concrete valuing experience, the logical properties are the correlates of the presentational or cognitive moments and the value-properties are the correlates specifically of the moment of feeling or emotion.¹³

Since the feeling is the affective response to cognized properties and founded in their presentation, our valuing the thing incorporates an underlying cognitive content. In this unity of cognitive and affective moments, we recognize the thing (with these particular properties) as valuable precisely insofar as it possesses these properties. There is, in other words, something like an abstraction at work in evaluation; we attend—more or less explicitly—only to some features of the thing

Phenomenology of Constitution, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 12.

⁸Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre 1908–1914*, ed. Ullrich Melle, *Husserliana* 28 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 252.

⁹Husserl explores the concept of foundation at length in *Logische Untersuchungen, Zweiter Band, Erster Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. Ursula Panzer, *Husserliana* 19/1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 267; *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 1:463). For the specific point that evaluative acts are founded on cognitions, cf. Hua 28, 252.

¹⁰Hua 4, 12 (14).

¹¹Cf. John J. Drummond, "Moral Objectivity: Husserl's Sentiments of the Understanding," *Husserl Studies* 12 (1995): 165–83.

¹²Hua 4, 8–11 (10–13); cf. also Hua 28, 252.

¹³Hua 28, 255–57, 260–62.



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Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy
A Handbook

Drummond, J.J.; Embree, L. (Eds.)

2002, VII, 579 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0770-5