

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION¹

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Phenomenological axiology (the theory of value) is the area of phenomenology that most explicitly deals with problems currently explored in *metaethics*. As one authoritative source describes it, metaethics is “the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice” (Sayre-McCord 2014). However, the scope of axiology is broader than the scope of metaethics, which is concerned exclusively with moral value. Axiology embraces values of all kinds, including political, aesthetic, and religious. The distinctive contribution of phenomenological axiology to metaethics is arguably twofold. First, phenomenology considers *values* to be robust *objects in their own right*, rather than mere projections of our desires and preferences. Second, and contrary to a potential intellectualistic misinterpretation of the first point, phenomenology considers our *emotional experiences* to play a key role in the disclosure and correct *grasping of values*.

Phenomenological axiology is thus almost diametrically opposed to the position expressed by Christine Korsgaard in the following quote from *The Sources of Normativity*: “To talk about values [...] is not to talk about entities, either mental or Platonic, but to talk in a shorthand way about relations we have with ourselves and one another” (Korsgaard 1996, 138). By contrast, for phenomenology to talk about values is to talk about entities that are neither mental, nor Platonic. Rather, value-talk refers intentionally to entities that are *experienced* and *posited as valuable*. At the most fundamental level, values are empirical objects and states of affairs that are experienced as possessing certain value-properties, such as a delicious meal, a generous action, and a beautiful painting. Axiologically qualified empirical objects are more properly labeled “goods”¹ in order to distinguish them from values as the objects of a higher-level mode of experience, whose correlate is not an empirical, but rather an ideal object. In this higher-level mode of experience values are potentially realized in an indefinite plurality of empirical objects, but they are not themselves empirical. They are grasped as objects in their own right, rather than as qualities of empirical objects. How to best interpret and articulate descriptively the shift from lower-level experience of valuable objects to higher-level experience of values as objects is one of the key issues on the agenda of phenomenological axiology. As for the reference to our intersubjective relations in Korsgaard’s quote, phenomenological

¹ For introductory purposes we can ignore Husserl’s more fine-grained distinction between goods and beauties. See, for instance, Husserl 2004, 187–190.

approaches to values do not downplay the cultural, historical, and social embeddedness of values; however, the values themselves are not identical with the cultural, historical, and social processes through which they are disclosed, obscured, devalued, reevaluated, etc. To say, for instance, that a landscape is beautiful is to talk about the landscape itself, and not about relations we have with ourselves and others. We posit the landscape as beautiful in and of itself and not just for us or for the animals that inhabit it. Indeed, value can be posited of something without being subjectively experienced by us in an emotive or appreciative way. We inhabit, and emotionally interact with, a 'world of value' (*Wertewelt*): a world that not only contains objects endowed with natural properties but is also filled and saturated with values that can be apprehended in a direct (non-inferential) *sui generis* 'perceptual' intuition, which is labeled '*Wertnehmung*' or 'value-grasping' and is analogous to perception (*Wahrnehmung*) or 'truth-grasping.' Indeed, truth-grasping is just one form of valuing, as truth is also treated as a value – the 'truth-value' – in this approach. How to best understand the sense in which value-properties attach to objects of experience and how they are related to natural, i.e., non-axiological properties is another important item of the phenomenologist's agenda. The only non-negotiable aspect of phenomenological axiology on this complex matter is that, whatever description or theory turns out to be right, it should preserve the simple evidence that value-properties are in the object and not in the eye of the beholder. On the other hand, however, phenomenology of value does not rhyme with straightforward moral realism in metaethics (see Cuneo 2007) or metanormative theory more generally. The fact that value-properties are in the object and that values themselves can become objects when the appropriate attitude is implemented does not mean that the relationship that holds between values and subjective acts of evaluation is purely contingent. It does not mean that there are moral (or more generally normative) facts that are entirely stance-independent. At a minimum, phenomenologists generally agree that the givenness of value-properties and values in evaluative experiences is essential to their very nature, in much the same way in which it is essential to the nature of *perceptual* objects to be given (either actually or potentially) in perception. The phenomenologists generally differ as to whether values are grasped cognitively or emotionally. Generally speaking, all phenomenologists hold that we directly intuit values in a *quasi*-perceptual manner, but there is scope for values being intuited at many different levels of awareness, indeed we can even be oriented unconsciously by values.

How to articulate the relationship between value-objects and values, on the one hand, and evaluative experiences, on the other, while holding fast to the evidence that the former are never reducible to the latter is thus an issue of primary interest in phenomenological axiology. In Husserl's reflections, for instance, a universal theory of values and the ideal forms of evaluative experiences requires a general theory of pure constitution and hinges on a transcendental theory of reason. The questions of the constitution, validity, and systematic order of values as given in and through (inter-)subjective evaluative experiences are, indeed, central for the development of a rational axiology that, in turn, is meant to provide the foundation of rational ethics (Husserl 2004, 24).

How to articulate the relation between axiology and ethics is therefore another critical question. Although the domain of phenomenological axiology includes moral values, properties, and evaluations, the object-field of axiology *tout court* does not coincide with the practical sphere. Consequently, a phenomenological theory of value cannot be simply reduced to a meta-reflection on the fundamental notions, presuppositions, and insights informing the philosophical discourse on ethical will, action, and practice. On the ontological-noematic side, values and axiological properties are also theoretical, aesthetic, personal, etc. On the noetic side, intentional evaluations and value-grasplings are not forms of ethical rational

consciousness. Furthermore, for Husserl, a complete axiology turns out to be insufficient for a universal doctrine of rationally and normatively conscious will (Husserl 2004, 245). For the systematic description of ‘what is a value,’ ‘what has value,’ ‘what is richer in value,’ etc., does not answer to the guiding ethical questions concerning the conformity of will and action to duty and purely rational norms, such as ‘what ought I to do?’ or ‘am I a moral agent?’. As Husserl came to realize around the same time he was working on *Ideas I*, axiology and a formal theory of practice (*Praktik*) are not yet *ethics*: on Husserlian standards, work on the theory of value and correct action based on intuitively fulfilled valuing would not yet amount to a complete meta-*ethics*. The latter also demands more comprehensive analyses on absolute values that admit no comparison or hierarchy, on what ought to be unconditionally realized, on sacrifice (*Opfer*), etc. (see Husserl 1988, 419-420 and 421-422).

Historically considered, the notion of value is common currency in early twentieth-century German philosophy. Supposedly, the term “axiology” was first introduced by Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) in his 1887 *Asthetik: Die Philosophie des Schönen* [Philosophy of the Beautiful]. Husserl discusses ‘axiology’ in his *Ideas I* (1913) §§ 117 and 147, where he introduces the idea of a formal axiology, although he already developed this idea in some detail in his lectures on ethics held in Göttingen a few years earlier (Husserl 1988). In this respect, phenomenological axiology is also the venue where phenomenological thinking can engage, both terminologically and theoretically, with other philosophical traditions, primarily Neo-Kantianism. It is nonetheless important to remark that the notion of value in phenomenology stems from a line of thought that differs significantly from the Neo-Kantians’. The historical antecedent of phenomenological axiology is undoubtedly Brentano’s influential lecture *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, where, on the basis of the idea of a thoroughgoing analogy holding among different psychological phenomena, Brentano establishes the idea of a correct feeling (Brentano 2009, 14), by analogy with insightful or evident judging (see Centi 2019). One could argue that, in much the same way in which Brentano’s students, including Husserl, introduced the notion of state-of-affairs (*Sachverhalt*) as the objective counterpart of judgment in order to move beyond purely noetic notions such as evidence or insightfulness to describe correct judging, phenomenologists introduced the notion of value as the objective counterpart of emotional experience, as that which makes emotional experience correct or incorrect. Without downplaying the otherwise significant differences between phenomenological thinkers on the correct interpretation of value and evaluative experience, it is no overstatement to say that all differences are as many variations of the themes originally broached by Brentano. By contrast, among the Neo-Kantians, particularly the Southwestern school spearheaded by Rickert, the notion of value is introduced to tag the carrier of validity, Lotze’s famous *Geltung*, independently of subjective acts of recognition (*Anerkennung*) in judgment (Rickert 2018). Thus, while for the phenomenologists the notion of value is tied from the very beginning to the emotional and conative sphere, for Rickert and his followers “value” designates the sphere of validity in general, particularly of *theoretical* validity. On this account, to judge correctly is to take an affirmative stance toward a value, e.g. the truth-value of a true proposition. Exploring in further detail the ramifications, as well as the costs and benefits of these different approaches to value and valuing would far exceed the scope of this introduction. The intention of the foregoing paragraph was just to highlight that axiology is by no means an isolated endeavor and with its articulation phenomenology was working at the cutting edge of the most influential debates of its time.

In sum, phenomenological axiology can be considered as both a fruitful contribution to metaethical and metanormative issues in contemporary philosophy, and a venue for productive engagement with other early Twentieth century philosophical traditions. From this point of view, one can consider the shift toward *existential* phenomenology ushered

in by Heidegger's *Being and Time* and carried forward by Sartre and other French thinkers as a significant transformation and, to some extent, as a loss in this respect. Arguably, one distinctive trait of existential phenomenology *vis-à-vis* realist and transcendental phenomenology is precisely the eclipse of axiology as a horizon of research. Heidegger's early critique of the concept of value (Ferencz-Flatz 2009) marks an important transition in the conception of both scope and method of phenomenology, one that no longer interprets the subject as active in a world of value disclosed by emotional experience, but as thrown into a world whose practical significance is contingent upon one's existential project, rather than the correct appreciation of axiological properties, relations, and entities.

The present collection of papers aims to offer a first pass at a rediscovery of phenomenological axiology and it does so following a recent trend that has blown the dust off some of the key works and issues in this lesser-known area of phenomenological research (De Monticelli 2015, 2017, 2021; Drummond 2021; and Staiti 2020). Taken together, these texts offer a vivid and fascinating picture of the several problems and figures involved in the articulation of a phenomenological axiology. They discuss thinkers as complex and diverse as Husserl, Scheler, Stein, Sartre, and von Hildebrand and contribute to shed light on various aspects of their work on value. In addition, the contributions of this special issue directly engage with the current analytic discussions on the nature of emotions (e.g., Mulligan, De Monticelli, Tappolet, Nussbaum, Solomon, Drummond, etc.) as well as moral theorists such as R. M. Hare. Overall, they pave the way for future research and set the stage for what has the potential to become a renaissance of phenomenological value-theory, an approach that the editors of this issue hope will come to be recognized as a solid and legitimate option in its own right in contemporary philosophy.

The volume opens with Ingrid Vendrell Ferran's "Emotions and Sentiments: Two Distinct Forms of Affective Intentionality," in which the author argues for the distinction between 'emotions,' such as envy, disgust, and shame, and 'sentiments,' such as love, hate, and adoration. In contrast with the approach adopted by contemporary analytic philosophers (e.g., Ben-ze'ev, Deonna, and Teroni) that discriminates between these two kinds of affective phenomena on the basis of differences in their temporal structures, Vendrell Ferran develops a novel alternative approach that relies on their different *intentional* structures. In particular, departing from other intentional approaches that discern emotions from sensations mostly in term of their axiological components (e.g., De Monticelli), Vendrell Ferran focuses on their different forms of *affective intentionality*, and contends that "while emotions are *responses* to *values* of the target, sentiments are *forms of regard* which *project* on the target *values congruent* with the sentiment we are experiencing."

In "The Foundation of Evaluation and Volition on Cognition: A New Contribution to the Debate over Husserl's Account of Objectifying and Non-objectifying Acts," Nicola Spano examines the foundational relation between 'non-objectifying acts' (i.e., volitions and evaluations) and 'objectifying acts' (i.e., cognitions) starting from Husserl's notorious thesis according to which "*intentional experience is either an objectifying act or has its basis in such an act*" (Husserl 1984, 514). Drawing from Husserl's earlier and later works, Spano explores the idea of foundation in connection with the change of attitude from the practical-evaluative to the theoretical sphere. In dialogue with Drummond and Rinofner-Kreidl, Spano also supports Staiti's analysis on the intentional structure of evaluations and volitions against the criticisms of intellectualism raised by Heidegger and Scheler against Husserl.

In "Are Emotions Valueceptions or Responses to Values? Husserl's Phenomenology of Affectivity Reconsidered," Alexis Delamare counterposes two different accounts of value and its relationship to emotions. The Meinongian account considers the emotions as the vehicles through which we grasp values. By contrast, the Hildebrandian account posits special value-

feelings by way of which values are grasped and argues that emotions only occasionally accompany the grasp of values. The key phenomenon invoked by the Hildebrandians to defend their account is so-called “cold” valueception, i.e., the possibility to acknowledge the presence of value without being emotionally moved. Delamare shows convincingly that, contrary to a widespread view, Husserl is not a straightforward Meinongian and he should be interpreted as proposing an alternative account, which revolves around the distinction between experiences of value in general, which can be cold, and *originary* experiences of values, which are necessarily accompanied by emotion.

In “Husserl and Non-Formal Ethics,” Veniero Venier traces the development of Husserl’s ethics from the formal axiology presented in his 1902 lectures in Göttingen to the reconfiguration of ethics in the wake of his analysis of ethical life. The grasping function of feeling takes center stage in Venier’s account and it plays a key role all the way to his later lectures titled *Introduction to Ethics*.

In “Things, Goods, and Values: The Operative Function of Husserl’s Unitary Foundation in Scheler’s Axiology,” Emanuele Caminada claims the formal axiological distinction between things, goods, and values stands at the core of Scheler’s metaethics. Caminada suggests understanding such a distinction in light of Husserl’s concepts of unitary foundation and, in particular, in light of the second type of unitary foundation that is described in §21 of Husserl’s *Third Logical Investigation* and that implicitly operates in Scheler’s description of how values inhere in goods. A comparison between Scheler’s argument concerning the independence of a world of goods, on the one hand, and Hare’s indiscernibility argument, on the other, also brings to the fore the main formal-ontological difference between the phenomenological account of unitary foundation and the analytic account of supervenience.

In “The Axiology of Dietrich von Hildebrand. From Phenomenology to Metaphysics,” Paola Premoli De Marchi shows how Hildebrand’s value theory provides axiological properties (i.e., ‘categories of importance’ in Hildebrand’s lexicon) with an objective foundation, allowing us to conceive of them as irreducible to merely subjective evaluative capacities. Starting from Hildebrand’s distinction of three categories of importance (i.e., the ‘subjectively satisfying,’ ‘value,’ and the ‘objective good for the person’), their connection with motivation, and their different kinds of foundation, Premoli De Marchi first elucidates how the essence of values consists in “the foundation of all importance itself,” and then investigates the relation between value and being through an examination of both ‘*the value of being*’ and ‘*the being of value*.’ The analysis thus moves from phenomenological reflections to a metaphysical inquiry into the relation between ‘being,’ ‘importance,’ and ‘ought-to-be’ that faces the question of “whether good can triumph over evil” and leads to a conception of reality as the effect and manifestation of the infinite goodness of a personal God.

The special issue also includes another contribution in the ‘Free Submission’ section. In her *Schatten der Irresponsivität: Pathos ohne Response/Response ohne Pathos. Trauma, Widerstand und Schelers Begriff der seelischen Kausalität*, Roberta Guccinelli examines the loss or impairment of our ability to interact with others in the context of socio-affective cognition. The author first compares Waldenfels’ responsive phenomenology with Scheler’s theory of values on the basis of their common interest in Freudian psychoanalysis. Guccinelli then draws important resources from Scheler’s criticisms of the implicit methodological assumptions that guide Freud’s constructive associationism. Anomalies and pathological disturbances related to our inability to interact with others are thus described as derivative phenomena: ‘deformations’ of the normal or *quasi-normal* phenomenon of responsiveness in the language of Waldenfels, or ‘aberrations’ of normal drives and normal pulsional life in Scheler’s phenomenology.

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