

Reason, Love and the Divine

A Trajectory of Husserl's Ethical Thought

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A human being can either let his life drift on the ebb and follow differing moods, impulses, drives and instincts that arise in him from moment to moment, or take control of its course and direct it consciously along deliberately chosen pathways to set goals. Ethical life has its origin in one's decision to follow the latter possibility. He is then confronted with questions such as: what goal ought I to choose for my life as a whole? What means ought I to follow to achieve it? What ought I to do in particular situations of my life? Is there an "ought" (absolute demand, obligation) at all in these matters or can I choose haphazardly as I wish? If there is an "ought," what is its origin?" Ethical tradition, from Socrates to Kant and thereafter, grapples with these fundamental questions. Husserl stands firmly in this tradition. The father of phenomenology brings his phenomenological method to bear upon his attempts to answer these questions.

Husserl has worked intensely on ethics in two separate periods of his life: from 1908 to 1914 and from 1920 to 1924. The lecture courses that he gave at the University of Göttingen¹ in 1908/09, 1911 and 1914 form the core of his ethical work in the first period. These lectures have been published in *Husserliana Volume 28 in 1988*². A major part of Husserl's work of the second period consists of two lecture courses he gave at the University of Freiburg³: "Introduction to Philosophy" in the winter semester of 1919/20 and "Introduction to Ethics" in the summer semester of 1920 (which was repeated with some modifications in 1924. The former has been published in *Husserliana Materialien IX*⁴ and the latter in *Husserliana XXXVII*⁵. Other significant ethical writings of this period include the *Kaizo* articles⁶ and some important manuscripts and research notes published in *Husserliana Volume XLII*⁷.

The publication of Husserl's ethical writings in the *Husserliana* series has elicited intense interest among philosophers and scholars in the ethics of the father of phenomenology, as can be judged from the profusion of scholarly writings on the topic. It has also led to a radical re-assessment of Husserl's entire philosophical work. Thus, in a recent work Joachim Siles Borrás shows the centrality of ethics for Husserl's entire phenomenological project.⁸ According to him Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as an ultimately grounded presuppositionless rigorous science is driven by the ethical motive of radical self-responsibility of the phenomenologist.

The above mentioned two separate periods of Husserl's intellectual engagement with ethics correspond to two phases in the development of his ethical thought. The first phase is referred to as Pre-War Ethics and the second as Post-War Ethics. There are significant changes in the way Husserl approaches ethics in these two periods. In the first period Husserl approaches ethics as a critique of practical reason and in the later period he bases ethics on a phenomenological ontology of the person. The present article seeks to trace the trajectory of Husserl's ethical thought through the two phases of its development under three foundational ideas: rationality, personhood and divinity.

1. Ethics as Phenomenological Critique of Axiological-Practical Reason: Husserl's Pre-War Ethics

Husserl's early ethics, worked out chiefly in the Göttingen lectures, unfolds as critique of axiological-practical reason and is seen by him as a part of his comprehensive philosophical project of a phenomenological critique of reason. According to Husserl there are three kinds or sorts of reason: theoretical reason, axiological (valuing) reason and practical (volitional acting) reason. A comprehensive project of critique of reason seeks to provide critiques of all the three kinds of reason.⁹ Ethics finds its place in this project as the critique of axiological-practical reason. The

critique is phenomenological in so far as it seeks to trace back the origin of ethical concepts in acts of consciousness.

Ethics, for early Husserl, encompasses two critiques: critique of axiological reason and critique of practical reason. To understand why it embraces both the critiques (unlike for Kant for whom ethics coincides with critique of practical reason) we should take a glance at Husserl's act-phenomenology. This phenomenology divides acts of consciousness into three fundamental groups: acts of presentation (*Vorstellung*) and judgment (*Urteil*) make up the first fundamental class; acts of feeling (*Gefühl*) the second, and finally acts of willing and acting the third. The tripartite division of acts corresponds to the tripartite division of reason: acts of presentation and judgment make up the sphere of theoretical reason, acts of feeling belong to axiological reason (because values arise in acts of feeling) and acts of willing and acting come under practical reason. According to Husserl, acts of the third group (willing and acting) take place always on the basis of acts of the second group (feeling acts). That is, I decide (will) to strive to obtain something and actually strive for it only if I first value it positively in an act of feeling. This 'foundedness' of feeling acts on volitional acts is the reason why critique of practical reason necessarily includes also the critique of axiological reason.

1.1 Critique of Theoretical Reason as Paradigm for Critique of Axiological-Practical Reason

Husserl had already executed the critique of theoretical reason in the *Logical Investigations* of 1900/01 and in the years immediately following its publication. Then in 1914 he turns his attention to the critique of axiological-practical reason. According to Husserl there exists a "radical and thoroughgoing analogy"¹⁰ between theoretical reason and axiological-practical reason, because of which the already executed critique of theoretical reason now serves him as a paradigm or model for critique of axiological-practical reason. Therefore, to understand

Husserl's pre-war ethics it is necessary to take a look at the main contours of his critique of theoretical reason.

Theoretical reason is the reason that aims at and attains knowledge of true being as the correlate of acts of evident judging. Its critique has two main parts: (1) first part is the clarification of the nature and sense of the formal a priori laws which normatively govern cognition or theoretical reason, namely, laws of formal logic. (2) The second part is the specifically phenomenological component of the critique, and it consists in thematizing and describing the essential structures and constitutive achievements of the acts of consciousness in which the formal categories in which these laws are rooted come to original presentation. This second part coincides with critique of knowledge, since the acts in question here are actually the acts of knowledge. *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, the first volume of the *Logical Investigations*, accomplishes the first part of the critique and the second part is taken up in the six Investigations of the second volume.

The *Prolegomena* executes the first part of the critique in three distinct steps: (1a) Husserl begins by raising the question as to whether logic is a practical-normative discipline (*Kunstlehre*) or a theoretical science and answering emphatically that it is a *Kunstlehre*. But he immediately adds that to every *Kunstlehre* there is an underlying theoretical science. The normative propositions of a *Kunstlehre* are mere transformations of the corresponding theoretical propositions from a normative-practical perspective. For instance, the normative proposition "A soldier should be brave" is a normative transformation of the theoretical proposition "Only a brave soldier is a good soldier". More generally: "Every normative proposition of, e.g., the form 'An A should be B' implies the theoretical proposition 'Only a A which is B has the properties of C', in which C serves to indicate the constitutive content of the standard-setting predicate 'good' (e.g., pleasure, knowledge, whatever, in short, is marked down as good by the valuation fundamental to our given sphere)."¹¹

(1b). The second step begins by raising the question: What is, then, the theoretical science that underlies normative logic?’ The dominant answer given to this question by his contemporaries is that it is empirical psychology. Husserl calls this position “logical psychologism”. The major chunk of the *Prolegomena* is Husserl’s famous refutation of psychologism. He puts forward two clinching arguments against psychologism. Firstly, he shows that the evidence we have about logical laws is radically different from the evidence we have in psychology. Regarding the absolute and universal holding of logical laws we have a priori insight; their evidence does not presuppose the existence of any empirical or psychological facts. But regarding the holding of psychological laws, we have only various degrees of probability as they are obtained through universalization based on observations of a limited number of psychological events. Secondly Husserl argues that psychologism is a form of sceptical relativism as it makes logical laws relative to the actual working of the human psyche and as sceptical relativism it falls into absurdities such as self-contradiction.

(1c). The third step is Husserl’s demonstration of pure logic¹² as the theoretical discipline that underlies normative logic and the clarification of its nature. The justification of the claim that pure logic is a theoretical discipline distinct from psychology and all other empirical sciences is made on the basis of a new ontology. According to this new ontology actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) consists of two fundamental categories of being: ideal objects and real (*reales*) objects. Real (*reales*) objects are all objects that exist either in time and space (like objects of the external world) or in time alone (like psychic events). Ideal objects are objects that exist neither in time and space nor in time alone, and yet exist as objects of thought. Psychology is a real (*reales*) science as its subject-matter consists of a region of real being, namely, psychic events, while pure logic is an ideal science dealing with a realm of ideal objects.¹³ Its laws are rooted in the formal categories such as judgment, truth, falsity, object etc.¹⁴

The second part of the critique is its specifically phenomenological component. This is an enquiry into the ‘origin’ of the forms (formal categories) in which logical laws are rooted. According to Husserl they have their origin or are constituted in certain acts of consciousness. Husserl’s phenomenological critique of theoretical reason seeks to thematize, in inner perception or phenomenological intuition, these acts of consciousness and describe their essential structures and constitutive achievements. The acts in question in the critique of theoretical reason are acts of presentation and judgment, which Husserl classifies as “objectifying acts.” It is in these acts that the origin of the fundamental categories of logic lies.

For instance, a formal category like ‘S is p’ is constituted in a multi-rayed synthetic act of intuitive judging¹⁵; and the form is originally or evidently given to an act of abstraction performed on the ideal judgment which is the correlate of the act of intuitive judging¹⁶.

The ultimate question of theoretical reason is the question of truth and falsity of judgments. But with formal logical laws alone one cannot decide whether a given judgment is true or false. This question of truth and falsity of judgments is addressed by Husserl in terms of his theory that knowledge is the synthesis of identification or fulfilment between an act of empty intention and corresponding act of intuition.¹⁷

1.2 The Parallel Critique of Axiological-Practical Reason

Worked out under the guiding idea of “parallelism and analogy” among the three kinds of reason Husserl’s ethics (or critique of axiological-practical reason) follows all the above-mentioned steps of critique of theoretical reason. In part one Husserl undertakes to clarify the sense and nature of formal a priori ethics corresponding to formal a priori logic. That part has all the 3 sub-steps we saw above in the critique of theoretical reason. And in the second part he offers a phenomenological clarification of the fundamental categories of formal ethics by going back to the relevant acts of consciousness. Here too the parallelism is evident.

1.2.1 Ethics as a Normative-Practical Discipline (*Kunstlehre*)

In a step parallel to (1a) of the critique of theoretical reason, Husserl begins all his lecture courses on ethics of this period by stressing that ethics is a practical-normative science (*Kunstlehre*). Thus, in his lecture course on “Ethics and Philosophy of Law” of 1897 Husserl defines logic as “a practical-normative science (*Kunstlehre*) which discovers the highest ends of life (and) sets rules which should help the acting person to build a reasonable order in living and acting with regard to these ends.”¹⁸ The same practical orientation of ethics is stressed in the 1919/20 lecture course. “For individuals and in individual cases the ethical question is continuously asked: ‘What should I do?’ ‘What is absolutely obligatory here and now and what is my true life-task in general?’”¹⁹

1.2.2 Refutation of Ethical Psychologism

In parallelism to (1b) the question about the science providing the theoretical foundation of normative-practical logic is raised and the dominant answer of his contemporaries is refuted. The usual answer of the contemporaries he calls “ethical psychologism”²⁰ Ethical psychologism tries to make psychology the foundation of ethics, in so far as it holds that the theoretical content of ethics derives from an investigation of the real mental states and behaviour. Husserl’s main argument against ethical psychologism is that it distorts the absolute sense of ethical laws and obligations as it relativizes the laws to individual or collective human psyche.

1.2.3 Pure Ethics

In the step parallel to (1c) Husserl proposes a “pure ethics” as the theoretical science that underlies normative logic. However, here Husserl faces a more onerous task than in the critique of theoretical reason as “pure ethics has never been conceived in the philosophical tradition”²¹; he is confronted with the task of discovering and formulating for the first

time the formal a priori laws of ethics. In logic the task had already been accomplished by Aristotle two thousand years ago and Husserl needed only to clarify the ideal-formal character of these laws. He regards his contribution to formal ethics as very important and sees himself as the “Aristotle of pure ethics.”²²

The “pure ethics” that Husserl elaborates consists of formal axiology and formal praxeology (*formale Axiologie und formale Praktik*). The laws of the former are conditions of possibility of any correct valuation and the laws of the latter are the conditions of possibility of any correct willing and acting. As examples of such formal axiological laws, let us consider “the law of excluded fourth,” the law of value-summation and the law of absorption. The logical law of excluded middle states that every proposition is either true or false, and a third possibility is excluded (*tertium non datur*). The parallel law in axiology is the law of the “excluded fourth” as something can be a value, a disvalue or value-neutral; these are the only possibilities; therefore, any fourth possibility is ruled out (*quatum non datur*). The law of value-summation (Summationsgesetz) states that the sum of certain values has always a higher value than each of its single values. The law of absorption states that a value will always be absorbed by the realization of a higher value.

Practical reason too, namely the realm of will and action, stands under its own a priori formal laws, which are rooted in “the form of the content of the will”²³. These laws state the conditions of possibility of any correct willing and acting. The science that investigates these laws is called by Husserl formal praxeology (*formale Praktik*). The first law that Husserl formulates is a law relating to means and end. It says: “Who wills the end ought also to will the means that are indispensable.” Another law runs: “If any volitional subject has to choose between two practical possibilities, the respective values of which are V_1 and V_2 , such that $V_1 < V_2$, then the practical decision in favour of V_1 is not only worse than the decision in favour of V_2 , but it is worse in itself. The relegation of what is better and preference for what is worse are wrong, and as such

the choice has to be judged as bad”²⁴ The highest law of formal praxeology is the formal categorical imperative. “The formal praxeology leads to a highest principle, which is grounded above all in the principle, ‘The better is the enemy of the good’. It says, ‘Do the best among the achievable’ (*Tue das Beste unter dem Erreichbarens*)²⁵.

1.2.4 The Phenomenological Component of the Critique

Just as compliance of a judgment with formal logical laws cannot tell us whether it is true or false, so too compliance with formal axiological laws cannot tell us whether a valuation is correct or not, and compliance with formal praxeological laws cannot tell us whether a willing-acting is right or wrong. For example, the judgment “There are one-eyed beings on Mars” does not violate any formal logical law, and yet its truth cannot be decided on that basis alone; only actual evidence regarding the existence of such beings on Mars can make it true. Similarly, the fact that I derive pleasure from torturing my dog does not make my regarding dog-torture an act of correct valuation, even though such a valuation does not violate any formal axiological laws. And if I actually engage in an act of dog-torture on the basis of that valuation, my act of torturing the dog does not make it an ethically right act, even though no formal praxeological laws are violated here. And yet, the purpose of ethics is to enable us to distinguish correct act of valuing from incorrect act of valuing (or to put it objectively, to enable us to distinguish a value from a disvalue); and to enable us to distinguish the morally right act from a morally incorrect act. In other words, question regarding truth and falsity, value and disvalue and moral rectitude and moral wrong cannot be decided at the formal a priori level. They are matters of also of content not of form alone.

It is in terms of his act-phenomenological analyses that Husserl seeks to answer such questions of ‘matter’. Here too Husserl seeks to work out a phenomenology of correct valuing and correct acting in analogy with his

phenomenology of knowledge which he had worked out in the sixth Logical Investigation as a part of the critique of theoretical reason.

In theoretical reason, where truth and falsity of judgments are at issue, truth is the correlate of evidence; and evidence is an act of synthesis of identification or fulfilment. In an empty act one posits emptily that such and such is or that such and such is so. That act is not an act of knowledge; we can posit anything emptily as long as it does not violate the formal a priori laws. Knowledge takes place when what is emptily posited in an empty act is presented intuitively in an act of intuition and when a synthesis of identification of fulfilment takes place between the two acts. In other words, when I recognize the intuitively given as identically the same as what I had emptily intended, knowledge happens. To put the same thing in different words, knowledge takes place when I experience the intuitive act as fulfilling what the empty act had emptily intended. Truth is the correlate of such acts of synthesis of identification or fulfilment.

True to his “method of analogy” Husserl sets out in his Göttingen lectures and in the research manuscripts of that period to discover and describe similar and parallel structures of empty positing and fulfilling intuitions in the sphere of emotion and willing-acting as well. This has meant abandonment of the analysis of these acts which he had offered in the *Logical Investigations*.²⁶ In this earlier work Husserl had classified acts into objectifying acts and non-objectifying acts on the basis of their thetic character or position-taking regarding being.²⁷ Presentations and judgments alone were claimed to be objectifying acts, namely acts that take a position in regard to the being of what is presented; therefore they alone can enter into synthesis of fulfilment. Feeling acts and acts of willing acting are non-objectifying acts. As non-objectifying acts they do not have their own ‘act-material’²⁸ and therefore do not have their own objects; neither do they take position on being on non-being of object. As intentional acts, of course, they are intentionally related to objects, but the objects to which they are related are supplied by the underlying

objectifying acts (acts of presentation or judgment). In other words, they are founded acts; they are founded on acts of presentation or judgment. Feeling acts are directly founded on acts of presentation or judgment; and acts of willing are directly founded on feeling acts and through these indirectly on acts of presentation or judgment. Accordingly, my act of liking a rose (which is a feeling act) should be analysed in the following way. A rose is presented to me in an act of presentation; and founded or built on this act of presentation another intentional act arises which relates itself to this presented rose. And if I decide to acquire that rose what happens is that built on the act of liking, an act of willing arises whose goal is to acquire the rose. What is to be noted here is that both the act of liking and of willing do not have their own objects; objects are supplied by the act of presentation; neither do they havethetic characters (position-takings regarding the being of what is presented) which can enter into synthesis of fulfilment. And without the possibility of synthesis of fulfilment it is impossible to talk about rationality, of distinguishing acts of correct valuation and willing from acts of incorrect valuation and willing. Therefore, in Göttingen lectures Husserl offers another analysis of acts of valuation and volition.

According to the new analysis feeling and volitional acts have their own intentional objects; they are called values. Husserl declares, “Values are objects and objects of a completely unique region.”²⁹ An object can have two categories of properties: “natural properties” and “value-properties”. Both kinds of properties are equally objective; but the latter kind of properties does not belong to the essence of the object; they are extra-essential properties of things. The non-axiological objectivities are completely self-standing and remain even when the axiological properties which are founded in them are removed. But the axiological objectivities cannot exist independent of the founding non-axiological objectivities.³⁰

In the new theory offered in the Göttingen lectures Husserl also distinguishes between acts of empty meaning and acts of fulfilling

intuitions in the sphere of feelings as well and contends that they can enter into synthesis of fulfilment. Thus, in parallel to perception (*Wahrnehmung*) in the sphere of theoretical reason, there is an act of “value-ception” (*Wertnehmung*) in the sphere of axiology.³¹ Such intuitive acts give fulfilment to empty acts of valuing. Like external perception, value-ception is also conceived by Husserl as an apperception or interpretation (*Auffassung*) of sense-contents (*Empfindungsgehalt*). The sense-contents here involved are the “sense-feelings” (*Empfindungsgefühle*).

2. Husserl’s Post-War Ethics

Husserl’s Post-War ethics shows two distinct lines of development, both rooted in the ontology of the human person.³² In the first line, which stands in continuity with Husserl’s Pre-War reason-centered ethics and represents its culmination, Husserl views ethical life as a conscious striving to transform one’s total life according to the ideal of reason. In the second line of development ethical life is seen as a response to the inner call of love, which constitutes the “innermost center” of the personal subject. Both the lines of development are rooted in his ontology of the person.

Husserl’s conception of the “I” (ego) develops gradually. In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl expressly rejected the idea of a pure ego as the center and owner of the stream of consciousness;³³ there is only a unified stream of consciousness, which he called the empirical ego. But in *Ideas I* Husserl accepts the existence of a pure ego as the center and owner of the stream of consciousness.³⁴ It is a subject in so far, the acts of consciousness are his acts; he is an agent in so far as he performs these acts. But this agent-subject is still a characterless empty point. Subsequently, especially as he delves deeper into the phenomenology of the pre-predicative life of consciousness, the agent-subject gets transformed into a person with a character and individually of his own with his convictions, capabilities, skills, acquired habits and his own

individually peculiar ways of doing things. Ethical decisions are taken by this personal “I”, on the basis of who I am; they are not imposed on me from outside; I alone am responsible for them. Husserl writes: “I do not know what I have to do by virtue of any causal investigation that I undertake or that others undertake on my behalf. I am the only person responsible for what I must do by virtue of who I am. I have to reflect as the person that I am now as the ego in the ‘instant’ in which I exist”...³⁵

In the first line of development of Husserl’s Post-War ethics the ethical subject is determined as the autonomous rational subject; and in the second line of development ethical subject is determined as a loving person.

2.1 Ethical Life as Striving for Self-Transformation according to the Rational Ideal

“You must change your life”- this demand of Rilke’s *Archaic Torso of Apollo*³⁶ reverberates in all its urgency through Husserl’s ethical writings of the Post-War period, especially through the articles that he wrote for the Japanese journal *Kaizo* with the title “Renewal” (*Erneuerung*). Husserl asserts in one of these articles: “Renewal of humans, of the individual human as well as the communalized humanity is the chief theme of all ethics. The ethical life in essence is one that stands consciously under the idea of renewal, a life guided and shaped willingly by the idea of renewal.”³⁷ Thus, ethical life is all about life’s renewal and change.

This renewal consists in the consciously effected transformation of the ordinary self to an absolutely rational self in all its thinking, valuing and volitional acting.³⁸ According to Husserl, ethical life, the life of renewal, begins with the awakening of the sense of the absolute “should”;³⁹ and this “should” is the “should” of the categorical imperative of reason which commands you to regulate your total life according to reason⁴⁰. Ethical life is thus a consciously effected life of reason.

But what does it mean to direct one's life according to reason? Husserl's answer runs: "My life is rational, that is, practical-rational when I will the best possible and act to bring it about according to my best possibility, when I resolve myself not let my life drift away, but strive to achieve the best possible..."⁴¹ In other words, one is practical-rational when one follows the categorical imperative which is formulated by Husserl as: "Do the best possible from among the achievable open to you"⁴²

Following the categorical imperative presupposes that there is a sphere of possible actions open to me in each particular situation and that I can evaluate them as to the degrees of their value as well as their achievability in the light of my abilities and skills. In the light of these rational considerations, I choose the action which has the highest degree of value, and which is achievable by me. Husserl points out that these prerequisites are in fact met I can become aware of the various possible ways of acting open to me. I can objectively evaluate these possibilities with respect to their values as well as consequences. I can also take into account my own capabilities and skills.⁴³ In the light of all these considerations I can decide what the best among the achievable is and commit myself to achieve it. When I do that, I do according to the demand of practical reason.

However, according to Husserl, acting rationally in all particular situations of life does not, by itself alone, make one's life fully rational and ethical. Besides acting in particular situations according to reason, the general goals that we set for our lives, like choosing of a profession should also be governed by demands of reason. Finally, and more importantly if my life is to be "consciously rational" and not merely "objectively and incidentally rational" I should thematize in a "bird's eye view" (*Überschau*) my entire life and resolve to bring it in its entirety under the norm of reason.⁴⁴ It is this act of the "bird's eye view" (*Überschau*) that enables one to give one's total life a rational and ethical form.⁴⁵

As we have observed above Husserl's view of ethical life as a life of reason is predicated upon his ontology of the person. Two ontological determinations of the personal subject play crucial role in Husserl's ethics of the rationally self-determining subject: autonomy of the subject and his "embeddedness" in the community of persons.

The idea of an autonomous subject giving itself its own norms of life is a central tenet in the ethics of modernity in general and of Kant and Fichte in particular. During his years in Freiburg Husserl was particularly impressed by Fichte's notion of the self-determining autonomous subject. But the important question here is: Is the subject in fact autonomous in its willing and acting? In other words, proving the autonomy of the acting subject is crucial for Husserl's ethical theory; and *that* question is not an ethical question but an ontological one about the subject. Husserl answers this ontological question in the affirmative.

For Husserl, freedom is fundamentally freedom from the forces of inertia and passivity that constantly act as a dead weight on the will that strives forward to realize the best possible value.⁴⁶ But how do we know that we have such freedom from passivity? Is not human life a rudderless ship which is constantly tossed about and driven hither and thither by the inclinations, habits drives etc. that are always active beneath the surface of the conscious mind?⁴⁷ In a research note of 1923 Husserl claims that we know with self-evidence that we are free; the same self-evidence of the "I am" with which modern philosophy begins is also available for the "I can" and the "I act". At least there are certain cases of the "I act" where when the acting is going on I can reflectively verify that that acting has been completely determined by me and that I have not let any forces of passivity dictate that act. However, Husserl also points out that I also have self-evidence of certain cases of the "I act" where I clearly see that the free choice of the "I" has been disturbed and the "I" has let itself be dictated by habits, passivity etc. But, according to Husserl, such disturbances of freedom do not cancel out the possibility of freedom. "I have the evidence of the "I can", of freedom, in one with the evidence of

the possible disturbance of my freedom; but the latter evidence does not cancel out freedom.⁴⁸” I can rationally tackle the disturbances of freedom, in that I observe them and learn from them that they have certain regularity and that I can take measures to prevent them from disturbing my freedom.

In other words, Husserl claims that even though factually the acting subject’s freedom is often encroached upon by his tendencies and inclinations, if he is sufficiently vigilant and resolute the possibility of free choice is always open to him. There is always a self-correcting dynamic operative in the subject. In the following passage Husserl shows how the ethical subject marches forward along the path of autonomous self-determination, in spite of the experiences of being influenced by passivity. “I take decisions after rationally thinking over the matter, not according to some blind and capricious inclination; but ofcourse often I decide according to inclination in spite of my rationally thinking over the matter, and against the result of such thinking. Afterwards, I do not like it and think over how to avoid such things in the future; my will resolves strongly to avoid such happenings. But that resolution also does not hold out for long; and when I act against it I have the consciousness of inconsistency, of will-contradiction (*Willenswiderspruch*) and of my own un-worth and of repentance. I once again affirm my general will and my general valuing, I re-enforce their strength so that now it can withstand greater inner resistances. I march forward and reduce my personal un-worth- this way I form my ethical “I”; this way I can form it; that is a practical possibility; and as I experience that I can, so will I act according to this in given cases. And in fact, I often do so, and in so far as I do that, I am free.”⁴⁹

Another important ontological dimension of the subject needs to be brought out to the fore, if Husserl’s ethics of the self-determining autonomous subjectivity is to keep at bay accusations of solipsism, nay, of selfishness. It is the ontological dimension of the community-embeddedness of the acting subject. The autonomously self-determining

ethical subject is not an isolated individual, having no essential ontological relatedness to the community of persons. He is firmly embedded in the whole of human community. He stands at the center of concentric circles of human communities, whose innermost circle is his family and the outermost humanity as a whole⁵⁰. In his innermost being he is influenced by others, and he can influence the communal life as such. As Husserl puts it, our communal living with others is not a living that passes one another by, but a living that lives in and through others (“*ein Durcheinander und Ineinander*”⁵¹). Because of this interwovenness of humanity I cannot value my life without at the same time valuing the lives of others;⁵² and a person who is awakened to this interwovenness (*Verflochtenheit*) of human lives values life, when he values it, in its universality⁵³. Thus, ethical life gets a global dimension.⁵⁴

2.2 Ethical Life as a Response to the Inner Call of Love

The second line of development in Husserl’s Post-War ethics coincides with and is rooted in his ontological discovery of a deeper center of the ethical subject as person. This center that goes beyond all rationality is love. Husserl writes: “It is specially to be noted that the “I” is not only the polar, centering interiority, an interiority which constitutes from out of itself sense, value and act, but is also an individual “I” which in all its presentations (*Vorstellen*), feeling-valuing (*fühlend-Werten*) and deciding has still another center, the center of love in the pre-eminent sense”⁵⁵. Thus, the human person at the centermost part of his being is a loving person, a person who experiences love as binding him to duties and value. Love calls the person to new values, duties and responsibilities. As Husserl puts it, this “innermost center of the “I” becomes the source of new kind of decisions, self-responsibilities and self-justifications.”⁵⁶ Husserl’s usual example is that of a mother’s duty for her child. The source of such duties and responsibilities is not any rational motive, but love. Thus Husserlian ethics ultimately reaches a point beyond rationality, a point of love from which ethical duties emanate; these duties and obligations are not amenable to rational

justification. Husserl writes: “There is an unconditional “You should, and you must”, that appeals to the person, and which is not subject to rational justification for the person who experiences this absolute affection; ... Its validity does not depend on any rational justifications, even where it is possible.”⁵⁷

2.3 Through Ethics to the Divine

It is well known that Immanuel Kant having demonstrated in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that pure reason is incapable of knowing anything about putative metaphysical realities like God and soul, makes these very realities the postulates of practical reason in his second *Critique*. In a similar vein Husserl who did not find any place for God within the confines of his transcendental phenomenology, finds himself pushed to address the question of God in his ethical investigations. For Husserl the question of God arises within his reflections on the possible impact of the irrationalities and uncertainties of the world on the ethical will of the person. As we have seen above every personal subject is called to an ethical task from his inner depths. Only by responding to this call of absolute duty and remaining faithful to it with a steadfast will and resoluteness can the person preserve his personhood. But the will is threatened with the possibility of slackening and abandonment of its task in the face of absurdities like sickness, death, war, possible catastrophic destruction of the world itself etc. Why to strain and strive at all if everything ultimately comes to naught? Husserl asserts that it is possible for us to assume a heroic attitude and remain faithful to ourselves even when we see clearly that the world is a ship destined to be wrecked at the end, in the same manner in which a mother who knows that the world would come to an end any moment, would remain faithful to the duties to her child.⁵⁸ However, as Husserl points out, such heroic steadfastness in the face of irrationality gives the individual only contentment with himself (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) for having remained faithful to himself at all cost, but not blessedness or happiness (*Glückseligkeit*).⁵⁹ Human beings ultimately yearn for blessedness, not merely self-contentment.

Blessedness is not the same thing as self-contentment: self-contentment is the correlate of a resolute will that stays steadfast in following the categorical imperative. It is a necessary condition of blessedness, but not a sufficient condition. In order to possess blessedness, besides having self-contentment, we should also be at peace with our own capabilities, skills etc. and with the limitations and irrationalities of the world. And to be at peace with the world and with ourselves, we should see that the irrationalities have a place in the whole 'plan'. But the world does not offer us on the rational plane any insight into such a plan. Only belief in God and his providence can help us make sense of the irrationalities and imperfections of the world. Therefore, Husserl says that blessedness can be attained only with belief in a God in whose providence everything ultimately makes sense. In Husserl's manuscripts we find the following note: "I can be blessed, and I can only be such in all suffering, misfortune, and irrationality of my surroundings, when I believe that God exists and that this world is God's world; and if I will with all the strength of my soul to hold fast to the absolute ought, and that itself is an absolute willing, then I must believe absolutely that God is; faith is the absolute and highest requirement."⁶⁰

In the citation above faith in God is demanded by human yearning for blessedness. But in another note Husserl says that faith in God is needed for the very preservation of the self; it is needed so that the will remains steadfast to its ethical task. "In order to be able to believe in myself and my true "I" and the developing in its direction, I must believe in God and in so far as I do this I see the divine dispensation, the counsel of God, and God's intention in my life."

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End Notes and Reference:

1. Husserl was Professor Extraordinarius at the University of Göttingen from 1901 to 1916.
2. Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre* (1908-1914), edited by Ullrich Melle (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988). *Husserliana* Vol.28. All references to *Husserliana* volumes will be abbreviated to Hua. followed by volume number
3. From 1916 to 1928 Husserl served at Freiburg University as Ordinarius Professor.
4. Edmund Husserl, *Einleitung in der Philosophie Vorlesungen 1916-20*, edited by Hanne Jacobs, *Husserliana Materialien IX*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012)
5. Edmund Husserl, *Einleitung in die Ethik. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1920 und 1924*, edited by. Henning Peucker, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004), Hua. 37
6. These are articles that Husserl wrote for the Japanese journal *Kaizo*. They are published in Edmund Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922-37)*, edited by Sepp Hans Rainer and Nenon Thomas, (Dordrecht: Kluwer,1989) Hua. 27
7. Edmund Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Pänomenologie: Anaysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik, Späte Ethik (Texte aus dem Nachlass 1908-1937)*, edited by Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014). Hua. 42
8. Joachim Siles Borrás, *The Ethics of Husserl's Phenomenology: Responsibility and Ethical Life*. (UK: Bloomsbury, 2011
9. In 1906 while outlining his main aim as a philosopher Husserl states that his philosophical project is to write a general and comprehensive critique of reason. Edmund Husserl, *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheories*, edited by Ullrich Melle (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1984), pp.442-9 (Hua. 24)
10. Hua. 28, p. 44
11. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay vols. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). Reference to the first volume of this work will be abbreviated as *Prole.* and to the second volume as *LI. Cf. Prole. #16*
12. As to its extent and scope Husserl's Pure Logic is wider than traditional logic or syllogistic; besides syllogistic it includes formal mathematics as well.
13. Husserl's ontology has two fundamental categories of objects: real objects and ideal objects. Real objects are objects that exist in time and space (like 'things') and those that exist in time alone (like psychic acts). Ideal objects exist neither in time nor in space; they are thought-objects given only to thought, not to senses, whether external or internal. Real sciences are sciences of real being and ideal sciences are sciences of ideal being.
14. This determination concerns only syllogistic or traditional logic, which according to Husserl is only a part of pure logic which, as theory of science includes, besides syllogistic also formal mathematics. Formal mathematics is rooted not in forms of ideal meanings, but ideal objects called numbers, sets etc.
15. Cf. *LI VI, #48*
16. *LI VI, #60*
17. Cf. *LI VI* chapter 1
18. Hua. 28, p.384. All citations from German texts have been translated by me.
19. Hua. 37, pp. 3-4
20. Hua.28, pp.29-30
21. Hua.28, p.4

22. Hua. 28, p. 35.
23. "To the form of the content of the will, that is, to the basic formations that are to be found in the essence of such a content as such there would belong theoretical laws which would run parallel to the formal logical i.e. to the analytical laws". (Hua 28, pp.49 f)
24. Hua. 28, p. 130
25. Hua. 28, p.221
26. For Husserl's analysis of feeling acts in LI, cf. LI V, #15
27. Cr. LI V, chapter 5. For a study of objectifying and non-objectifying acts see also Ullrich Melle, „Objektivierende und nicht-objektivierende Akte“, in Husserl- Ausgabe und Husserl-Forschung, edited by Samuel Ijsseling (Phaenomenologica 115, Dordrecht, 1990) pp. 35-49
28. Matter and quality are two mutually necessary moments in an intentional act and they together form the intentional essence of the act. Cf. LI V, ##20-21. Husserl describes matter of an act in the following words: "The matter, therefore, must be that element in an act which first gives it reference to an object, and reference so wholly definite that it not merely fixes the object meant in a general way, but also the precise way in which it is meant." LI V, #20
29. Hua.28, p.283
30. "The axiological objectivities are so founded in the non-axiological objectivities that the latter kind of objectivities are complete in themselves and remain even when we remove the axiological predicates which may be assigned to them and can truly belong to them." (Hua. 28, p.261)
31. Husserl uses the expression "Wertnehmung" for the first time in a manuscript from the year 1909.
32. In his "Introduction to Philosophy" lectures at Freiburg Husserl states his new plan for ethics in the following words: "Ethics as a science cannot deal with every specific individual and every particular case within its praxis, but it can teach us ... about the essence of a willing subject who acts as an agent in general, and about the essence of situations and spheres of choice in general..." [Husserliana-Materialien Vol. 9 p. 136 (emphasis added)]. Accordingly, Husserl proposes to develop his ethics on the basis of an ontology of the volitional-acting subject and of the particular situations in which he may be called upon to act. In his writings we do not find much about the ontology of particular situations; but there is a fairly well-developed ontology of the acting subject. Cf. Ullrich Melle, "Husserl's Personalist Ethics, Husserl Studies (2007) 23: 1-15
33. Cf. LI V, #8
34. Cf. Edmund Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), #35-37
35. Hua.42, p.404
36. Cf. Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875-1926) poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo" which ends with the call "Change your life".
37. Hua. 27, p. 20
38. In Edmund Husserl, "Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt. Sittlichkeit (Tugend) und Glückseligkeit," edited by Ullrich Melle Husserl Studies 13: 201-235, Husserl says that humans form a normal idea of man; besides this normal idea of man as such, we have

- also the idea of a “rational human” as an ethical ideal and demand. Ethical life is a striving to transform the normal idea of man according to the ideal of the rational humanity. Cf. pp. 222-223
39. “With the awakening of the sense of the absolute should awakens also the ethical self-consciousness”. Cited by Sebastian Luft in “Das Subjekt als Moralische Person. Zu Husserls Späten Reflexionen bezüglich des Personenbegriffs” p. 227
 40. This new emphasis on the rational self-transformation of the individual as the chief concern of ethics is evident in his definition of that science in the Kaizo article: “Ethics is the science of the total life of action of a rational subjectivity, lived from the point of view of reason that regulates this whole life in a unified way.” (Hua. 27, p. 21)
 41. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p.212
 42. Elsewhere Husserl conceives of reason in its most extensive sense inclusive of all the three kinds of reason. Thus, the demand that our lives be directed by reason would mean to aim at and strive to be guided by experiences of synthesis of fulfilment between an empty position-taking and a corresponding intuitive act. Thus in his “Introduction to Philosophy” lectures, after having determined that blessedness is the ultimate aim of ethical life, Husserl defines blessedness in the following words: “A blessed total life as such would be a unified life in which all its intentions and all its striving would play itself out in the form of fulfilled intuitions”. (Hua. 35, p. 44)
 43. Cf. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p.212
 44. “Besides other general goals and the considerations related to them, I can also set for myself a formal goal that overarches all of them: taking a bird’s eye view of my whole life and valuing it and myself as its autonomous will-subject (Willenssubjekt) I can resolve myself to follow the general practical possibility of directing my whole life according to reason... in that way I am not only objectively and incidentally rational but consciously rational.” Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p. 212
 45. For a detailed examination of Überschau and its significance for Husserlian ethics see Andrea Staiti, “A Grasp from afar: Überschau and the Givenness of Life in Husserlian Phenomenology” in *Continental Philosophy Review* (2013) 46:21-36
 46. “As subject (man) is free in so far as he can resist passivity, in so far as he can, instead of giving in to practical affections and inclinations, ‘set them out of force’, thoughtfully consider (überlegen) and freely give expression to his wilful ‘yes’ or ‘no.’” (Wert des Lebens, Wert der Welt, p.211)
 47. In Husserl’s ontology of the person two fundamental categories are operative: Activity and Passivity. The former refers to the area of the consciously acting ego, and the latter to the area from which drives, habits, inclinations, tendencies etc. constantly affect the conscious ego variously. Husserlian phenomenology practices investigation and description of both areas.
 48. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt. p.213
 49. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt p.213
 50. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p. 206
 51. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p.217
 52. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p. 210
 53. Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt, p. 210

54. It may be remarked here that precisely at this point Husserlian ethics opens up the possibility of an environmental ethics; if one can show phenomenologically the “embeddedness” of the individual in the environmental world, one can also show that the decisions of the acting subject have to be responsive to and responsible for the environment.
55. Cited in Sebastian Luft, *Das Subjekt als Moralische Person*, p. 227
56. Ibid
57. Hua. 42, pp.391-392
58. Cf. *Wert des Lebens. Wert der Welt*, pp.210-11
59. Cf. *Ibid.*, 216
60. Cited in, Ullrich Melle, “Husserl’s personalist ethics”, p. 15

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