

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: The subject of this article concerns the what, the how and the why of moral phenomenology. The first question we take into consideration is „What is moral phenomenology”? The second question which arises is „How to pursue moral phenomenology”? The third question is „Why pursue moral phenomenology”? We will analyze the study *Moral phenomenology: foundation issues*¹, by which the American phenomenologist Uriah Kriegel aims three lines of research: the definition of moral phenomenology and the description of field research within the phenomenological tradition; the establishment of a method of moral phenomenology research; the emphasis of the purpose of such research and its importance for moral philosophy in general.

Keywords: moral philosophy, moral phenomenology, ethics, phenomenology of morality, meta-ethics, normative ethics, cognitive science.

WHAT IS MORAL PHENOMENOLOGY?

Uriah Kriegel notes that the term "phenomenology" is ambiguous. The first acception of the concept refers to the philosophical tradition generated by the work of Edmund Husserl. Another understanding of the term concerns a first-person study on experiential aspects of mental life.

Moral phenomenology as a moral philosophy in the phenomenological tradition

Moral phenomenology as moral philosophy in the Husserlian phenomenological tradition is, first and foremost, a first-hand philosophy program. In Kantian tradition, speculative philosophy concerns with the justification of our uncritical thinking, the model of

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¹ Uriah Kriegel (2007). *Moral phenomenology: foundation issues*. “Phenomenology and the Cognitive Science Journal”, Arizona: "Tucson" University.

a pre-reflexive world solidly tied of the critical reflection of epistemic foundations. Husserl's developing program of speculative philosophy is as richer and deeper one as Immanuel Kant's program, therefore it has to be treated seriously.

However, Uriah Kriegel provided us a very crude description of speculative philosophy. Before all, he reminds us that the English philosopher John Stuart Mill notoriously asserted that the ordinary objects are nothing but "permanent possibilities of different sensations." This statement is problematic in two very different ways. Firstly, an object appears to us in a variety of ways that go beyond the sensations, and these non-sensory impressions, such as perceptions, cognitive states, emotions, feelings, etc., form our concepts of objects. Secondly, whatever our views about objects are, certainly, they are more than mere sensations. In this context we can initiate a double departure of Mill's thesis. First, instead of identifying objects with "permanent possibilities of sensation", we'll identify objects with "permanent possibilities of appearance". And, also, instead of assuming the identity between objects and "permanent possibilities of appearance", we can postulate only an intimate connection, probably a kind of association, between them. The result is that, although objects are not identical with "the constant possibility of sensation", they are a constituent manner connected to the "permanent possibilities of appearance".

This more liberal version of Mill's idea is a more plausible interpretation of the Husserlian point of view. This view is afterwards used by Husserl in the service of speculative philosophy. According to Husserl, I can misinterpret that the table is red, but I can not misinterpret that the table only seems red to me. Apparitions or appearances are in fact ways in which objects appear. Therefore, there is no reality devoid of appearances. So when I know how the depictions of objects appear, I also know how is the appearance itself. If the table above mentioned is indeed connected in a constitutive manner to the set of all its appearances, then, through the participation at the appearances, I can secure with a plus of confidence my uncritical knowledge of the table. In other words, I can fundament my knowledge of something which transcends me in principle (the object from the table) on the knowledge of something which doesn't have to transcend me in principle (though it has to transcend me in practice), namely the set of all appearances of the table. This program depends on the cognitive act of participating at the appearances connected in a

constitutive manner to objects. That involves at least two steps: firstly, putting in brackets (the reduction of) the outside, meaning the independent existence of this table in the order of the focus of the mind on its appearances, using imaginative variations; and, secondly, taking into account how mass appears in different conditions. Ideally, the result would be a hermetical, but safe knowledge of the set of the appearances of the table, henceforth in a constitutive manner connected.

Husserl developed this program in a very detailed and systematic manner, but important for our knowledge of the realm of facts. However, his comments on the field of values have been more disparated. Here, Uriah Kriegel recalls the works of Max Scheler on the field of values. In Scheler's view, the field of values is emerging primarily in emotion and affection, and not in perception or cognition. Values and valuable objects seem to be more reliable and clearer in the emotional experience.

Therefore, to understand an object as an axiological set of all objectual appearances would require the application of something similar to Husserlian reduction at emotional experiences, using imaginative variations to contemplate the emotional-affective appearances of objects. Following this project, Scheler developed a system for the phenomenological values. In the heart of the system is an order of five non-moral values, based on five types of assessments. From bottom to top, they are: tangible values or values sensitive; instrumental values as necessity and utility; values of life; mental values, such as those associated with beauty and goodness; and values related to what is divine or saint. In terms of moral value, it is simply the preference of positive values to negative ones within each axiological grade. This special structure in the range of values, meaning the supervision of moral values over non-moral value can be "read", according to Scheler, as an intuitive act that reflects the preferences involved in our emotional experiences.

Thus, in Scheler's work, the Husserlian program or a speculative philosophy finds an ethical counterpart. Following Emmanuel Levinas, the epistemological nature of the phenomenological program is replaced by ethics based on speculative philosophy. Levinas argued that it is something special in the way other human beings appear to us, something missing in the appearances of tables or trees. In the experience of meeting with someone else's face, the otherness itself is revealing to us. Other

occurrences appear as something that transcends us, in principle. Indeed, transcendence itself appears to us in the sense that it is a distinct phenomenological component of our experience of the other. Husserl believed that the reality of thing should be constructed upon a single entity whose appearance consumes the reality of the depictions of objects. But Levinas suggests that thing could be built in an opposite manner to Kantian metaphysics: by focusing on a single entity whose appearance transcends reality, revealing itself in its true form, meaning the otherness of human being. Only in this way we can hope for getting in contact with things themselves. While work is to Husserl eliminated through the colonization of reality, to Emmanuel Levinas work is overcome by the reality it is invaded by.

The philosopher whose work aimed accurately a moral phenomenology in both senses of the term - as moral philosophy in phenomenological tradition and as first-person study on the experiences of moral life- is Mandelbaum². The greatest quality of his theory is the idea that moral experiences of „direct moral obligations" are what he called the sense of demand. Mandelbaum describes this feature as a force that, like any other forces, has a direction and an origin. The direction of this force is the Self: we always claim moral experiences which turn against us. And we always experience the origin of this moral requirement outside of us that we, as it derives from something else than ourselves. Although the phenomenological tradition was primarily epistemological, it provides a rich basis for developing the phenomenological analysis of the concrete elements of our moral experience. Recent studies of moral phenomenology have been accomplished by R.C.Sokolowski³ and J.J.Drummond. Their studies reveal that the awareness of the fundamental problems implied by a phenomenological analysis of moral philosophy is essential for the phenomenological school.

²Mandelbaum, M. (1955). *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

³Sokolowski, R.C. (1985). *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP; Idem (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Idem (2002). *The phenomenology of friendship*. "Review of Metaphysics", 55, 451-471

Moral phenomenology as a first-person study over the experiential aspects of our moral life

A perennial philosophical question is implied by the relationship between facts and values. The matter has always been whether the distinction is exclusive or not: if there are facts that are values and / or vice versa, if there are values which are facts. Without any doubts, the distinction is exhaustive: in the sense that there is no third type of entity that is neither fact nor value. Our main instrument for the study of facts is science. Science seeks to discover how the world is, and today we trust that it generally has the ability to do so. Although much remains to be explained about the Universe, we have a reasonable understanding of what surrounds us. However, there is an area where scientific progress has been more limited: the nature of consciousness experience.

Although psychological and neuro-physiological researches have significantly increased our knowledge of consciousness, there is a widespread idea that this knowledge has advanced only marginally our understanding of consciousness. The problem is that science, with its always third person references, involving only objective methods of research, can only be relevant when it comes to the mechanical aspects of consciousness, which is not also valid for its experiential aspects. Science usually took into consideration what is not consciousness, but did not consider what the consciousness is. For a better understanding of what is consciousness, we must engage in a kind of first-person study of consciousness experience. Therefore, we need a subjective way of access to our own consciousness. The original study of the experience of consciousness is often mentioned as phenomenology. Likewise, it has often been said that phenomenology is the only way to study subjective consciousness itself, unlike its manifestation in speech and behavior, or that phenomenology means to study what is consciousness, as opposed to what does the consciousness.

Since neurophysiological investigations on neural correlations of phenomena of consciousness in the brain are interested only in the study of these correlations, phenomenology enlightens the phenomena of consciousness itself, and it's not looking only for certain correlations between the states or the emotions of consciousness. Similarly, while the psychological models over the consciousness reveal themselves to us as causal relationships specific

to a conscious mental episode, phenomenology will provide us a portrait of the intrinsic nature of conscious episode. In other words, neuroscience and cognitive psychology study the mechanics of conscious states and activities and by no chance one's inner sense of consciousness experience. It takes phenomenology.

It should be stressed that the main instrument for the study of the field of values is not science, but moral philosophy. Morality has traditionally been divided into two main subfields: Meta-ethics and normative ethics. The distinction is very clear: normative ethics questions good things and meta-ethics questions what does goodness suppose to be. Both of them have led to investigations in the psychology of moral agents and in the analysis of their personal values, which is the psychology of morality. However, a limitation of moral psychology is that, although it has been practiced so far, it has focused exclusively on the mechanics of conscious states, rather than the experience of consciousness, and it had especially researched the moral perception, thought, deliberation, emotions, feelings, etc. Moral psychology has tried to discover what moral functions satisfy the mental states in the moral agent - that is to follow not only what is pleasing to it, but also times when the state of moral agent is changing. In parallel with this limitation we encounter the scientific study of consciousness, where consciousness is seen as a main element in the field of facts.

Our study on the field of values is a specific phenomenological completion, necessary to the first person study on the experiential aspect of our moral life. This should be the phenomenology of morals. It should investigate the experiential dimension of the morality responsible for mental states and processes, in the service of moral philosophy and psychology.

How should we investigate a phenomenology of morality?

Generally, there are several preliminary conditions for the viability of a field of research. In our case, there are mainly three basic conditions: Firstly, we must have in mind more or less clear the conception of the phenomena that the research seeks to address. Secondly, we must have a preliminary reason to believe that the so conceived phenomena really exist. Thirdly, we must have reliable methods for the study of these phenomena. Perhaps there are other prior conditions, and, of course,

other goals, but here we are dealing only with these three preliminary observations as they relate to the phenomenology of morals.

There are at least five ways in which a claim about our moral life could be called phenomenological. Supposing that someone argues that, from a phenomenological point of view, our moral justice that "slavery is wrong" corresponds to an objective fact.

This statement acknowledges the following five interpretations:

- (1) Usually, the statements showing that slavery is wrong tend to be a kind of superficial grammatical statements about the objective fact;
- (2) Regardless of the grammar of such utterances, when a normal person is asked whether her trial about the fact that slavery is wrong is to describe an objective fact, she usually says no;
- (3) Regardless of what she provides, that person believes, without doubt, that her judgment is an objective fact;
- (4) Regardless of what people think, common-sense belief that this court has, that slavery is wrong, is an objective fact;
- (5) Regardless of the status and the belief of the person, when she decides that slavery is wrong, she usually suffers a phenomenal experience which is exposed by the experience of an objective fact.

These five phenomenological concepts: grammar, people claim, people's belief, the sense of certitude and the phenomenal experience were probably mixed in a certain degree with the out of date meanings of the term "phenomenology", relevant to the literature of this field. But for the purposes of a first person study on our moral life, more relevant would be the fifth concept which is proper to the object of moral phenomenology. All other uses denote phenomena that can be fully studied in the third person, from an objective point of view. But it is not the same with the fifth notion. Through this concept, the phenomenological analysis takes into consideration that our moral judgment on slavery has to be objective in the sense that it instantiates a specific phenomenal property. Phenomenal properties are properties of mental states in the virtue of what is alike to a subject sensitive to change. Therefore this is the notion of experience which is the focus of discussions about phenomenal consciousness in the philosophy of mind.

Are the mental states morally instantiated, such as intricate phenomenal properties? In other words, is there a moral phenomenality to investigate a moral phenomenology? We must ensure that the answer is yes, so there won't follow a subject without a

subject. The discussions over phenomenology in the philosophy of mind sometimes operated with an extremely weak conception about the phenomenality, in which are included only the sensory qualities such as redness, bitterness, pain or pleasure. An explicit supporter of such weak conception might be inclined to reject the existence of moral phenomenality.

We might be tempted to think that we could justify moral phenomenology even against the poor conception about phenomenality, in the extent that emotional and perceptual experiences can be analyzed from a moral point of view. Watching a bunch of hooligans throwing a cat into the fire for a laugh, we can literally see that they are doing something wrong. So there is such thing as moral perception, and of course, there is something like moral emotion: the experience of indignation, for example, is a truly moral "fuel". Since very few adopt a poor conception about phenomenality, so they exclude perception and emotion, there is room enough for moral phenomenology even without such conceptions. However, this option has important limitations. Firstly, although we see that the hooligans are doing something wrong, there is no doubt that we can not see the injustice of what they're doing themselves. Injustice is not presented visually in my mind. Therefore, a weak phenomenologist would claim that there is no phenomenal visual feature in my experience to match, the injustice. A defender of moral phenomenology may thus stand for a literal vision of the injustice itself. Secondly, limiting moral phenomenology at the moral perception, we would ignore the most of our moral life.

Why to investigate a phenomenology of morality?

When we examine the viability of moral phenomenology is important to consider both the theoretical foundation and the domain of theory with its functional potential. If, as we've seen before, Kriegel treated the issue of theoretical foundations of moral phenomenology, in the section related to the purpose and role of a phenomenological research on moral philosophy, now he will analyze its application domain.

In particular, Kriegel examines how the moral phenomenology does implement relevant research in meta-ethics, normative ethics and cognitive science.

Moral phenomenology and meta-ethics

One way to put the fundamental question of meta-ethics is as follows: are there any external moral facts, autonomous of the mind? Moral realism is the view according to which there are external moral facts, independent of the mind, and moral anti-realism is the view that they are not. There is also an intermediate position where the moral facts are related to facts involving secondary qualities (for example, that just-baked bread smells good), this position is that the intermediary by moral facts as external, but not as independent of mind.

These positions on the metaphysics of moral facts seem to correspond to positions on the psychology of moral commitment, it is because there are unidirectional arguments from facts involving unidirectional secondary qualities to external moral facts, independent of mind. More specifically, the so-called cognitivism about moral commitments tends to lead to moral realism, while the so-called internalism about moral commitments tends to lead to moral anti-realism. Cognitivism is the view that moral commitments are cognitive functions which represent the world as including certain factors about what is good, nice, straight, honest, etc.

It is implausibly that our moral life is nothing more than a big illusion. Even if someone accepts the cognitivism and rejects the great illusion of our moral life, he must bind to an external dimension, namely, moral mentally-independent facts, to which cognitive representations are transitive (they make some correct and others incorrect) as for realism. Internalism is the perspective that moral commitments are inherently motivated. Any alleged moral fact it represents should display in and out the property of being inspected. Just as representations of such facts may be inherently motivated, even if there is something strange in the property to be inspected. It is implausible to impose such a property to an entire field of facts works, but is even more true, as common sense suggests, to assume that there aren't such facts, such as those for antirealism.

Cognitivism and internalism are in tension one with another, therefore, the traditional portrait of the mind divides the operations of mind into two non-overlapping groups: on the one hand, there are processes and cognitive functions whose belief is a paradigm that seeks to build a true representation of the world. This representation must be as disinterested and objective as possible. On the other hand, there are processes and conative functions whose desires are

paradigms, which guide the behavior of subject, governing the motivational fund of impulses by conatus. The result is a theory of motivation, according to which inherent motivational functions are rather cognitive than conative and cognitive functions are rather descriptive than motivational. Against the fund of such a theory of motivation, moral commitments can be either cognitive or motivational, but not both.

Some philosophers have rejected this theory of motivation and supported a kind of cognitive internalism distributing moral commitments as inherently motivating cognitive functions. These philosophers are usually tempted by a sort of secondary quality amount of moral facts that is intermediary to realism and antirealism. From this perspective, moral commitments represent certain dispositions that emphasize inherent motivational functions in the right moral agents. For example, the judgment "slavery is wrong" is correct if slavery foregrounds in the right moral agents the tendency of disagreement, evasion, or fight against slavery. Thus, meta-ethical positions tend to correlate with them and, although they find their expression in them, they gather moral commitments. Realism is correlated with the mixture of cognitivism and externalism, antirealism is correlated with the mixture of non-cognitivism and internalism, and the secondary quality amount of moral facts, with the mixture of cognitivism and internalism. Traditionally, the question if moral commitments are in their origin cognitive or motivational (or both) has been investigated by a careful examination of their properties of not being representable and functional. The working assumption is that moral commitments are representational and functional related to paradigmatic cognitive functions, afterwards demanding to be treated as cognitive. But if they are functionally and representational related to paradigmatic conative functions, moral commitments require to be treated as conative or motivational.

Moral phenomenology and normative ethics

Life without perceptual experiences could be very boring, but still worth living. In contrast, life without emotional experiences may as well not be worth living. Some emotional experiences are central to the value of the individual life; they give sense to life and determine how a meaningful life is for the one who lives it. Therefore, seeking a better life may require a way of understanding the emotional

experiences of moral phenomenology.

Consider the following problem: in any major religion there is a routine practice of thanksgiving to God for all the positive elements of one's life. Although an Orthodox Jew is obliged to stop thanking God when he eats bread, this practice of focusing your mind on what is positive in your life plays a central role in creating and supporting welfare. Unfortunately, the practice is missing from secular culture and lifestyle, because the secular person does not have a God to thank. Yet one might wonder if he wouldn't deserve for those who hope to secular flourishing or profane *eudaemonia*, to find a suitable replacement for the religious experience of gratitude. Whereas it is essential that the phenomenology of gratitude is directed towards an animated personal object and conscious, a secular Eudaemonist can not really embrace the practice of gratitude as it is. It must be replaced.

In search of such a substitution we should take a closer look over the phenomenal components of the religious experience of gratitude. Though gratitude may require a correlation with a personal object which is responsible for the foundations of gratitude, it is possible that some of the main components of that experience don't do so, and it could be one undirected to secular life. A central aspect of the religious experience of gratitude contains or suspends the natural attitude of taking for granted foundations of gratitude (to which someone is grateful).

Perhaps the reason why the Jew is obliged to thank God for something mundane like bread than to various other delicacies, is that the latter is something that we are usually given for granted. Also, our health, stable income, etc. are things that, from a natural attitude (within the Husserlian perspective) we take them for granted. A central element in the religious experience of gratitude is to suspend the *for granted* as opposed to the flourishing gratitude. Such suspension does not require a personal object. An even more important component is the appreciation of property. When someone stops to look at the positive elements of his life as something offered for granted, he can begin to consider them a fortune. You feel lucky when you are conscious of your health, income and family and you perceive them as fortune. The feeling of wealth becomes in those contexts much more stronger: the individual feels fortunate not only in rare occasions, when he's delving into delicacies, but also in common ones, in which you

have the opportunity to buy a loaf of bread at a stone's throw away. This kind of assessment seems to be in Kriegel's opinion the nucleus of the religious experience of gratitude and of its Eudaemonistical effectiveness.

The two central features, which aim at the wealth sense, are, on the one hand, a positive and pleasant feeling, and on the other hand, don't require a personal animated object.

Thus, a possibility to replace the secular religious experience of gratitude would be this: the experience of assessing property, which is based on the suspension of the natural attitude of looking beyond what is given for granted. This type of experience is phenomenologically overlapped sufficient enough with religious experience of gratitude, without supposing a personal object to play a parallel role in supporting the secular welfare. A secular Eudaemonist implemented, however, the following imperative: to induce in yourself that kind of experience as a daily habit. It is important to note that, in order to achieve the required imperative, there is a need of moral-phenomenological analysis. In this way, the relevance of moral phenomenology to normative ethics is illustrated. But moral phenomenology may be vital not only to the precise Eudaemonistic purpose of detailing moral precepts, but also the more global goal of building a general theory of morality and welfare. For example, in classic Aristotelian ethics of virtue, a virtuous person not only makes things right, but also makes it for the right reasons, and not only do it for the right reasons, but also feels like doing so. If so, then the fully virtuous person is characterized not only by her actions and beliefs, but also specific by an experiential dimension. What is the size and how should one characterize in general terms? What is the phenomenology of the virtuous agent? A virtue ethics should include an answer to this question and answering this question involves deepening moral phenomenology.

It is now required a more general question relating to the dilemma of whether phenomenological findings could be mobilized for or against moral theory. Horgan and Timmons⁴ argue that the phenomenology of moral deliberation is originally devoid of consistency, and this implies a manifesto against consistency. This way of thinking can create a naturalistic type of error. Eventually a

⁴ Horgan, T. & Timmons, M.C. (2005). *Moral phenomenology and moral theory*. "Philosophical Issues", 15, 56-77.

consequentialist can argue that our moral phenomenology is not consequential, but tends to be. A more reasonable way to link the phenomenological considerations of moral theory, involves two principles. The first is that "tends" implies "can." This is valid when the agent "tends" to make an action only if the agent "can" accomplish action. The second principle relates to what the agent may or may not be constrained to do by phenomenality. There is a phenomenal state P and an action, A, so that if an agent is in phenomenal state P he can not perform the action A. These two principles contend what an agent phenomenologically tends to be constrained by: we have a phenomenal state P, so if the agent is in the phenomenal state P, then it means that the agent tends to perform an action A.

Moral phenomenology and cognitive science

A recent progress in moral philosophy is to establish extensive contacts with empirical research. The moral philosophy of the twentieth century produced an abundance of ingenious experiment on mind. On the eve of the new millennium it became clear that these experiments were not inherently designed to be only about the mind, and researchers have begun to use them in neurological and behavioral studies to distinguish different layers in the moral thinking of the medium agent and decision-making. This rapprochement between moral philosophy and cognitive science has been mutually useful. The moral philosophy provides cognitive science with a particularly revealing material and cognitive science provides moral philosophy a new refreshing perspective over the perennial concepts that it uses. But a similar approach remains to be made between cognitive science and phenomenology of morals. Neurological and behavioral studies that have been elaborated so far have not discriminated conscious mental states by the unconscious ones.

There are several reasons to do otherwise; one of them is that doing so involves moral phenomenology. It has been demonstrated that many mental functions can be realized either consciously or unconsciously. However, both the neurological and the unconscious behavioral evidence, such as: perceptive sense, facial recognition, lexical processing, memory recovery, etc. are enacted. The most striking case is that of blindness, where the primary visual cortex lesions lead to complete loss of conscious vision, but not to the one of the capacity of non-conscious visual processing. However, the non-

conscious realization of a function is usually somehow functional-deficient to conscious awareness. Blind patients, for example, are more inclined to visual perception errors than normal subjects. To be aware means to contribute to achieving the most important mental functions.

Considering that an experimental study does not discriminate the moral conscious state of the non-conscious one, no matter the functional significance of consciousness in moral mental doesn't matter. Furthermore, a goal of research in this area tends to be the identification of neurological (and behavioral) correlations of moral conscience. But the usual methodology initiating such research requires the juxtaposition of conscious and non-conscious performances of the same functions. In this way we treat consciousness as a scientific variable. The juxtaposition of the conscious moral mental state with the non-conscious one would require the discrimination between the two.

CONCLUSIONS

The reason we need more moral phenomenology in order to study the moral mind in a way that dissociates the conscious realization of the non-conscious one is simple: in order to know if a particular type of episode is a potential juxtaposition, one must know which aspects of mind are regarded as conscious. Although for certain aspects of moral mental these may be unidirectional issues, for others more complicated it might not be so. While some philosophers have said that we urgently need a philosophical theory of modal operators, Uriah Kriegel believes that we certainly need an urgent moral phenomenology. The direct relevance of moral experience to the basic questions of meta-ethics and normative ethics, and also the pursuit of happiness, are in a strong contrast to occasional and the dispersed way in which its study was carried out so far. The purpose of the actual research of phenomenology and cognitive science is that of making progress regarding the rectification of the status of this situation.

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