



The Life-world as Moral World: Vindicating the Life-world en route to a Phenomenology of the Virtues

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Abstract Clarifying the essential experiential structures at work in our everyday moral engagements promises both (1) to provide a perspicacious self-understanding, and (2) to significantly contribute to theoretical and practical matters of moral philosophy. Since the phenomenological enterprise is concerned with revealing the a priori structures of experience in general, it is then well positioned to discern the essential structures of moral experience specifically. Phenomenology can therefore significantly contribute to matters pertaining to moral philosophy. In this paper I would like to contribute to the relatively small yet burgeoning field of phenomenological ethics. I endeavour to do so by first identifying and consolidating the basic level of sense-bestowal, and then outlining the a priori structures of volition in order to demonstrate how such phenomenologically discerned structures are required for moral experience. Specifically, in section one I locate moral experience as at the level of meaning that is phenomenologically identified as the life-world, and then vindicate the life-world by illustrating how it is immune to naturalistic rationalisation. By thus both securing the level of meaning that is of concern and importantly delimiting the scope of our analysis, I proceed in section two to relate the volitional analyses of Aristotle, Husserl, and Heidegger. This relation is achieved thanks to a conceptual point of continuity: '*prohairesis*'. By examining the function of this concept (as an intentional structure) and its phenomenological continuity, the ground is then prepared for further phenomenological analyses of the virtues.

Introduction

This paper serves two aims: (1) to establish the validity and viability of a phenomenology of moral experience, especially of the virtues, and (2) to illustrate a significant conceptual affinity between Aristotle, Husserl, and Heidegger. An important preparatory part of the first aim, which also serves to establish the second aim, is coming to phenomenological grips with the will. This is because the will is an important locus of our motivation to engage with the world, particularly with each other as situated in a social world of manifold contexts. In short, a phenomenology of moral experience must first take into account a phenomenology of the will. With this in view, it should be noted at the outset that willing is phenomenologically identified at the practical level of intentionality. Our characteristics, and virtues as such, manifest at this level of intentionality. It is then somewhat of a tautology to point out that the virtues (i.e., proficient moral attributes) have as their basis the practical intentionality of willing.

Since the will is a kind of practical experience in which we are engaged every day, and insofar as an analysis of the will can significantly contribute to our own self-understanding, it therefore appears to be an element of experience that rewards close and careful attention. And since the point of phenomenology is precisely to examine such experience, it is then somewhat surprising that the phenomenology of the will has been afforded relatively little attention in the phenomenological literature (while receiving significant attention in the general philosophical literature). There are, however, a number of valuable precedents for a phenomenology of the will, of which a noteworthy example is Paul Ricoeur and his numerous treatises.¹ Erazim Kohak, the translator of Ricoeur's lengthy work examining the phenomenological structures of the voluntary and involuntary, notes that: 'in approaching the problems of incarnation, of being-in-the-world, [Ricoeur] relies heavily on Husserlian techniques. Thus the entire project of *The Philosophy of the Will* is carried out within phenomenological brackets, as an intentional analysis' (1966, p. xiv).

¹ For the secondary literature regarding Husserl's account of volition, see Lotz 2006, Melle 1997, Mertens 1998, Nenon 1990, and Peucker 2008b. Regarding volition and action, see especially Embree 1992, 1996, Smith 2004, and Sokolowski 1985, 1989. And, for an expressly moral development of such analyses, see Drummond 1995, 2002, 2008, 2009a-b. Many thanks to John Drummond for kindly making a number of his research papers available to me, several of which are directly relevant to the themes of this paper.

While recognising his substantial contribution to a phenomenology of the will, we will not draw from Ricoeur, instead choosing to explore Husserl's account of the will, but without depending upon Husserl. The reason for this two-part choice is that I think a phenomenology of moral experience, and in particular a phenomenology of the virtues, is greatly facilitated not only by a comparative analysis of Aristotle's and Husserl's accounts of willing and acting, but also by briefly noting Heidegger's unique "synthesis" of these two accounts. Since our task is ultimately that of phenomenologically examining moral experience, we are then significantly aided by an examination, if not obliged to examine, the conceptual affinities running through Aristotle, Husserl, and Heidegger in these volitional and moral respects.

In aid of this task, the virtues are here singled out vis-à-vis other approaches to normative ethics simply because virtuous engagement is a mode of experience consonant with the level of meaning with which our phenomenological analyses are concerned. For instance, and to borrow from John McDowell, if it is the case that a moral outlook requires a moral theory, then ethics as a branch of moral theory has as its primary topic the concept of "right conduct" and the justification of principles of behaviour (1998, p. 50). But this is at best a roundabout way of understanding moral engagement, of understanding and examining everyday moral experience. Tending to such experience itself we are instead struck by precisely the lack of theory, and as such find McDowell's position quite evident when he writes: 'Occasion by occasion, one knows what to do, if one does, not by applying universal principles but by being a certain kind of person: one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way' (*ibid.*, p. 73). In order to phenomenologically examine our everyday moral experience as such, we must fix our attention on the life-world, and determine how this level of meaning resists naturalisation.

The first part of the paper takes a brief account of the life-world. Here, we both identify the life-world as the original level of meaning at which our moral engagements take place, and show how the life-world is as such largely impervious to the current trend toward naturalisation. Since phenomenological analyses typically eschew empiricist reductions, and since our moral transactions are identified as operative at the life-world level of meaning, then our account of the virtues as primarily operative at the life-world level of meaning requires a vindication of the life-world. That is, before examining the basic structures of volition and virtue we must first secure their context by illustrating how the life-world is not itself empirically reducible (or mathematisable). The nature of such resistance becomes clear once the 'one-sidedness' of the sciences is phenomenologically diagnosed, a

diagnosis that also allows us to identify the nature of the ‘crisis’ of our modern sciences and reason.

The second part offers an approach to resolving this crisis. This approach involves the examination of our volitional and moral engagements, and to this end we will acquaint phenomenology with virtue ethics by considering some familiar topics from virtue ethics. First, we will consider Aristotle’s notion of *prohairesis* (reasoned choice/commitment), and note how the development of character and virtue as such involves a habituation (*ethos*) of such reasoned choices, which then entails a nurturing of a moral expertise (*phronesis*) that is analogous to the development of any general skill. To this we will then compare Husserl’s intentional analyses of volition, the result of which is that the virtues are phenomenologically discerned as self-empowered determinations of our own being rather than passively acquired characteristics. Next, Heidegger’s appropriation of Aristotle’s practical philosophy is noted, with particular reference to Heidegger’s notion of ‘resoluteness’ as a translation of Aristotle’s ‘prohairesis’. This familiar point is interesting by itself, but is particularly instructive for our purposes because in view of the illustrated affinity between Aristotle and Husserl, Heidegger’s development of phenomenology is then in this respect clearly continuous from Husserl’s phenomenology. Since *prohairesis* and volition figure alike in prominence for Aristotle, Husserl, and Heidegger, phenomenology is then not only poised to significantly contribute to discussions in virtue ethics and philosophy of action, but is itself a substantively moral exercise as such. In short, a phenomenology of the virtues appears to be a fruitful line of enquiry, perhaps simply because virtuous engagement is a mode of experience that falls nicely within the purview of phenomenology’s concrete analyses of lived experience.

1. The Life-world and its Resistance to Naturalisation

Before we embark on a phenomenological analysis of moral experience and the virtues, we first need to secure the level of meaning with which we are concerned, the level at which we will identify everyday moral experience. But in order to do that we need to enact an attitudinal shift, only after which can we point to the life-world and illustrate its resistance to naturalisation.

1.1. *Recognising the Life-world*

In short, an “attitude” is a mode of engagement that at once is both determined by and determines a specific field of objects. More specifically, an attitude is a style of engagement that has a particular correlative interest (object); that is, it involves a *style* that is already doxically and emotively established, and an *interest* (object) that in-turn determines the style of engagement. For instance, intrigued by Dali’s painting “Cabaret Scene” I become locked into an aesthetic attitude; paying attention to the structure of my judgements about this piece I shift into a propositional attitude; while reorienting my attention once more on the painting I then become interested solely in the geometric figures, and as such my attitude shifts once more, but this time into a geometric attitude. The attitude I adopt in each case is not only in accordance with the *kind of object* with which I am engaged, but also, and correlatively, the object-kind determines the *way in which I engage* with the world. What is more, since the adoption of any attitude presupposes both doxic and evaluative levels of intentionality, the notion of ‘attitude’, or style of engagement, is then intrinsically woven in with the volitional level of intentionality (of which more in a moment).

To this it is worth adding at least two points. First, that the most general and significant attitudes identified by Husserl are (i) the original natural attitude, which is the basis for all other attitudes, and is the attitude in which our beliefs in general straightforwardly posit the world’s actual existence; (ii) the practical attitude, which, as an immediate development of the natural attitude, involves our everyday navigation in our relative cultural environments, and all that they may entail (e.g., specific social and technological structures with which we are familiar, and which we identify in varying degrees as significant to our living space, or ‘home-worlds’); (iii) the theoretical attitude, which is fundamental to the development of the natural sciences, is the attitude that occludes practical and cultural concerns, and (iv) the philosophical or phenomenological attitude. Since this last attitude is motivated by a desire for clarification and understanding of both the sciences themselves and the constitutive activity that the sciences require, it must therefore operate outside the framework and categories of those sciences.

This peculiar last kind of attitude brings us to the second, and perhaps most crucial point, which is that such shifts in attitude entail an express ‘reorientation’ of our concern (cf., Husserl 1970, p. 280-81). This reorientation involves an explicit decision to refocus our attention to a different theme of objects. For example, reading a novel I find myself absorbed in the story and impressed by the narrative, only to then refocus my attention to the

syntactical structure of the text itself. Similarly, watching a film I am engaged by the dialogue and plot, only to realise and thus refocus my attention to the significance of these specific elements to the guiding *meaning* of that particular film as a whole. It is important to point out that such a decisive ‘reorientation’ is not only pervasive throughout our everyday engagements, but is also key to the shift from the natural to the theoretical-scientific attitudes (not to mention the philosophical attitude). It is only by virtue of a *decision* to shift our attitude or style of engagement from the everyday to the scientific, and by virtue of a *commitment* to that specific attitude, that we come to understand the world in natural scientific terms.

1.2. *Précis of the Life-world*

By acknowledging the multitude of attitudes at our disposal, we are thus, in a very basic fashion, prepared to discern the life-world as the basic level of meaning (provided, of course, that we are *willing* to pay attention to the meaning structures that primarily are not naturalistically burdened). The typical account of the life-world is that it is the level of meaning at which our everyday life is engaged. It is the original layer of meaning with which we are most familiar; it is the ‘obvious’ world that we navigate in our everyday living. As correct as such a general definition may be, it borders on banal since there is much more at work in the concept of the life-world. We would therefore do well to treat each part individually.

Focussing solely upon the notion of ‘world’ we find that, upon approaching any given thing or object in the world, such an object is never given in isolation. That is, what remains constant for all things is that they are always co-given within a horizon, and the horizon is as such always co-given, whether implicitly or explicitly. Things are thus present *as* within a horizon. In the everyday practical-cultural sense (i.e., non-theoretical or non-scientific sense), the ‘world’ is not a thing since it is not present *as* within a horizon. It *is* indeed the totality of things in the objective theoretical sense but, from a phenomenological viewpoint, since the limit of our horizontal expansion is the world as a complex manifold of life-worlds, the world is then not assigned any abstract thing-value but is instead the universal horizon of our everyday activities (*ibid.*, §37). It is ultimately within the practical world-horizon that things are given—i.e., as chairs, houses, neighbourhoods, states, countries, etc. What is more, since a local horizon is always co-intended and as such is pre-given, and since the horizon appears *as* that within which things are located; and, conversely, since things are given *as*

within a horizon, the horizon is therefore not only (1) *not* an object in the normal sense—instead, its manifest appearance is achieved thanks to a decisive reorientation toward a specific theme of enquiry—but is also (2) necessary, and certainly there, whereas the intended object is subject to varying degrees of (un)certainty. In other words, the world is not just an isolable thing that we come to understand as we would in the everyday scientific sense, but is in fact that which is *fundamentally* ‘given in understanding’ (cf., Dodd 2004, p. 151), and this is because the objects of our experiential activity is always given in front of a world-background that is pre- or co-given.

On the other hand, the ‘life’ aspect of the life-world clearly involves incorporating the personal lived aspect of our engagement with the world (our ‘personal space’, if you like). If each object must present itself within a horizon, then, of course, each object-giving horizon is the place of my cognitive interest or concern. The ‘life’ component of the life-world is then none other than the horizon that animates and entertains my interest in what is present before me. That is, the (cognitive) interest that is engaged with objects in the world is neither a formal nor vacant gaze, but is instead an interest that is imbued with evaluative and practical purpose, or meaning. For example, the occurrently perceived object outside my window is not just an obscure and erratic looking structure but is indeed understood or meant (i.e., interpreted) *as* a tree, and in its context is at once also understood *as* part of my garden; while, after shifting my attention and interest, I notice that the oddly uniform conglomeration of wood and metal to my right is not just a bundle of elements but is a guitar for playing music. The ‘life’-‘world’, taken as a concrete whole, is therefore the level of meaning whereby my animated interest in the world is mutually supported, or co-constituted, by the horizon in which it takes place. And this horizon, to be clear, is not that of the simply physicalistic world. Instead, this horizon is discerned as the world that animates my interest, the world in which ‘I live’ insofar as *it* is evaluative and practical, and such that *I* accordingly engage and grapple with values and pursue technological and artistic ends (cf., Husserl 1989, §55).

But what is this so-called ‘level’ of meaning? When Aron Gurwitsch points out that the life-world is ‘a cultural world’ (1974b, p. 20), he is simply referring to the fact that since the thematisation of the life-world requires a reductive or, more precisely, a subtractive procedure regarding the objective sciences and their claims, the world with which we are left is not a blank world where our intentional engagements are rendered somehow pure or void of meaning, but instead is a world of purposeful, useful, or even useless objects—the world of instruments, machines, literature, art, etc. From this we

can identify the life-world as accordingly the everyday doxic level of meaning, the level of informed common belief. The distinction to be made here is that between the kind of cognitive activity that is undertaken in, on one hand, everyday belief statements (*doxa*) and, on the other hand, everyday scientific statements (*theoria*). More specifically, the important distinction to be made here between *doxa* and *theoria* is that the purpose of the latter is to achieve universal claims, while the former remain satisfied as subject-relative. By thus noting everyday *doxa* to be the original level of meaning, the level upon which all of our theoretical claims depend (since it would be a counter-sense to suppose that our primary engagement in the world is theoretical), we are then phenomenologically justified in pointing to the life-world as the source of the sciences; it is the basis of meaning from which the sciences are developed.

1.3. Diagnosing and Resisting the Sciences

I would now like to stitch together a number of important phenomenological findings, which really deserve far greater attention than can be provided here. As we just noted, the theoretically animated sciences typically and at least tacitly seek to achieve universal claims regarding their subject matter. In order to achieve this goal, however, the idea of a *genuine* or *authentic* science must be compromised. This is because a genuine science, which is concerned with the fundamental premise or grounds from which a conclusion is drawn (Aristotle, *Post. An.* 87a38-87b5, 88b30-89a1, *Nic. Eth.* 1140b30-41a10; Hardy 1992, pp. 4-10), must be capable of following its universal claims back to the evident cognitive acts by which they were constituted (cf., Moran 2000, pp. 126-127). A genuine science is for Husserl then a complex comprising a revival of the above Greek idea of science (as per Aristotle's *Post. An.*), rationalist and Cartesian elements (as per the primacy of pure logic vis-à-vis the empirical sciences), but also has a profound 'positivist' element (e.g., Husserl 1983, §20) insofar as that which is under examination must be brought to original or actual evidence. That is, the genuine knowledge claim must involve original evidence such that the actual subject matter is present before us and is as such true (*Wirklichkeit*).

Yet on the other hand, and complementing this notion of a genuine science, we can note the modern scientific concern with consistency or, more precisely, formal validity (*Richtigkeit*). With this notion the success of the sciences, in particular our modern sciences, quickly becomes apparent. For example, with the legitimate appropriation of logic by mathematics in the

nineteenth century (cf., Husserl 1970, Proleg. §71), and the subsequent increasing application of mathematics in the natural sciences (from astronomy, to molecular biology and the human sciences) due to a heightened ability of symbol manipulation (1970 §9g), the mathematical mode of analysis informs and directs our everyday truth claims. As such, by virtue of this distinction between truth as validity (i.e., formal inference) and truth as actuality (i.e., actual being), and by virtue of the practical scientific success of the former, it is then understandable that the latter is often dropped as a necessary requirement from scientific enquiry. Truth as consistency is the operative method of truth for the sciences, leaving genuine, authentic truth and evidence as inessential luxuries (this is of course not a disparaging comment since the level of consistency has been integral to the success of the sciences). Instead of experiencing the world in its immediacy or authenticity (which is our mode of engagement in the pre-scientific life-world and which is as such unencumbered by theoretical idealisations), the objective or mathematical engagement of the sciences ‘simply’ stresses consistency.¹ Pointing to this philosophically and existentially lacklustre situation, James Dodd notes that: “human existence requires an evidence, or experience of truth richer than logical consistency, more concrete than true proposition” (2004, p. 30). Or, as Husserl similarly notes: “of all the prejudices that have gained currency, the most ruinous is that evidence is the same as ‘logical’ evidence, that mediate evidence amounts to deductive and immediate to axiomatic, or that of immediately evident assertions (‘judgments’) (*ibid.*, Hua 29, 150: 16-20). What is more, this equivocation of robust and logical evidences, which amounts to a levelling down of the notion of evidence, is ruinous because it restricts the full potential of the human capacity of reason (e.g., emotive, practical, theoretical) to just one kind of reason, i.e., theoretical reason. That is, it is ruinous because theoretical reason, in which we find naturalistic rationalisation, is *in itself* no basis for everyday living—to maintain as much would be to fallaciously supplant the genus with the species.² “Theoretical

¹ Though, of course, such engagement is far from simple due to its complex abstractions. Nevertheless, it is ‘simple’ insofar as it is not burdened with an account of truth as actuality (*Wirklichkeit*).

² On this point it is worth alluding to Husserl’s concern over the modern misunderstanding of reason, or as he diagnoses, the ‘misguided rationalism’ of the Enlightenment. For Husserl, the ‘ratio’ of Enlightenment rationalism stems from scientific method and instrumentality, the result of which is not only that reason’s unity becomes fragmented but also that our own self-understanding as rational beings is then also distorted (i.e., by way of such rationalism’s naturalism and objectivism). See his Vienna Lecture in the *Crisis* (1970).

reason”, writes Husserl, “is a function of practical reason, the intellect is servant of the will” (1959, p. 201).¹

In view of these concerns, we should clarify the phenomenological suspicion of the sciences a little further, for since Husserl clearly endorses the mathematical advances in logic (Husserl, 1970 §9g; 2001b Proleg., §71) it may seem a little odd that he simultaneously criticises it. The criticism is directed not to the formalising technique of the mathematical or natural sciences, but to the putative achievements that are claimed to result from such techniques. For example, in his ‘Review of Ernst Schröder’s “*Vorlesungen*”’ Husserl forthrightly points to Schröder’s conflation of the ‘logical theory’ of the deductive process and the ‘technique’ of deduction itself. The problem with this conflation, for Husserl, is that the technical method of the subject domain (i.e., symbolic calculation, or computation) and their results are (mis)taken as the logical theory or proper universal account of that domain. However, according to Husserl it remains the case that the (calculative) technique is but one among a multitude of methods available in the broader pure logic (1994, p. 59/10; it appears that Husserl is here anticipating his pure logic of the Prolegomena). With this in mind it is worth noting that we can substitute (1) Schröder’s misattribution of the scope of the deductive ‘technique’ with (2) the objective scientific ‘method’ or ‘technique’, and thus see that Husserl’s concern in both cases (where deduction and scientific method are respectively Husserl’s early and later themes of analysis) is not merely analogous but is indeed a continuous concern regarding the illegitimate overreaching or overextension of the respective fields of application. That is, the former deductive field overextends its reach regarding a theory of deduction and formal theory of science in general, while the latter scientific field overextends itself regarding the constitutive activities of science in general—i.e., regarding intentional or phenomenological matters. And, it is at this point that Husserl diagnoses the above kind of self-imposed conceptual and methodological restriction, and the theoretical overreaching that it engages, as ‘one-sidedness’ (1994, p. 67/19). In other words, the consistency-driven or ‘technical’ account of knowledge that the sciences undertake substantially shifts our attention away from the idea of a genuine or authentic science and its concern with occurrent truth, thus yielding a philosophical and scientific unbalance, i.e., a scientific ‘one-sidedness’.

To unpack this just one step farther: with its objective one-sidedness, because the scientific method determines the scope of its respective ‘special

¹ “... Erkenntnis ist Funktion der praktischen Vernunft, der Intellect ist Diener des Willens”.

sciences', and because those sciences in turn determine the theme ('objective') and meaning ('naturalistic') of their respective domain, they therefore miss or overlook the cognitive processes by which they are constituted. But the result of this is, for Husserl at least, that the special sciences are unable to grasp their own *genuine* meaning, and in particular, are therefore unable to articulate the meaning of the objects they examine (e.g., we might think of the biochemical sciences of genetic engineering, cloning, or perhaps the statistical science of demography), which is partly because the special sciences do not tend to the meaning-horizon within which such objects are located, the meaning-horizon which serves to 'co-determine' the sense of those objects (Husserl 1969, p. 13/12). Thus, with this the sciences risk finding themselves in a crisis, a crisis of their own self-understanding and meaning.

From this, if we take the term 'crisis' (κρίνω, κρίσις) at its original meaning as 'division' and 'decision' (cf., Dodd 2004, pp. 44-46), and if we then consider the crisis at hand as that of the lack of meaning and self-understanding by the modern objective sciences, we are then presented with a problem of reconciliation. That is, the division that is entailed by a crisis must be co-operative with the *decision* to reconcile any resulting disparity, and the specific decision we are confronted with is how to reconcile the classical idea of science as concerned with revealing necessary and original principles or basic foundations (cf., Hardy 1992, p. 6), with the modern idea of science as concerned with truths that are universally valid yet non-foundational, the result of which is that it is ultimately concerned with contingent truths (i.e., revisable truths). Since rationality (*Vernunft*) is essential for our own self-understanding, and since the calculative empirical sciences therefore dissolve the necessity of rationality to a mere contingency, the crisis of philosophy for Husserl then entails not only the problem of how such special sciences relate to philosophy, but also, what meaning those sciences have for our human existence (Husserl 1970, §5, p. 12).

To return to the life-world, the life-world is certainly mathematisable in the standard scientific sense (*ibid.*, §9b-d). However, it is of course not itself mathematical but is simply open or susceptible to a mathematical articulation. "Instead of saying that the life-world is mathematical", writes Gurwitsch, "we should more appropriately say that nature lends itself to mathematization" (1974a, p. 56). The life-world is as such our primary mode of engaging the world, it is our fundamental practical reality, regardless of the successes of the natural, objective sciences (*ibid.*).

2. Phenomenology of Willing and the Virtues

From the above it should be clear that we are dealing, not with the theoretical moment of subjectivity, which is primarily concerned with universal claims, but with the practically rational moment of subjectivity; we are dealing, not with universal moral claims, but with moral claims that are relative, or more precisely are *proportional* to the context or situation with which we are concerned.¹ As such, and by virtue of the practical deliberation involved in such doxic affairs, we are then concerned with contingent matters and, more specifically, contingent matters that we are capable of acting upon (*Nic. Eth.* 1112a). Rather than the putative necessary truths of the scientific-theoretical attitude, we are instead concerned with the practical truths of the moral attitude (Annas 2008, p. 26; Anscombe 1981, pp. 76-77).

The distinction that Husserl makes between doxic and theoretical capacities, especially regarding the life-world, is mildly interesting as a point of continuity between Aristotle and Husserl, i.e., regarding Aristotle's division of the soul (cf., *Nic. Eth.* 1102a-1103a, 1139a). What is substantially more interesting, however, are Aristotle's notions of *boulesis* and *prohairesis* as they pertain to virtuous activity (*phronesis*) and the proficient moral practitioner (*phronimos*). Let us treat these four important terms as two pairs.

2.1. Aristotle. From *Boulesis* and *Prohairesis* to *Phronesis* and the *Phronimos*

The first two terms, *boulesis* (rational desire, or wish) and *prohairesis* (rational choice, decision, or commitment), are clearly closely related. *Boulesis*, as "reasoned desire", appears for Aristotle to be paradoxically both (1) identified as a *rational* part of subjectivity (*De An.* 432b), and (2) identified as a species of desire (*orexis*), in which case it pertains to the non-rational part of subjectivity, including the emotions and bodily desires (*De An.* 414b). Since Aristotle is not unequivocal in this case we should conclude that *boulesis* is not categorically contained and engages both parts of the "animating principle". For the most part we will opt for the term "wish" rather than "reasoned desire" since it conveniently and sufficiently captures the nature of

¹ To be clear, I am *not* suggesting that Husserl abandoned any claims of universality in moral matters. For the purpose of this paper, I simply restrict my focus to the practical level of intentionality, leaving for a future occasion the more theoretically oriented claims of moral universals.

boulesis as the capacity to aspire or want something *without* having the practicable means by which to achieve that objective (*telos*). That is, wishing pertains to the impossible or at least not yet possible, such as wishing to be immortal or being able to fly unaided. The several important points to be noted here are that wishing (rational desire) (1) is not concerned with the means by which to achieve its desired end, thus making the wish practicably impossible, which as such entails that (2) wishing overemphasises the end or object of that desire (consider a wish to win the lotto), and (3) the person who claims to set out to achieve a wishful objective is therefore justifiably thought to be ridiculous (*Nic. Eth.* 1111b-1112a).¹

Prohairesis, as reasoned choice, or what we here call *commitment* (Chamberlain 1984) is, while closely related, significantly different to wishing. This difference is perhaps best gauged as a *development* of wishing rather than contrary to it, such that we incrementally proceed toward practical action. Commitment accordingly differs from wishing, for Aristotle, because (1) though it has an end in view it is primarily concerned with what is conducive to achieving that end (*Nic. Eth.* 1111b), which entails (2) that commitment emphasises the means to the desired or intended end rather than the end itself, thus (3) characterising the committed person as practically intelligent rather than wishfully ridiculous. More specifically, commitment (*prohairesis*) is the dynamic process by which the dictates of reason exert influence upon the (“non-rational”) desire in order to both change and achieve that desire (Chamberlain 1984, p. 151). Wishing and commitment are in this way intrinsically entwined, and, what is more, insofar as *prohairesis* is at once a rational decision *and* a commitment to achieve a desired end, it is then clearly the locus of willing, i.e., of volitional activity.

In fact, according to Chamberlain, we can break *prohairesis* (commitment) down into three parts. The first requirement is (1) the development of a judgement regarding a state of affairs such that some thing is either affirmed or denied. It is here that a choice or goal or intention is determined. After this determination we (2) deliberate about *how* to achieve the goal and as such determine what is specifically conducive to such an achievement. By virtue of selecting the means we are then *in a position to do otherwise*, to not “follow-through” or be weak-willed, and it is at this moment that we engage

¹ The matter of appropriate terminology when translating *boulesis* and *prohairesis* is in fact a little more complex than this. Among numerous possibilities, and due to the scope of these concepts, translators may render *boulesis* as ‘will’ and *prohairesis* as ‘choice’. The respective terminologies adopted for this paper are for the reasons stipulated, and are options that are frequently employed in the literature.

a purpose or resolve to act according to the means to achieve the goal. And finally, (3) the original desire or wish thus becomes adjusted or modified according to the reasoned choice (cf., *ibid.*, pp. 153-54). For example, confronted with the idea of quitting smoking, or of completing a research project, or perhaps becoming vegetarian, a judgement is respectively made. Regarding the vegetarian option, if an affirmative judgement is made we then determine the means by which to achieve that end (e.g., not eating meat, arranging a healthy alternative diet, etc.), yet at once we are susceptible to lapses of attention or moments of weak will, the only constructive response to which is to resolve oneself to the means and goal. Assuming a genuine resolve, the original mere wish or empty desire is then modified and consolidated by virtue of the chosen commitment.

All of this, of course, is by no means simply a matter of subscribing to rules. Instead, the achievement and maintenance of a commitment requires habituation through practise (*Nic. Eth.* 1103b). As such, the consistent realisation of a goal is none other than the specification of a certain skill. Since moral virtue is a state involving rational choice or “commitment” (*ibid.*, 1105b1107a, 1139a, 1164b), and since such rationally conceived commitment is a certain skill, moral virtue is therefore a skill, though a skill of the practical rather than productive kind (*ibid.*, 1103a-1105b, 1140a). The person who consistently engages in intelligent moral practise (i.e., *phronesis*) is therefore proficient in such practical moral action, and it is to this person that the title ‘prudent’, or ‘moral expert’ can apply (i.e., the *phronimos*).

2.2. Husserl. *Intentional Structures of Willing*

It appears that Husserl’s phenomenological analyses of volition and action are substantially indebted to Aristotle. However, this debt is typically only registered by way of conceptual or paradigmatic continuity, rather than registered by name. Let us then note at least one point of continuity.¹

¹ Of course, the concept of volition has a rich history. I do not claim that Husserl’s such analyses stem directly and only from Aristotle. I do, however, claim that there are substantial congruencies between Aristotle’s and Husserl’s analyses of practical engagement such that a phenomenological ethics, in particular a phenomenological virtue ethics, is not only a valid and worthwhile project, but is indeed an essential feature of phenomenology itself. Aside from traditional authors of volition, it is perhaps more instructive to point to Brentano as a more proximate influence upon Husserl’s phenomenological analyses of practical intentionality (cf., 1973 esp. pp. 200-204, Part 3, I & Part 6, I-III).

Action, or more specifically, volitional action, is a concrete whole composed of several layers of intentionality. By slowing down our lived experiences in order to identify these different layers of intentionality it is important to note that this identification is not an *isolation* of each intentionality-type such that each level actually operates independently of the others; everyday action is always a complex synthesis of different kinds of intentionality.

Three levels of intentionality can be discerned according to Husserl, and they are (1) the level of pure doxic intentionality in which we find objectivating acts; (2) the emotive, evaluative, or axiological level; and (3) the level of willing or volitional activity.¹ The first and most basic level, the level of pure doxic regard, is justifiably but somewhat misleadingly labelled theoretical. This primary level of our intentional relations refers to our basic *objectifying* acts. It is at this level that we can recognise our most basic acknowledgement of an object's presence, that a given object actually exists such that we can posit that "it is there", that, for example, "the table is brown" or "the window is open" (i.e., the most basic predicative form "*S* is *p*"). Without this basic level of engagement there is no way that we can begin to value any thing, since after all, without some thing identified there is then simply nothing for us to like or dislike. The second level then refers to our emotional or valuing acts. By virtue of first identifying Dali's "Cabaret Scene", I can then develop a like or dislike for the painting and thus declare whether I find it pleasurable or nauseating. And finally, it is the level of the will or volition that we find to be the proximate cause of action. Recognising something to be pleasant or unpleasant, tasteful or distasteful, and so on, I decide what my imminent course of action will accordingly be.

In addition to these three basic intentional levels that compose a proper volitional act—an essential component of which is the fiat ('let it be done') which is conceptually akin to Husserl's concern with the 'I can'—we can primarily distinguish two kinds of will. The first kind is the will toward a future action, such as a commitment to "go on holiday at the end of the year". While the second kind is the *operative* willing, or act-willing, such as a commitment to jog a certain distance, maintain vegetarian eating habits, and so on. Since the achievement of a future action requires a commitment to the means by which to realise that action, the operative willing therefore obtains

¹ For Husserl's indication of these levels see 1983 §§95, 121, 139, 147; 1989 §§2, 4, 5, Part 3 ('Section 3') *passim*, Supp. XI; 2001a §15, App. 4; 2008 App. 4, p. 430-31/424. For analysis of these levels in the secondary literature see the references listed in note 1.

a phenomenological primacy to the resolution or resolve to a future action (cf., Melle 2007, pp. 180-84; Mertens 1998, pp. 129-31; Nenon 1990, p. 302; Peucker 2008b, pp. 3-4). Indicating precisely this distinction, and in a rich passage that is worth quoting in full, a passage that also appears to anticipate Heidegger's ontological appropriation of both Aristotle's *prohairesis* and Husserl's will, we can note Husserl:

[E]very judicative resoluteness (and thus no less every valuing and willing) is in no way merely a momentary act of the ego; rather, every act is either primordially instituting or a merely repeated act. As primordially instituting, it institutes an abiding resoluteness of the ego with the decision. The ego that has decided in this way is from now on a different ego. Something is sedimented in it as its abiding characteristic, and when the ego now repeats the judgment, it "actualises," it effectively realizes only the decision that was in it from the previous time as its abiding resoluteness. The new explicit judgment is then given not merely as a remembering of the previous decision, but rather as the previous, but enduringly valid one, as the effective realization of the earlier resoluteness that belongs to the ego (2001a, p. 443/360)

As should hopefully be apparent, there is a striking continuity between Aristotle's and Husserl's accounts of the will. For example (1) just as Aristotle's first requirement is the development of a judgement regarding an object or state-of-affairs such that some thing is affirmed or denied, so too for Husserl the objectivating acts are the basis of our action; the desired, wished, or simply intentional object is discerned here. Again (2) just as for Aristotle the desire or wish serves as the basis for volition proper, so too for Husserl the emotional or evaluative intentionality underlies the practical volition. What is more (3) for both Husserl and Aristotle, wishing is clearly distinguished from willing insofar as the wishing act excludes the possibility of realising the wished object, whereas the volitional act does include the possibility of such a practical realisation (cf., Lotz 2006, pp. 128-31; Melle 1997, p. 179; Mertens 1998, p. 127). 'It is only between practical possibilities that I can "decide"', writes Husserl, 'and only a practical possibility ... can be a theme of my will. I cannot will anything ... that does not lie in my power, in my competence' (1989, p. 270). Volition, in other words, whether as operative or future-oriented resolve, entails the recognition and emphasis upon the means by which to achieve the desired object or state-of-affairs. Lastly, though certainly not the last point of continuity that can be identified, we might also note (4) that for both Aristotle and Husserl we can will neither ideal objectivities nor historical events, but only individual actual reality

(Nenon 1990, p. 304). Volition and action, in other words, are firmly anchored in the actual world in which we live.

From such substantial continuity, let us recall Aristotle's account of moral virtue as the state that involves habituated competent deployment of rational choice (commitment) and rational desire (wishing) (*Nic. Eth.* 1105b-1106b, 1139a). Since moral virtue entails volitional commitment, and since volition is a practical level of engagement, moral virtue is then identified at the everyday practical level of action, the level of the life-world in which we are predominantly engaged in personal relationships. The life-world, to recall, is precisely the level of our personalistic attitude, and an *attitude*, to recall once more, generally speaking "means a habitually fixed style of willing life comprising directions of the will or interests that are prescribed by this style" (Husserl 1970, p. 280). Our personal characters, or virtues, are thus self-determined. 'Virtues', writes Henning Peucker, 'are relatively stable dispositions to act in a certain manner, and Husserl's analysis can show how they arise precisely from the original experiences and concrete history of persons' (2008a, p. 324).

Since the brief examples provided so far of volitional action and commitment are largely individualistic (i.e., jogging, quitting smoking, and vegetarian eating), and since the phenomenological analyses may not immediately resonate as pertaining to specifically moral concerns, let us then quickly insert a moral category into the mix. Kindness, for example, refers to the right or appropriate emotions we have regarding other people. An intrinsically social character trait, in which equilibrium is achieved by moderating a deficiency such as ambivalence and an excess such as obsession, the quality of kindness requires a competent maintenance or commitment of immanent dispositions such that the "kind person" will act kindly in various situations, to various kinds of people, and over an extended period of time. Due to our volitional commitment, due to our *choice to be* a kind of person, whether kind, friendly, judicious, courageous, and so on, and due to the dependence of the virtues upon volition as states of volition, the virtues are therefore not passively acquired characteristics, but instead are self-empowered determinations of our own being.

2.3. Heidegger. *Prohairesis* Resolve

Arguably achieving results consistent with Husserl's above analyses, Heidegger lucidly lays-out the ontological structures of the phenomena of wishing and willing, structures that also clearly draw from Aristotle's notions

of *boulesis* and *prohairesis* (1962 §41, pp. 238-41/193-96). Wishing, for example, is identified as a mode of being that is directed toward possibilities, while the ontological structures of our willing, of Dasein's willing, are identified as (1) the prior disclosure of the for-the-sake-of-which, (2) the disclosure of something that *can* be of concern, and (3) based on its potentiality-for-being, Dasein's projection toward the possibility of the willed. What is of particular interest, however, is the way in which Heidegger later translates and develops Aristotle's notion of *prohairesis* in order to account for Dasein's own self-understanding as a care-ful self that is solicitously concerned with others.

To this fundamental ontological end, Franco Volpi (1992, 1994), for example, clearly details how Heidegger "ontologises" what Aristotle calls *prohairesis* (i.e., commitment, reasoned choice, or decision). The only difference between Aristotle and Heidegger in this respect, aside from Heidegger's unambiguous ontological rendering, is that for Aristotle *prohairesis* is a special moment within his account of action, while for Heidegger *prohairesis* (literally translated as *Entschlossenheit*, i.e., "resoluteness") is a characteristic of the being of Dasein (Volpi 1992, p. 120).

To clarify Heidegger's ontologising move regarding Aristotle's *prohairesis*, it may be helpful to note some key passages from Heidegger's 1923-24 lectures *Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (2005). Here Heidegger questions the translation or general understanding of Aristotle's *De Anima* as "On the Soul", since such an understanding mistakes the faculties as experiences rather than modes of being. 'For Aristotle, perception, thinking, wanting are not experiences', writes Heidegger. 'Περὶ ψυχῆς is not psychology in the modern sense, but instead deals with the being of human being (or living beings in general) in the world' (*ibid.*, p. 4, cf., pp. 38-39). Any ambiguity regarding Heidegger's explicit "ontologising" of Aristotle, in particular the *De Anima*, is dispelled by the following passage:

Aristotle's *De Anima*. If one translates it "On the Soul", then it is misunderstood today in a psychological sense. If we adhere, not to the words, but to what is said in Aristotle's investigation, then we translate it: "About being in the world". What are crudely designated in an easily misunderstood manner as "faculties of the soul", "perception", "thinking", "willing", are for Aristotle not experiences, but ways of existing of someone living in his world (*Ibid.*, p. 223).

The ontologising of *prohairesis* therefore entails that the focus of our examination of volition shifts from the *object* of our volition to our volitional *being* itself. In other words, it entails a reorientation from our objectivating

volition to our being volitional, in particular, to our volitional commitment to our own being as being-in-the-world.

Saving for a future occasion the detailed unpacking of Heidegger's important existential-ontological examination of *prohairesis* (resoluteness), let us for now just point to the relevance of *conscience* to Dasein's resolute authenticity. The reason for this is that since the virtues first require decisive or prohairesis, an ontologising of the will qua prohairesis presents interesting ramifications for our understanding the virtues. The virtues, it seems, are not simply dispositional states of volition, but are basic moments of our moral being *due to a fundamental commitment to our own being*.

For Heidegger the notions of conscience and guilt are key to his notion of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). Since Dasein's being-in-the-world entails precisely that Dasein is a being amongst any number of complex concerns and solitudes, Dasein's basic "environmental" condition is therefore a condition in which Dasein has no choice. Dasein is involuntarily thrown in to a world that is imbued with meaningful actions and practises due to the manifold concerns of other Dasein. As such, Dasein is ensconced amongst others and is necessarily discovered as in the others' world, the world of the 'one' (the 'they'—*das Man*), in which Dasein is also both an other and part of the one. Dasein calls itself away from this social ensconcement in order for it to disclose its most original being, not as *there-being* (Da-sein) but as sheer being with projected possibilities, as an 'empty' being that is 'open' to the world, an emptiness or openness that is only achieved by muting the cacophony of the one and by Dasein's heeding its own call of conscience (cf., Heidegger 1962, pp. 319-22/274-77, 354-56/306-08).

Heidegger's reference to conscience does not, of course, refer to the ordinary psychological notion of conscience. Not a psychological moral feeling, conscience is instead identified as a basic ontological constituent of Dasein. What is more, it is Dasein itself that calls its own everyday self to conscience. Since conscience is the call of care (*Sorge*), Dasein's calling-in its fallen 'one's self' is thus a move from one's everyday 'chatter' to the silent 'discourse' of Dasein's ownmost care-ful self. Conscience is not only composed of care, however, for the cognates 'concern' (*Besorgen*) and 'solicitude' (*Fürsorge*) also figure prominently in Dasein's disclosure of its own authenticity. Where 'care' is the basic relational mode of life (*ibid.*, 2001, pp. 67-70) such that Dasein's factual existence is at once both thrown in to the world and is fallen amongst one's world, and, such that Dasein is 'ahead-of-itself' in a self-projective fashion (*ibid.*, 1962, pp. 236-37/191-93), 'concern' and 'solicitude' are therefore discerned as *kinds* of care. Care is fundamen-

tally though tacitly self-referential; however, concern and solicitude respectively refer to Dasein's practical and personal relations such that I am carefully concerned with the teapot, the squash racquet, or the car's gearbox, while I also solicitously care for my family and friends. 'Care' therefore signifies the unity of such existential-ontological structures. As Heidegger notes: 'the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills the signification of the term 'care' [*Sorge*]' (*ibid.*, p. 237/192-93).

Since conscience is the 'call of care', since it 'summons Dasein's Self from its lostness in the "they"' (*ibid.*, p. 319/274), and since Dasein's careful being—as thrownness, fallenness, and the projective ahead-of-itself—is permeated by a negation such that Dasein is involuntarily thrown and is always discerned *as* amidst the one, and because negation is the common denominator of what it is to be 'guilty', Dasein is therefore fundamentally guilty (*ibid.*, pp. 326-33/281-87). "Conscience attests not by making something known in an undifferentiated manner", observes Heidegger, "but by calling forth and summoning us to Being-guilty" (*ibid.*, p. 341/293).

However, recognising such guilt as woven in to the basic structures of its being, Dasein has a choice. Discerning its emptiness or openness to the world, and recognising the fundamental guilt that accompanies its everyday engagements, there follows for Dasein an acknowledgement of its being and at once a freedom to choose its mode of being as authentic or inauthentic. 'In choosing myself as my possibility', writes Heidegger, 'I myself choose my being... What is chosen in this choice is nothing other than willing to have conscience' (1985, pp. 318f/439-42). Everyday Dasein, as being-with others and generally ensconced in society's (the one's) goings on, is unaware of its basic conscience and is therefore guilty. But upon expressly recognising its basic existential-ontological structures by listening to its conscience as the call of care, Dasein authentically chooses to become guilty: 'With the choice of willing to have conscience, I have [i.e., Dasein has] at the same time chosen *to have become guilty*' (*ibid.*, p. 319/440-42). Indeed, in a passage that is structurally analogous to Aristotle's account of *akrasia* (weak-will) as first requiring volitional commitment, Heidegger notes that: 'I can truly be without conscience only when I have chosen to be willing to have conscience' (*ibid.*). This fundamental 'choice' or decision is none other than that of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*).

Not an everyday choice or resolve, resoluteness requires recognition of the fundamental structures of our being, only after which can we choose to *be* in the world in a specific manner; that is, only after which can we *authentically* choose to engage in the world, and engage as a particular kind

of person. Resoluteness is ‘the choosing to choose a kind of Being-one’s-Self’ (*ibid.*, 1962, p. 314/270). In other words, as Heidegger explains in his 1927 lectures, ‘*resoluteness* is our name for authentic existence, the existence of the Dasein in which the Dasein is itself in and from its own most peculiar possibility, a possibility that has been seized on and chosen by the Dasein itself’ (1982, p. 287/406-08). As a direct existential-ontological translation of Aristotle’s *prohairesis*, to resolve is to both will and choose authenticity. Dasein’s resolve is no less than a decision to open its own factual-finite self to its own being and the world (cf., Richardson 1974, pp. 287-88). As genuine or authentic “Being-one’s-Self”, resoluteness does not pertain to Dasein’s abstractive commitment to itself as a ‘free-floating’ self, but instead pertains to Dasein’s thrusting its resolute self into its concerned-practical and solicitous-social states of affairs. Resolution projectively discloses and determines ‘what is factually possible at the time’ (Heidegger 1962, p. 345/288) such that a volitional resolve of being vegetarian, for example, is only possible by way of certain ontic-ontological conditions. By thus meeting the basic ‘practically possible’ criteria of volition it is also worth noting that the temporal mode of resoluteness is ‘repetition’. Since prohairetic resolve entails Dasein’s projective self-disclosure, the resolute commitment therefore also entails Dasein’s ‘coming-back-toward-itself’ precisely from its chosen projected possibility; the temporal mode of resoluteness is that of ‘repetitive self-precedence’ (1982, p. 287/406-08, cf., 1962, pp. 355, 437/308, 385-86), in which case Dasein’s authentic resolve is a phronetic achievement. Such habituated resolve thus results, as we saw with Husserl’s observations above, in Dasein’s determination of its own being such that its choice, its prohairetic resolve, becomes sedimented as its ‘abiding characteristic’, a characteristic that is ‘actualised’ upon repetition. To borrow from Husserl’s above observations, Heidegger’s Dasein effectively realises “the decision that was in it from the previous time as its abiding resoluteness” (Husserl 2001a, p. 443/360). Indeed, as Husserl elsewhere observes, ‘in the reactivation of an old decision I depend on my former decision; I am now the one I am as determined by my prior being (by my decisions)’ (1989, p. 343/331).

3. Conclusion and Points for Further Consideration

The scope of this paper is expressly limited to establishing the life-world as the practical world of our moral activity. This is achieved by first illustrating the life-world and defending it against the current trend toward naturalisation, and second, by illustrating the continuity of the practical intentional

structure of *prohairesis* from Aristotle to Husserl and to Heidegger. Admittedly, with Heidegger we have come a long way from the comparatively familiar analyses of volition by Aristotle and Husserl. A phenomenological analysis of volition and moral action, however, makes no promise to being a straightforward analysis; our experiential being is after all a complex state of affairs. For both Aristotle and Husserl our wilful or volitional commitment (*prohairesis*) is the proximate cause of our moral and personal activity, while for Heidegger our prohairesis is key to our authentic engagement in the world as always concernfully practical and solicitously social, a world in which we too easily become lost when we relinquish our own authentic self-understanding.

In conclusion, earlier we noted that the so-called “crisis” of our modern sciences and reason has its origin, in part, in the difference between truth as concerned with actual being and truth as concerned with consistency, or valid inference. The crisis, or “division”, becomes problematic when one truth-type is overemphasised, in which case the modern crisis is due to the overemphasis upon truth as consistency. Subsequently, the scientific predilection for valid inference sees our understanding of the world substitute theoretical universals for the world in which we live. With this overemphasis we unwittingly overlook the immediate reality of our personal, lived-world; we unwittingly lose the very “obviousness” (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) of our life-world. What a phenomenology of the will and virtues promises in this respect is a practical way in which to ameliorate the divisive fractures between the personal, scientific, and philosophical attitudes, fractures that are unduly magnified by the crisis, but which can be *resolved* by way of careful reflection upon the world and our engagement in it. This is the commitment of phenomenology as a radical philosophy.

Points for Further Research

To indicate several issues for further research regarding the phenomenology of volition and the virtues, we can point to (1) the way in which the epoché is a “*decisive moment*” (*Augenblick*) for phenomenology; that is, the way in which phenomenology is itself an expressly willed mode of enquiry. (2) The relation between Aristotle’s and Husserl’s accounts of practical truth, and how those accounts respectively pertain to their analyses of volition and action. And, in a more practical context, we can also point to (3) how a phenomenological analysis of the intentional structures of volition and virtue appears relevant to the psychopathology of thought-action fusion; that is, the

way in which morality is understood by patients with this particular disorder, and how the relevant phenomenological analyses might contribute to its further understanding.

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