The possibility of a phenomenology of cultural worlds in Hegel and Husserl

Article (Accepted Version)

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It goes to Hegel's credit to have alerted us that ethics is not just a matter of my individual decision – and be it in line with something as universal yet abstract as the categorical imperative. Rather, being ethical means for an individual to consider the world they live in. This world precedes the individual as a meaningful context that is determined by certain senses, atmospheres, and ideals. It is also a world of customs, laws, and regulations which the individual needs to consider. This does not mean to adhere to these customs blindly; in fact, it does not even mean to have to adhere to them at all if they prove faulty or outdated. Yet considering them is necessary since our actions are always actions in context, that is, actions that emerge from a context and influence this context in turn.

With Hegel, we can say that an ethical decision is a decision that is made after considering the world we live in, but needs to also involve the conscience of the individual, as we will see more closely. But how can we consider the world we live in? How can we get a sense of that world, given that we tend to take it for granted as our familiar context? That is where a 'phenomenology' of that world would be helpful, namely, a description of how this world comes to appear. This essay claims that the world we live in is best understood as a historical-cultural world. It is a historical world because world is always in a process of becoming and evolves historically. It is cultural because it consists of the meaningful connections that permeate a particular world, and these meanings make up a cultural. We will refer to cultural-historical worlds here just as cultural worlds because the historical character is already implied in the (phenomenological) concept of world whereas the cultural character calls for more exploration.

The fact that ethics requires considering one's cultural world can be explained and justified on the grounds of Heidegger's or Merleau-Ponty's observation that our existence is being-in-the-world or being-toward-the-world. Yet the significance of world as well as its historical-cultural character have already been identified by Husserl, and for reasons that should emerge more fully below, Husserl proves a particularly promising philosopher for exploring the nature and manifestation of cultural worlds. In thinking about ethics from the perspective of world, a tension comes to the fore that has been treated by different philosophers under different headings. The phenomenological perspective in existentialist terms would utilize the concepts freedom versus facticity, where facticity names our being (thrown) in(to) the world. Quite a similar distinction with an even stronger emphasis on ethics is the Hegelian distinction between morality and *Sittlichkeit*. While morality designates Kantian ethics which both Husserl and Hegel find too abstract, individualistic, or lacking in attention to history[i], the concept of *Sittlichkeit* requires some explanation which will be provided in the first section of this essay.

Ethics is thus an interplay of (more or less) rational decisions and habitualized laws. This interplay has taken different shapes during history, and at different times, one or the other element dominates. Husserl is usually interpreted as tending more toward the modern

Kantian perspective whereas Hegel is said to emphasize the necessary reconciliation of self-consciousness and general law in which the law becomes a "second nature" to me. There is certainly some truth to this common interpretation; yet in the end, each of them emphasizes both aspects of ethics, morality as well as habitualization. Husserl's focus on reason might let us forget that he also acknowledges the significance of tradition and heritage (in the widest sense). In reading Husserl's *Kaizo* articles, I will therefore highlight a theme which at first does not seem central to the articles: the level of "religious culture."

Yet this does not mean that a subordinate aspect will be emphasized here in order to move Husserl closer to Hegel. The themes of habitualization and sedimentation are fundamental themes of Husserl's phenomenology. The idea of a primordial foundation of an ethical life on the individual and communal level compliments this emphasis. Husserl reflects on norms as familiar-optimal standards and on the role of the phenomenologists in perceiving crises and in questioning norms which are possibly no longer optimal. Although Husserl shares Kant's emphasis on reason (exemplified in the titles of his critiques of pure and practical reason), he attends to norms as the communal aspects of ethical life in a fashion quite alien to Kant's categorical imperative. This turn to an ethics of norms as "second nature" is a turn to premodern, ancient times, as emerges from Hegel and Husserl.

There are similar reasons that motivate Hegel and Husserl to stress the significance of habitualized norms. Aside from vaguely pragmatic reasons, namely, that we could often not act (or would act too late) if relying on the categorical imperative, both of them notice a certain emptiness in Kant's notion of reason which inspires them to turn back to the ancient world. For ethical questions, history carries a special significance in several respects. Husserl shares Hegel's conviction that something like communal consciousness exists and that, particularly in the context of ethical consideration, we need to move beyond the boundaries of the individual. A moral philosophy which takes history seriously will undoubtedly also consider the habitualization of norms. This means that, in contrast to Kant's ethics, a good deed can no longer be regarded as an autonomous, spontaneous beginning, but only as a beginning on the basis of the given -- in this case, the given laws and norms. Hegel and Husserl both acknowledge this fact.

I. Hegel on Morality versus Sittlichkeit

As we explore the difference between morality and *Sittlichkeit*, there is a puzzle in Hegel's philosophy which we should be aware of and try to resolve in this section. In the *Phenomenology*, *Sittlichkeit* precedes morality as a level of Spirit whereas in the *Philosophy of Right*, morality precedes *Sittlichkeit*. Given the internal necessity[ii] that determines dialectical progression for Hegel, such a reversal should not happen. Yet in order to see how this is not a contradiction, we need to understand both concepts better.

On the most general level, morality refers to an individual consciousness whereas *Sittlichkeit* is always concerned with a community. *Sittlichkeit* relates to *Sitte*, custom, and there is no such thing as "my" custom; rather, it has to be at least the custom of a small community like a family (e.g., "In our family, it is customary at Christmas…"). The concept

of morality, in contrast, is borrowed from Kant who contrasts it with legality. Morality is rational and free. It corresponds to the spirit of modern times which elevates the subject to the level of the highest principle and does not accept any law without examining it. From the standpoint of morality, it is the subject's highest right "to recognize nothing that I do not perceive as rational" (*PhR*: § 132)[iii].

The state of morality is hence a state of diremption (*Entzweiung*) in which the individual recognizes his/her own will in contrast to and possibly in conflict with the laws of society. A main point of critique raised by Hegel against the standpoint of morality as conceived by Kant is its emptiness of content rooted in the fact that the individual gives its own laws. We have hence received an indication that morality, as a state of diremption, has to be overcome. Such overcoming happens by what Hegel designates as *Sittlichkeit*; yet this is no longer the immediate *Sittlichkeit* of the ancient world. The identity of individual will and communal customs is replaced by a relation between them, such that the individual takes over certain customs as a matter of conviction. This form of *Sittlichkeit* is realized in the European state.[iv]

These preliminary considerations already show a certain difficulty of the relation between morality and *Sittlichkeit*. Historically speaking, *Sittlichkeit* both precedes and follows morality. The immediate form of *Sittlichkeit* can be found in antiquity, the mediated form in the European states of Hegel's time. Hegel had not yet thought through the mediated form of *Sittlichkeit* at the time of writing the *Phenomenology* (– just like his state was still in a condition of turmoil). Superficially speaking, this is the reason why, in the *Phenomenology*, *Sittlichkeit* (in the shape of ancient *Sittlichkeit*) precedes morality, and morality then enters into religion,[v] whereas in the *Philosophy of Right*, *Sittlichkeit* follows upon morality.[vi] The earlier text focuses on ancient, immediate *Sittlichkeit*, the later one on mediated *Sittlichkeit*.

In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel provides a particularly clear definition of *Sittlichkeit*:

> When these one-sidednesses (*Einseitigkeiten*) have been sublated, subjective *freedom* as the *universal* rational will in and for itself which yields knowledge of itself in the consciousness of individual subjectivity and which has its state of mind as well as its activity and its immediate universal actuality at the same time as *custom* (*Sitte*) – self-conscious *freedom* has become its *nature*. (*Enc. III*: § 513)

Sittlichkeit is the sublation of a previous one-sided structure, namely, of the split between subjective freedom and general custom. Subjective freedom now turns into the will which is in and for itself; it has knowledge of itself, but it also possesses an external reality, as custom. Freedom has to become a form of nature as general reality while at the same time being a "second nature" for the individual. The individual internalizes and habitualizes the laws rather than making about a new decision each time (since this would delay or even prevent our taking action). The passage quoted here already indicates that *Sittlichkeit* does not mean to simply accept and take over existent laws and customs.[vii] Different levels of *Sittlichkeit* need to be distinguished, and when we have left behind the standpoint of immediate

Sittlichkeit, we reach a *Sittlichkeit* mediated by "reflection" and "insight grounded on reasons" (*PhR*: § 147).

Although in the *Phenomenology*, *Sittlichkeit* (as ancient, immediate *Sittlichkeit*) precedes morality, the situation turns out to be more complex. The Kantian standpoint – and thus, in a certain sense, the standpoint of morality, although not designated as such – already occurs prior to *Sittlichkeit*, namely, at the end of the chapter on reason. Under the heading of reason as giving laws and reason as testing laws, Hegel criticizes contradictions in Kant's theory.[viii] According to Hegel, reason as giving laws does not say what it really means. When it says, "Everyone ought to speak the truth," it actually means "... *if* he knows the truth" (*PhS*: 313/254). The general proposition thus acquires a specific content.

As a result, reason cannot sustain itself; we enter into the realm of Spirit, and Spirit is the "actuality of *Sittlichkeit*" (*PhS*: 325/262). Immediate, harmonious *Sittlichkeit* as we find it in ancient Greece "is submerged in the formal universality of legality or law" (*PhS*: 326 f./265). As shapes of diremption, *Bildung* and belief are opposed to each other; the enlightenment brings about a revolution of this opposition. The result is a return to moral self-consciousness and thus a return to Kant's theory, albeit on a higher level. At stake is no longer the giving and testing of more or less general laws, but communal life in which the problem of the correlation between morality and happiness arises (*PhS*: 445/366). The postulate of the harmony between morality and happiness is problematic, since impure motives enter into moral consciousness. In the face of these contradictory motives, moral self-consciousness "flees from this with abhorrence back into itself" and turns into "pure conscience" (*PhS*: 464/383).

The standpoint of conscience will now be treated in some detail. This examination is in line with my overall persuasion that the *Phenomenology*, due to its less rigorous systematicity, provides more openness for thought and more leeway for critique than the *Philosophy of Right*.

II. Hegel and the Phenomenology of Conscience

Conscience returns in a certain sense to the individual, even though we are already in the realm of Spirit. It will ultimately be the conversation with others which leads beyond conscience – after a last attempt to enter more deeply into the standpoint of conscience and retain it by giving equal rights to everybody when conscience turns into the beautiful soul.[ix] Conscience as "*concrete* moral Spirit" (*PhS*: 466/385) which has returned to itself is the immediate unity of moral essence realizing itself and action as concrete moral shape. In and through action, consciousness relates to the actuality.

Conscience exists concretely as it fulfills "not this or that duty, but knows and does what is concretely right" (*PhS*: 467/385). The positive result of this repeated critique of Kant's moral philosophy consists in solving the conflict of the moral world view: conscience does not helplessly observe the conflict of various duties, but proceeds to act. Conscience knows that it is in a unique or singular situation such that no casuistic approach can be helpful. When conscience acts, it is in a community with others. The deed is real, and it can

be accepted or rejected by others. More precisely, the action is real exactly because it calls for recognition; to act means to translate what is individual into what is universal (*PhS*: 470/388). For Hegel, the good is not the good will (which does not necessarily come to realize itself and thus cannot be recognized), but the good deed.

At the same time, conscience knows very well about the difficulties of acting which stem from the fact that there are always some circumstances of my action that remain unknown to me. I am confronted with "a plurality of circumstances which breaks up and spreads out endlessly in all directions" (*PhS*: 472/389). Conscience is thus always already guilty since it is inevitably ignorant of at least some of the circumstances relevant to the action. The case of Oedipus takes this difficulty to the extreme. Since conscience cannot achieve complete knowledge, it takes its knowledge to be complete. Otherwise, conscience would never come to act. The problem of the moral world-view consists exactly in the fact that it is too obsessed with its own deficiencies to proceed to action. The moral world-view is concerned with a conflict of duties which are, upon closer consideration, devoid of content; in contrast, conscience imports its content, taken from its individuality, into specific duties (*PhS*: 476/393).

Since all action stays in contact with actuality and with others, an aspect of inequality emerges. The action is a determinate one, "a *specific* action, not identical with the element of everyone's self-consciousness, and therefore not necessarily acknowledged" (*PhS*: 477/394). Conscience is never merely a private judgement, but calls for general recognition. There are different consciences because everybody has a conscience. We do not know whether the other consciences are good or evil. Yet I have to take the conscience of others as evil in order to assert my own self, at least as an initial step (*PhS*: 477 f./394).

It is necessary for us to articulate our convictions. By giving reasons, we ward off assumptions about bad intentions which others explicitly or implicitly attribute to us. "Here again, then, we see language as the existence of Spirit" (*PhS*: 478/395). With language, others truly come into play, and we are now dealing with Spirit in the genuine sense while moral consciousness previously remained "dumb" or silent (*PhS*: 479/396). Language (rather than action) is our true connection to the world; language eliminates alienation because it connects us to others and to world. Language connects one self-consciousness to the other; it is the possibility of communication, justification, and recognition. The role of language in Hegel is quite close to the significance of *logos* in Husserl. What we share with others is *logos* as language which allows giving reasons for our actions, i.e., giving justification (*logon didonai*). The moment of recognition is only implicitly present in Husserl; he emphasizes the ethical ideal we are striving for, and if this striving is successful, we will gain recognition from rational others.

Although conscience seeks the recognition of others, it is initially convinced that it knows best what should be done, since it knows its own situation best. Others can ask for a justification, but from the perspective of my conscience, they owe me respect. As "moral genius," conscience goes beyond the difference between abstract self-consciousness and its own self-consciousness, returns to itself and acquires its poorest position (*PhS*: 482/397). The

shape of the "beautiful soul" which does not want its inner beauty to be contaminated by a real action will not be treated in detail here, especially since Hegel also only mentions it briefly. [x] The beautiful soul lacks power because it does not come to externalize itself. "In this transparent purity of its moments, an unhappy, so-called 'beautiful soul', its light dies away within it, and it vanishes like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air" (*PhS*: 484/400). Language thus falls into the inequality of the individual being-for-itself (an inequality which comes about because language, going by its meaning or essence, is meant to be for others).

Yet the community in its observing role is still present, and it accuses conscience of hypocrazy. Conscience admits that it is evil since it acts according to its law; by doing so, it acts against the others and "wrongs" them (*PhS*: 486/402). Not only the consciousness which gives its own law realizes that it is evil; judging consciousness has to admit that it is evil as well because in its judging, it shares into the evil. Acting consciousness and judging consciousness are two sides of one and the same coin, as it were. To judge means not to act, yet judging consciousness knows that acting needs to happen. Therefore, it shares the guilt. When judging consciousness makes itself equal to acting consciousness, it is recognized by acting consciousness as equal. Both recognise that they cannot be 'objective' because they cannot consider all possible aspects of the situation. Acting consciousness thus realises that it is not inferior to judging consciousness. Instead of trying to claim a superior position, it offers forgivenness to judging consciousness -- which judging consciousness does not immediately accept. Yet in the end, they admit that each is promoting its own self-interest and realize that they can forgive each other for this. Admitting their guilt opens up the possibility of improvement.[xi]

The two forms of consciousness forgive each other, become reconciled, and recognize each other to be one and the same 'I' (*PhS*: 494/409). With this insight, Hegel's phenomenological analysis comes to a close; and we are indeed familiar with the fact that the phenomenon of conscience exhibits a strangely dual nature. It determines the nature of conscience to carry out a dialogue within individual consciousness in which I take distance from myself, as it were, and assess my own intentions and actions. This is not a voluntary act but rather, happens to me -- almost as if an external voice was speaking to me. Conscience is not a solipsistic phenomenon; it is not a mere monologue. Only because we are in a community and conversation with others do we have conscience. Conscience necessarily involves the interplay of individuality and universality. One conscience by itself cannot decide what is good, as Husserl would agree.

III. Husserl on the Renewal of Reason

The *Kaizo* articles,[xii] written by Husserl in the years of 1922 and 1923, maintain a unique place within his philosophy. There, Husserl introduces certain ethical themes and problems which will be subsequently foregone and will resurface, albeit briefly, only at the end of his philosophical career (in the 1930ies). It seems justified then that these essays present themselves to be the key to Husserl's phenomenological ethics.

In their emphases on reason and rationality, the *Kaizo* articles first give an impression of Husserl as a Kantian, and the impression is strengthened by his discussions of the categorical imperative. However, a major portion of the articles and particularly Husserl's reflections on religious culture appear out of place if they are read from the perspective of Kantian ethics. While the influence of Kant's philosophy on Husserl's phenomenological method is undoubtedly strong, this chapter will suggest that Husserl's considerations on ethics rather move him away from Kant and toward Hegel.

Husserl's ethical theory has not been discussed much in the literature; even less so have his *Kaizo* articles found much response, especially in the English literature.[xiii] Those authors who examine these articles either try to give an immanent interpretation without placing the articles in the broader context of ethical theories,[xiv] or come to conclude that the *Kaizo* articles are somewhat atypical for Husserl's thought.[xv] I will interpret the *Kaizo* articles as a coherent account which fits well into Husserl's late thought. For this purpose, the concept of reason will be examined in order to show that there are not only Kantian echoes, but also ancient Greek ideas which contribute to Husserl's usage of the notion. Afterwards, Husserl's investigation of norms will be considered as it moves him beyond the sphere of the individual. Husserl focuses on religious culture to explain the importance of habitualizing norms.

Ethics, for Husserl, is the "science of the entire practical life of a rational subjectivity under the viewpoint of reason that regulates this life uniformly" (*Hua XXVII:* 21). In order to act in an ethical fashion, we take our orientation from an ideal, the ideal of the true and ethical human being. This ideal is ultimately unattainable, and yet it functions as a criterion, as a "pole idea" (*Polidee*). Husserl says that every life, even the "not completely consequential life of self-regulation", qualifies as an ethical life (*Hua XXVII:* 39); here we encounter the tension between relativity and absoluteness which permeates Husserl's philosophy. We thus need to investigate what reason means for Husserl and what function or role the ideal of the ethical human being has.

Husserl regards the "rationalisation of praxis" (*Rationalisierung der Praxis*) as an important task (*Hua XXVII:* 9); he is convinced that, along with the manifestation of reason, sooner or later there will be a manifestation of the good as well. This trust in the power of reason has its basis in the fact that rational accounts can be followed or understood. If we act based on reasons which we can explain to others, at least the possibility of a successful co-existence is given. This thought already indicates that, for Husserl, reason constitutes what we all share. Husserl does not develop a specific philosophical concept of reason, but rather, leans in on our everyday understanding of rational action, acting on reasons, etc. In one of the few passages that explicitly lay out his concept of reason, Husserl states the following:

> The concept of *logos* as autonomous reason and originally theoretical reason, as the faculty of judging in a 'self-less' manner (*,selbstlosen' Urteilens*) which, as a judging from pure insight, listens exclusively to the voices of the things 'themselves,' acquires thus its original conception and simultaneously its world-changing power

(*weltumgestaltende Kraft*). (*Hua XXVII:* 83)

Husserl thus refers us back to the Greek concept of *logos*. First, Aristotle famously defined man as the animal which has *logos*. As we will see, Husserl's concern in these articles also lies with specific abilities which distinguish human beings from other animals -- abilities to face their lives, to "survey" it and to take responsibility for it. Second, one of the many facets of *logos*' meaning is "language"; as noted above, Husserl investigates how "reasons" (another meaning of *logos*) are communicable and comprehensible. Because we have language, we are able to give reasons and accounts (*logon didonai)* for our actions.

However, "true knowing" in the sense of complete, infallible knowing is in principle unattainable for humans as finite beings. Husserl acknowledges this, yet elevates "absolute reason" -- in the sense of an absolutely increased theoretical and practical reason -- to the status of an *ideal*. A being with absolute reason would be God if we simultaneously attribute omnipotence to it (*Hua XXVII*: 33). The ideal thus functions as a pole, lying in infinity. "The absolute Limes is the idea of God;" it is "the genuine and true ego," from which we are always infinitely far removed (*Hua XXVII*: 33 f.).

Before Husserl engages in considerations regarding the idea of God, he provides a simple argument for the existence of such an ideal that is accessible by way of the phenomenological method. If we criticize contemporary humanity as needing improvement, this judgement is based on the belief in a "good," "true," and "genuine" humanity as an ideal possibility (*Hua XXVII*: 10). We cannot begin our critique without imagining something better; and if our critique is contingent on ethical questions, the better something must be a better humanity. The ideal human is an "ethical human" (*Hua XXVII*: 23). Only in an ethical human being does the essence of a human being come to completion. Yet such a completely true, genuine, good human can only be grasped through the concept of an unattainable ideal which we nevertheless continuously strive for if we lead a critical life. As humans, we are never infallible and never reach the point where an improvement in the direction of an ethical ideal is no longer possible. It is because of this necessary restriction that Husserl calls the "not fully consequential life" ethical as well.

The feature which forms the condition for the possibility of orienting my life in relation to the ideal of the good human is the fact that I can survey my life, more precisely, my "whole" life, or life in its entirety (*Hua XXVII*: 25, 31). This is a strange thought since I obviously do not have a standpoint at my disposal which would allow me to look at my life in its entirety. Perhaps this would be possible on my deathbed – but this is a retrospective position and signifies looking back into the past. Husserl, on the other hand, is concerned with striving for the future. How could a survey be possible in light of the fact that I know about my finitude and mortality, yet the time of my death is entirely inaccessible to me?[xvi] Considering this paradoxical situation, it is hardly surprising that Husserl, in the same passage in which he explicates the possibility of surveying my entire life, also talks about the "infinity of my life" (*Hua XXVII*: 27). My life is finite and infinite at once since I know about my death as such, but not about the "when" of this death. To put it in a less contradictory

fashion, I set infinite goals for myself despite my finitude; the fact that my life is limited does not exclude infinite responsibility, but rather, includes it.

If these connections are kept in mind, it becomes obvious why Husserl has some justification to speak about a survey of our entire lives. We have an idea of our future, even if this idea includes a certain indeterminacy. For this future, we are able to set goals. As a human being, I can even set a unitary life goal for myself; at the same time, I can change this goal, and I may even have to change it, in accordance with the changing circumstances. And yet, something remains stable in this change; human beings remain true to themselves, wanting to love themselves, as Husserl once puts it in a manuscript.[xvii] This means that humans want to stay true to their conscience, want to act in accordance with it. The possibility for humans to survey their lives mean that they have conscience. It means that we can give account for our actions, and it also means that there is always a danger not to be able to "live" with a certain action.

On the level of the community or the "human at large" (*Mensch im großen*), these definite yet changeable standards transform into *norms*. Norms develop over time, and it is thus necessary that we can communicate about them – by way of our participation in *logos*. In order to investigate the emergence and development of norms, a static procedure cannot suffice; a "dynamic-genetic" perspective is called for (*Hua XXVII*: 55).[xviii] Yet Husserl not only considers the *genesis* of norms in these articles, as he pursues it in the different manuscripts on normality. Rather, he engages in *historical* reflections, particularly in the article "Formal types of culture in the development of humanity" which constitutes the fifth and last essay (*Hua XXVII:* 59-94). These historical reflections are concerned with the transformation of norms over generations, on the one hand, and the different role of norms in antiquity, middle ages, and modernity, on the other. Parts of the investigation thus go beyond a genetic phenomenology and belong to a historical-generative phenomenology.

IV. Husserl's Phenomenology of Cultural Norms

Norms possess a strange doubleness as they are "made" by us, yet at the same time, we are exposed and delivered over to them. This double character calls for a historical exploration. It might be tempting to assume that Husserl's call for "rationalisation," for rational critique, would naturally lead him to strive for a critical questioning of all norms, ruling out any unquestioned acceptance. This modern tendency, inspired by the spirit of enlightenment, is indeed prevalent in Husserl's thought; but it is accompanied by an awareness of the value carried by "old and awe-inspiring tradition (*altehrwürdige Tradition*)" (*Hua XXVII:* 58). This tradition, although not indisputable, demands a certain respect and awe because norms have always been taken over by us, and this habitualization is a necessary component of ethical action. It is not possible for us to call the existing norms into question in *every* situation, making a critical decision every single time. Such acting would not just be impractical and time-consuming, but it would overwhelm us completely. Ethical action is only possible because certain norms have become a "second nature" for us (*Hua XXVII:* 37).

Whereas critical questioning, as mentioned before, is a modern achievement (which

has certain roots in Greek antiquity), Husserl finds a particularly developed form of the habitualization of norms in religious culture. The "level of religious culture" and the "level of scientific culture" shall now be sketched briefly. Husserl maintains that we find in every "higher developed culture" a cultural form of "religion" (*Hua XXVII:* 60).[xix] Within religions, certain laws have the status of absolute norms, i.e., norms that are valid not just factually, under the regimen of a certain ruler or during a certain era, but norms that we experience as unconditionally valid. The legislators of these absolute norms are transcendent powers which in a given religion count as divinities. A religion hence contains a system of absolute validities. As long as the dominance of religion remains intact, normal life coincides with religious life (*Hua XXVII:* 61). Husserl summarizes the experience of the religious life in the following, laconic remark: "There cannot be a tension [here] between authority and freedom, just as little as the dreamer has an awareness of illusion; it exactly presupposes awakening " (ibid.).

Although religion teaches us about the existence of unconditional ought-to's and about the habitualization of norms, and although such life is originally consistent in itself, enabling peaceful co-existence, an awakening is inevitable. This is partly a consequence of the fact that religious cultures have been and are mostly hierarchical; Husserl mentions explicitly the "imperialistic" community of priests in the middle ages (*Hua XXVII:* 90). Without assessing this Husserlian claim here, some indicative evidence for this hierarchy can be found in the way church authority is structured. A hierarchical culture inevitably exhibits the character of restriction rather than freedom (*Hua XXVII:* 63). It is hence opposed to our ethical abilities, to our abilities of critically taking position, which are equivalent to our freedom. Hence a religious movement for freedom evolves out of religion by necessity. It is remarkable and noteworthy that Husserl focuses on the movement of critique which emerges from religion itself, i.e., on immanent critique, rather than turning toward external critique imposed by philosophy and the sciences. He states that the religious movement for freedom and other similar movements cross over and play together, yet that the self-critique of religion and its internal transformation is a separate process (*Hua XXVII:* 67). The emphasis he places on this fact confirms again that Husserl acknowledges the significance of religion and, in a broader sense, the habitualization of norms.

This level is countered by the level of scientific culture, the "level of a cultural humanity which forms itself and its environment through pure autonomous reason and, specifically, through scientific reason" (*Hua XXVII:* 73). Although philosophy and science were originally instituted in ancient Greece, the institution of an ethics on the basis of "pure autonomous reason" only happens in Kant's philosophy. Kant thus plays an important, though not always unequivocal role in the *Kaizo* articles. Husserl repeatedly refers to the categorical imperative which has validity for all humans in such a way that we can only be "true" humans if we submit ourselves and our actions to the categorical imperative. Nevertheless, Husserl does not want to "take over the Kantian formulation and the Kantian explanation, in short, the Kantian theory; just this one thing shall be said, namely, that the individual human being lives a life which, not lived away in an arbitrary fashion, has a value"

(*Hua XXVII:* 44). Despite repeated references to Kant, Husserl diverges from the Kantian ethics on a point of utmost significance: for Husserl, an ethical action does not mean a spontaneous new beginning. In the context of Husserl's philosophy, an ethical unconditional beginning is impossible already due to the fact that the intentional basic structure of expectation and fulfillment or disappointment permeates all areas of life.

During the modern era, religion and philosophy necessarily diverge. This does not mean that faith as such and its content are dismissed; yet the predominance of autonomous reason means that nothing can be accepted as unquestioned, merely on the basis of church authority (*Hua XXVII:* 92). In this way, the modern era is immediately opposed to the Middle Ages. The dominance of religion in the Middle Ages led to such a degree of dogmatism and imperialism that modernity had to intervene, as it were. In the process, the advantages and strong sides of premodern culture were neglected or drowned in the reformation movements. According to Husserl, modern philosophy differs from ancient philosophy particularly in the fact that it submits all traditional sciences to a radical critique of reason which only mathematics can ultimately stand up to (*Hua XXVII:* 92).

As Husserl emphasizes the advantages as well as the downsides of religious culture, he alerts us that its insights should not be rejected prematurely. One such insight consist in the habitualization of norms. The modern tendency of individualization, i.e., the tendency to underscore the capacities of conscience and reason in the acting person is thus countered by the old European tradition of communal norms. In what way premodern insights can be integrated into or mediated with the modern concept of an autonomy of reason is unfortunately not explicitly spelled out by Husserl. However, he provides two important hints. First, Husserl talks of the primordial institution (*Urstiftung*) of an ethical life which all humans have to undertake for themselves as they reflect and make the decision to lead an ethical life, submitting themselves to unconditional ought-to's (*Hua XXVII:* 43). This primordial institution is then taken up into the habitualization of the critical attitude such that a "habitual critical position-taking" is formed (*Hua XXVII:* 63). The decision to live and act critically thus does not always have to be repeated anew.

Second, norms can take on "the character of an available possession and good (…) for the single individual, but also for the community" (*Hua XXVII:* 75). The rational justification of a norm has to be possible in principle, but will not necessarily be carried out before a norm is actually applied; for the norm is part of an "available possession." Yet in order for the norm to become such an available possession, different people need to confirm the norm's rationality over a period of time, and the person which applies the norm should justify it in the mode of potentiality, although not in actuality.

Does Husserl thus provide a standard that enables us to determine certain normative laws? All justification of specific laws, so he says, is "part of the development of an individual ethics itself, not of the outline of its principle guidelines" (*Hua XXVII:* 43). This is a consequence of Husserl's intentions in these articles which also eliminates the impasses and pitfalls involved in working out an ethical theory. It is not Husserl's intention to develop a complete ethical theory or take position in the controversial discussion of such theories.

However, Husserl envisions certain tasks for philosophers as the "representatives of the spirit of reason or the spiritual organ through which the community reaches an awareness of its true determination (its true self)" (*Hua XXVII:* 54). Philosophers are exemplary, as it were, in leading a critical life of self-reflection. It is their task to perceive crises and to critically reflect on them. How is the philosopher supposed to recognize a crisis? Husserl implies that a crisis makes itself known and will be discerned by the philosophers if they are attentive to their community. A crisis can be recognized through certain moods in the consciousness of a community, such as a fundamental, existential discontent. It can thus be concluded from Husserl's reflections on ethics that philosophers have to be attentive to communal moods, and that they have to stay in touch with the community rather than taking a detached position. These realizations have implications for the relation between natural and philosophical consciousness to be discussed in the concluding section of this essay.

V. Concluding, or Writing about the World we Live in

It has emerged from these considerations that ethics happens between conscience and norms, freedom and facticity, or the individual and their world. Furthermore, this is not a relationship of opposition, but penetration and interdependence. Although both elements can be found in both philosophers, Husserl can be said to "radicalise" or "deconstruct" Hegel because he keeps the main insights about norms in the wider sense and how they tie our homeworld together, but emphasises how norms can be changed in light of a crisis. Actual *logos* and dialectics as they happen between humans in political, legal, moral, and economic negotiations can fail, can lead to crisis. Hence the task of the phenomenologist: to observe the sense, the atmosphere of a cultural world. But how to recognise such an atmosphere? Even when the world is crisis, it can be difficult to discern – and even more so, what that crisis actually consists in. What if it is not crisis but, say, boredom, stagnation or some kind of hidden deterioration on account of a forgetfulness that, by way of being a forgetfulness, is likely to only become apparent when it is at least partially over?

One way to reveal cultural worlds, so Heidegger suggests, is the work of art. But this basic idea is already in Hegel, which is why Heidegger engages in some detail with Hegel's claim that art is in its highest form is a thing of the past.[xx] This means that art would no longer be an appropriate revealing of world. But what is the character of a world that no longer lends itself to artistic revelation? Would it not be a world about which we by definition have to be worried because there seems to be some essential forgetfulness and concealment that resists the disclosure through art? In any case, let us turn to our best option, as it were: art. More precisely, literature, partly because we can only close on one example and partly because literature, by way of its intimate relation to language, might play a special role if we keep in mind that language is the element of Spirit as well as the essence of the homeworld.

German contemporary writer Judith Hermann undertakes this task with respect to several cultural worlds in her first book *Summerhouse, Later*, a collection of short stories. The atmospheres of several cultural worlds are captured from the perspective of a traveller of German origin, a stranger's view. The perspective of the stranger, so we learn from Plato to

Husserl, is revealing because it accomplishes a kind of *epoché*, suspending the familiar. Whether it is New York and the strange local custom of people living in hotels as experienced in 'Hunter Thomson Blues' or the Russian solitary landscape narrated from the female contemplative perspective, the intensity of the Bali beach or the Icelandic silence of the outside world in contrast with sociality of the interior space – the perspective taken proves revealing and draws us in, given that we are also coming to these worlds as the stranger. Yet for Hermann, interpersonal relations between the characters are in the foreground, and in her next book, *Nothing but Ghosts*, cultural worlds no longer play a crucial role.

The writer who arguably reveals the contemporary American world best is David Foster Wallace, as far as its atmosphere is concerned. Yet he does so perhaps not so much by literature as rather through a new genre that we would like to call 'phenomenological ethnography'.[xxi] The style (taken in the wide, phenomenological sense) or indeed genre of phenomenological ethnography is exhibited at its best and clearest in the volume *On a Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never do Again*. The descriptions which are given sometimes as ethnography, sometimes as auto-ethnography have a phenomenological extension in that they reveal structures of our existence and especially structures of our interactions with others. Yet even more so, they reveal cultural worlds. Sometimes, this happens in footnotes, which generally add multidimensionality, density and humour to the work: Footnote 53: "[…] Tibor, table 64's beloved and extremely cool Hungarian waiter […] whose pink and birdlike face on occasions like this expressed a combination of mortification and dignity that seem somehow to sum up the whole plight of postwar Eastern Europe" (Wallace 1998: 296).

The atmosphere of the contemporary American world, for Wallace, is a world of easy and often infantile pleasures to which people are drawn because they have neither learned to stretch themselves through good literature, nor have they learned to say 'no' to the wrong pleasures or to a general excess of pleasures, especially where TV as well as internet activities are concerned. Wallace wonders whether there will be even more trouble for the state of the American cultural subject in the future when internet pornography comes to involve tactile as well as visual elements. Certain cultural moods or atmospheres make people yearn for passive, infantile pleasures, Wallace maintains. We might feel reminded of Heidegger's notion of deep boredom, for example, which he does not take to the cultural level, unlike terror (*Schrecken*) which designates our world for Heidegger.

Wallace states in an interview that he is a writer because he remembers such good experiences of having been a reader, and what was most "fun" about being a reader was "being part of some kind of exchange between consciousnesses".[xxii] In other words, it was the sense of being part of Spirit, or the revelation of a shared cultural world. Because a revelation of our home or *ethnos* is always also a revelation of *ethos*, and thus matters to who we are. The task of the writer can then be, as Wallace puts it, "to mimic how the world feels against our nerve-endings right now".[xxiii]

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[i] Evaluating Hegel's and Husserl's criticism of Kant's philosophy will not be possible within the framework of the current article. For some of the most important moments of such criticism, see Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially the chapter "Reason as lawgiver", and Husserl's *Crisis*, especially sections 28 to 32.

[ii] Hegel explains this necessity in the Introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, sections 77 to 80. Without being able to explore the dialectical method in detail here, it should be noted that the combination of finding the appropriate starting point and proceeding by following internal tensions and contradictions until they have been overcome guarantees the internal necessity of the progression.

[iii] Abbreviations used:

Works by GWF Hegel:

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1986). *Werke* in 20 volumes. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Enc III = Vol. 10: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*. (*Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830). Transl. W. Wallace. Together with the Zusätze in Boumann's Text (1845) transl. by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)

PhR = Vol. 7: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Transl. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991)

PhS = Vol. 3: *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. (*Phenomenology of Spirit*. Transl. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)

Works by E. Husserl:

Hua XXVII = Husserl, E. (1989), *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (1922-1937). *Husserliana* Collected Works, vol. XXVII, ed. T. Nenon and H.-R. Sepp. Kluwer: The Hague.

[iv] "The present time has ridden itself of its barbaric nature and unlawful willfulness, and the truth has ridden itself of its beyond and its contingent violence, such that the truthful reconciliation has become objective and helps unfold the *state* into the image and actuality of reason " (*PhR*: § 360) – According to the *Philosophy of Right*, the German state accomplishes the reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity; it is determined by "free and happy *Sittlichkeit*" (*PhR*: § 356). The Roman empire is characterized by the diremption or split of *Sittlichkeit* into the extremes of private self-consciousness and abstract universality (*PhR*: § 357) which has to be sublated in the German state. – Concerning the problems with this position which leaves out those states in which no rational concept of freedom has been realized yet, see Siep 1982: 92.

[v] A different topic which cannot be treated here concerns the question as to whether religion exhibits some structural similarity with the more developed shape of *Sittlichkeit* and whether the religious community is similar to the *sittliche* community.

[vi] Within the part on *Sittlichkeit*, there is a further distinction between the family which represents the immediate shape of *Sittlichkeit*, civil society as a shape of diremption which contains elements of morality, and the state as fully developed *Sittlichkeit*.

[vii] Ludwig Siep shows how the sublation of morality into *Sittlichkeit* means still giving a certain right to morality on the level of *Sittlichkeit*: Siep (1982). Siep describes the position of *Sittlichkeit* in Hegel well: "The confidence that the private and public realization of myself is overall secured in an

autonomous legal, social, and cultural state must not be confused with a blind trust in any kind of state authority, law or even order." (Siep 1982: 92).

viii We cannot examine here to what extent this criticism does justice to Kant's philosophy. However, Hegel's objections are rather extrinsic, so one might suspect that a response from a Kantian perspective could be formulated. The basic objection concerning an emptiness of content and the subjectivity of morality comes closer to the core of Kant's theory.

ix Conscience bears certain similarities with sense-certainty. Certainly, we are now concerned with an entirely different, more advanced level; we are concerned with Spirit whereas sense-certainty relates to the individual. Yet the failure of sense-certainty to preserve its standpoint has essentially been connected to the fact that we are always in a community and conversation with others.

Another connection between sense-certainty and conscience lies in the character of beginning which both of them exhibit. Sense-certainty forms the beginning of the journey of consciousness, and conscience forms the beginning of ethics, as it were. Hegel does not treat conscience at the very beginning of his reflections on *Sittlichkeit* and morality; but if we disregard the exact order of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* for a moment, the phenomenon of conscience proves to be an 'earlier' phenomenon. For example, natural consciousness frequently turns to it for explanation. Hegel's analysis of conscience reveals – just like his analysis of sense-certainty – that there are no unconditional beginnings and that the allegedly unconditional claim of conscience does not occur out from nowhere.

At the beginning of the chapter on Spirit, we were already concerned with a law that *is* or exists – yet as a law pregiven to consciousness which consciousness had to accept. After the experience of the alienation of Spirit in *Bildung* and enlightenment, we are concerned with a law which bases its existence on the certainty of the inner world. Hegel makes reference to sense-certainty implicitly by using familiar formulations and explicitly in a comparison at the beginning of the analysis of conscience (*PhS*: 467/385). H.S. Harris points out that in the moral world, we are concerned with actions as "things" – with multiple aspects of actions, etc. –, whereas conscience returns to the beginning (Harris 1997: 460). Furthermore, Harris compares the standpoint of conscience with the moral sense philosophy developed by Shaftesbury and others: action is grounded in a moral sentiment.

x H.S. Harris poses the question whether this shape has to be passed through by necessity or whether it might be possible to reach the level of reconciliation directly (Harris 1997: 457). To my mind, modified and softened versions of the "beautiful soul" are conceivable.

xi Harris 1997: 502.

xii The "Introduction" of Husserliana Volume XXVII (in which the *Kaizo* articles are published) informs us that the editor of the Japanese journal *The Kaizo* asked Husserl for a contribution. Husserl responded to this request since it gave him the opportunity to tackle a theme which had occupied him since the end of the war: the theme of "renewal," which is the translation of "Kaizo." Only the first three articles were actually published, as tensions with the publisher arose (*Hua XXVII*: x ff.)

xiii An English translation of the *Kaizo* articles is currently being prepared.

xiv Welton 1991.

xv Ullrich Melle describes the articles as providing an "incomplete and one-sided picture of Husserl's later ethical thought" since the theme of love is almost absent (Melle 2004: 346). It seems dissatisfying to describe those articles on ethics which Husserl himself prepared and released for publication as one-sided. At the same time, a more encompassing interpretation of Husserl's ethics which also considers the topic of love as it emerges particularly in his lecture courses would move him into even closer proximity to (the early) Hegel.

xvi Heidegger designates death as the possibility of absolute impossibility (1998: 250).

xvii See Manuscript E III 4, "Teleologie," p. 12a: "Absolute goals (…) are those goals which I need to follow in order to be able to love myself." (*Absolute Ziele (...) sind so, daß ich mich nur lieben kann, wenn ich ihnen folge*.) I would like to thank Rudolf Bernet, Director of the Husserl Archives at the time of my accessing the manuscript, for his permission to quote from this manuscript.

xviii The first two *Kaizo* articles belong to static phenomenology whereas the third article, as Husserl himself announces, employs a genetic analysis. See also Welton 1991: 586.

xix We will leave open the question why Husserl only speaks of "higher developed cultures." This

restriction might be based on a restriction in his concept of religion which would presuppose the existence of a fully formulated doctrine.

[xx] *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*. Translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975: 10. We will not be able to engage with the various interpretations of this Hegelian claim since it is the general idea, present in Hegel and Heidegger, that interests us here.

[xxi] There is not really space to spell out what that means, in this article. It will soon be developed in an online project at the University of [removed for blind review].

[xxii] May 1996 Interview with Charlie Rose.

[xxiii] 1996 Interview with WPR on *Infinite Jest*.