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Education for Values: phenomenology's insights

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Abstract

One of the most important contributions of Husserl's paramount work is his assertion to go "back to the things themselves". Why did this come about? Similarly to what Giambattista Vico did to the reception of Descartes' work or to what Charles Sanders Peirce did to modern science, in particular, to semiotics perspectives of modern science, Husserl was dissecting the newly born science of psychology because he was confident that, somehow, it was missing the point. And the point was that life, the quotidian and concrete side of life, with its complexity and density, was being put to the side. Was Husserl right in his insights? Was the objectivity, the subjectivity and the individuation process that comes about through the assertion of "back to the things themselves" really captures whatever needs to be captured in human experience of life as it presents itself?

1 - Introduction

The point that this paper makes is the following: first, dominant thinking is biased towards that which may be controlled and predicted and Modernity is but a reflection, and a consequence, of that which was already present at the birth of Western tradition, influenced by Greek's new born philosophy, which was the need to avoid any possible lack of control, understood as a thought-system itself; second, Modern education, and its ethical and evaluative inner structure, that is, the values it unavoidably highlights and promotes, better, its Cosmo vision or thought-system, is precisely an instance where the fear of the unknown, taken as lack of control, becomes visible; and third, the question lies unanswered, as it is not the purpose of the present paper to unveil the secrets of the universe.

Hayden White's Trope theory (1976, 1978) helps us, humans, to acknowledge that irony, sense of humor, in arts and in every day life, is a critical ingredient for survival. More importantly, the need to cope with how humans cope with the unknown, for the

evolution of humankind, not from an anthropocentric perspective but as an instance of manifestation present in reality itself, is the task all individuals and all social systems have had to come with some kind of plausible answer.

Consequently, the aim of the present paper is to use the contributions of authors such as Michel Henry (1963), Maria Zambrano (2011) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1961), in order to demonstrate the power of phenomenology to capture the paradoxes of human development. It takes for granted that that which is generally called education, values and ethics is part of such human developmental process. Human, human beings, "human" understood as an adjective of being.

Contemporary challenges require rethinking society's structures and systems of thought. Within varied disciplinary fields, a wide range of authors has voiced such imperative and urgency for global change. From Jean Baudrillard's (1994) notion of hyperreality, to the idea of hypermodernity (Charles and Lipowetsky, 2006); from Levina's ethics of care (1989), to Thomas Picketty's (2000) work on economic inequality, understood as the dark side of current progress; from José-Luís Dader's cyberpolitics (2009), to Jean-François Lyotard's (1985) stressing the crucial role of local narratives, against the oppressive and decaying presence of meta and grand overarching narratives.

Manoel Castells (2011) has developed the idea of the network society. Castells voices a powerful argument that humanity has reached a stage of over development at a technological level, which contrasts to its underdevelopment stage, in social terms.

For the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1986), global peace, or any idealised future stage of society, are important, as such idealisation process itself helps to create the conditions for its emergence. In other words, humans need to create idealised visions of reality as such illusions help cultivate positive attitudes towards reality, which, in turn, foster trust and openness, that themselves enable the creation of new opportunities for novelty and change.

This social change corresponds to a meaning making process. The unit of meaning is not a word but a sentence. This evidence is present and visible even in a sentence as simple as: "Go!". Gonçalves's (1996) work on the philosophy of action captures this dynamism, present in natural language. In other words, the world of affects is the gate door to the irrefutable intelligibility of quotidian reality and it is through dynamic rationality processes that humans make sense of their worlds.

2 – Education and values

It is important to start with education. Education shapes present day societies. And it is important to start with values. Values and education correspond to two sides of the same coin.

Both Dewey (1938) and Engeström (1987) present unorthodox approaches to education. Their criticism as well as the novelty they introduce in education implies the need to reevaluate the values being transmitted by such social vehicle. Peace building and peace maintenance are crucial values, which need to be further promoted in present day educational systems. Berdal (2017), Harris (2010) and Gerstein (2003) address peace related issues as constituting structural elements of societies that are able to achieve high levels of human development.

Phenomenology, as it is understood today, over a century after Husserl's work, presents itself as a multivariate and polyhedral reality. Phenomenology is the world of experience, experience that occurs when it is acknowledged as such.

Experience, when it is acknowledged as such - as opposed to the experience of existence, which needs no specific acknowledgment to carry on existing. Phenomenology captures that hint, that subtle margin: between living and letting go, "no questions asked", and the punch like surprise of being alive.

Aesthetics, religion, politics or techno science, all share the same historical framework, in the sense that any kind of development, whatever the area, will profit from the categories and knowledge instances present in every specific time period and geographical context. This conditioning process, or this historicity, enables the recognition of the contextual factors that influenced the emergence of Husserl's work.

Bell's (1974) study of the post-industrial society, Todoroi's (2011) work on the information era and Herbert Simon's (1996) work on the sciences of the artificial, together offer a rich perspective on the complexity of contemporary challenges.

The argument of the present text is that phenomenology is a toolbox, which enables decoding present day contexts, even when such contexts have undergone deep transformational change since Husserl's time. On one hand, Husserl's drive to revise the scientific basis of new sciences, such as psychology, and to argue for the need to reformulate its foundations, is still valid today. On another hand, Artificial Intelligence, neuro-psychoanalysis or the context of industry 4.0, as novel contributions to human knowledge, still fall within the radar of that which phenomenology offers to develop, that is, access to the experiential world of human existence.

Power may be an effective category in order to characterize the importance of phenomenology for contemporary societies. When terms such as empowerment are used, the issue that is at stake is diffuse and unclear. Yes, there is the call for reinforcement of whatever reality is being mentioned and, yet, the particularities of such process are evasive.

In other words, empowering a particular situation – people, idea or event – implies capturing the world of experience, which has not yet been fully exploited in past circumstances and that, once open to novelty, will enable new opportunities of participation to be manifested. Two crucial terms stand out in this account: first, to participate, that is how humans engage in life maintenance and life enrichment initiatives, and, second, manifestation, that is how reality works, in a permanent state of flow, of flux and of change.

Consequently, the phenomenology toolbox is a tin opener, and the tin is the past and the present. Phenomenology helps to revise the past, in an effort to stratify the simultaneous and the sequential influences that determined the emergence of Husserl's work and that of his followers. And phenomenology helps to revise the present, as an open ground that enables questioning one's reasoning and taken for granted assumptions.

Phenomenology is an enabler and a change maker precisely because it opens the Pandora's box of free thought. Consent, permission, emancipation, liberation and inspiration, are all characteristics of empowering modes of existence that phenomenology enables. Why? Because human existence, in cultural settings where education is institutionalized and values are made explicit in rule making behavior, through the use of language and the participation in social practices, needs to be constantly nurtured by non predictive inputs in order to foster creativity and take full profit of all that existence has to offer, no matter the circumstances.

Education and values illustrate the workings of phenomenology. The learning-teaching dual model, which has served as the basis of Western educational systems, simultaneously repeats, reproduces and reinforces societal structures, as well as enables surreptitious instances of rejection, innovation and change to occur. In other words, the educational system is designed and programmed to replicate society, with its dominant values and thought patterns, and yet, intrinsic to the workings of human settings, there is an extra – extra-ordinary – activity, which manages to escape the grips of predetermined designed systems and that dispicently introduces novelty.

Novelty occurs in creative production, in the exploration of new approaches and relationships and in truly engaging in the open process of living life to the full. Values have the in-built capacity to generate further and further levels of valuation, therefore being open to the dynamics of life itself. Such life is understood as an emergent, self-organizing and auto-poietic process of generating intuition, inspiration and cheer enthusiasm. Educational systems may be more or less conducive to such openness to creativity.

One of the most severe dramas of over developed societies is the pure waste of creative power. However, more than this being a characteristic of specific educational systems and pedagogical cultures, indeed it is a long standing bias towards domain and control and aversion to change. Western culture's obsession with the need to predict and determine the course of events, at whatever level, is itself an instance of a death culture, with no tolerance to difference or to diversity and endemically rejecting alien, foreign or distanced alternatives.

In other words, Western culture suffers from a disease, a contamination, which twists its evaluative power. This means that it loses its capacity to grasp the threats and opportunities of its own reality. However, such illness, or handicap, also has its limits, so that, now and then, new opportunities emerge and change happens. Like taming a wild horse, the secret is to simultaneously keep the strength and power of a savage beast, whilst introducing ways to enable transforming such cheer brute energy into creative artistry, artisanship and creative power.

Civilization itself corresponds to such evolution and although civilizations come and go, cultural traits are incorporated and transformed, migrating from dying civilizations to those that are emerging and gradually being born. In a more radical way, humanity itself captures, incorporates and reifies such evolutionary processes.

Phenomenology enables a crude look at such successive contamination processes, in which education and values, contain both the poison and its antidote. Such education and values correspond to the visible aspects of the undercurrents that determine civilizations, cultures and human evolution, transformation and development.

3 – Ludwig Wittgenstein

The philosophical work of Wittgenstein (1958, 1961) is as diverse and contradictory as it is rich and fertile. The intensity and the stretching of the limits that are present in his work imply that its interpretation needs new categories as it breaks the bounds of conventional philosophical qualifications. Moreover, the reception of his work is still

offering new interpretations, which help to understand the role of phenomenology in contemporary times.

Wittgenstein's life condenses a set of unique circumstances, including the troubled European environment of the first half of the twentieth century, an intense inner life and self-perception, as well as an insatiable appetite for heterodox intellectual productions. The result is a still largely unexplored accumulation of research material, which is still finding new interpretations today. Though Wittgenstein's work received powerful, yet, contradictory acceptance during his lifetime, ranging from the hero like mythological veneration of his pupils, to the hostile rejection of some other thinkers, many aspects of his rich and diverse work are still being explored in present times.

Both philosophy of language and philosophy of action play a foundational role in Wittgenstein's oeuvre. Bridging Continental and analytic philosophy, his contributions help to stress the role of phenomenology as the backbone element of all philosophy.

Continental and analytical stances do not represent two sides of the same coin. Continental contributions, in particular phenomenological insights, deepen and give new breadth to the task of philosophical inquiry. On the contrary, analytical philosophy, often taken as an exclusive and all encompassing approach, even if or when productive and effective, it falls captive of its own enchantment power and becomes as a reductive, almost narcissistic or autistic language-game.

The revolutionary and heterodox nature of Wittgenstein's work lead him to consider himself as an anti-philosophy philosopher. Therefore, he rejected the conventional position, present in Western tradition, of considering a top-down approach, understood as a system of thought that could be readily applied in order to make sense of the world. This approach would be a one-size-fits-all undertaking, such as a solution looking for a problem. If the model did not fit reality, reality was the problem, not the model.

For Wittgenstein, the self-sufficient and self-satisfied nature of conventional Western philosophy implied that it was, indeed, part of the problem and not part of the solution. Most of Wittgenstein's efforts were to denounce the vulnerability and frailty of Western thought, rather than worrying about offering precise alternatives. As other authors after him, including Michel Foucault, their ultimate aim was to present an image of philosophy that could be accessible and, indeed, practical. Both authors use the expression of aiming to make one's life a work of art, an artistic production, as the ideal aim of all individuals. That is, intuitive, creative and spontaneous, open

to the inspirations of life itself. In other words, this understanding of life as a work of art aimed at characterizing human's experience of existence, always open for novelty, as long as being open to the dense and intense nature of authentic livelihood.

4 – Maria Zambrano

Zambrano's (2011) work is highly creative. Her notion of poetic reason establishes a common ground between poetry and philosophy, in which "philosophical thinking, more than the expression of the final structures of reality (the Being), is the creation and opening for the unexpected (the process of being)" (Bezerra, 2012: 7).

Throughout the history of philosophy there is a divide between formal and institutional bound philosophical production and the philosophizing performed by independent thinkers. Zambrano's is an exemplar of the latter. Having lived through the Spanish civil war in late thirties (1936-1939), and having been caught in the losing side of the war, Zambrano did not achieve a formal academic career. Nevertheless, she managed to produce a vast volume of work that is hard to place, to tame or to classify. Her heterodoxy followed the tradition of her masters, the contemporary and controversial Spanish philosophers Ortega y Gasset and Xavier Zubiri.

Zambrano has been recognized as a great name in present times, contrasting to her almost incognito existence during her lifetime. The magnitude of her work, both in terms of quantity and of quality, has been promoted steadily yet slowly. Probably the most impressive impact of her work comes from her ability to interpret the evolution of Western thought as an instance of mismatchment, as an equivocation or a misconception. As has been performed by other authors, namely Michel Foucault or Hannah Arendt, Zambrano uses Antiquity settings in order to disclose and to denounce misunderstandings that are still operative today.

A striking example is Zambrano's notion of poetic rationality. Under this view, pure analytical reasoning, such as mathematics or geometry, and pure symbolic and metaphorical thought, present in poetry, have more in common than meets the eye. That is, according to Zambrano, pre-Socratic thought, before the Logos was taken as the exclusive route to rationality, human creative and inspiring productions did not sever poetry from analytic rationality. For Zambrano, the millenary evolution of Western thought has evolved under that spell, as an in-built bias towards acknowledging predictive and objective knowledge production and devaluing and even despising or ignoring the hidden symbolic, intuitive, mythological and poetic

links to life itself, merging the world of affects and that of plural rationality. This is a powerful interpretation, yet it is troubling in the sense that it hints that somehow, humans have been missing the point.

According to Zambrano, that continuous presence of the poetic side did not disappear; rather, it merely went under cover, disguised in story telling, artistic production or popular culture. However, the intensification of the techno science environment, together with the programmed and systematic nature of life in institutionalized settings, has intensified the divide between the poetic and the analytical sides of rationality and the price being paid for that is visible in self-destructive behavior, both individual and collective. The present climate change crises or war conflicts, child obesity and the rising numbers of anorexia, are wide apart examples of the cumulative effect of the alienation and denial of the intuitive and spontaneous side of life, which needs to be nurtured, developed and cherished.

Although Zambrano was not recognized in her lifetime, her constant and laborious contributions are an overwhelming testimony of the creative nature of human livelihood. Her work represents an hymn and an anthem to humankind. The thorough and sound phenomenological grounding of her masters' work, Gasset and Zubiri, found in Zambrano a spring for further work that will be hard to exhaust. In other words, Zambrano represents the treasury land for future phenomenology, including feminism, sustainability and ecological concerns, as well as the crucial insight of linking poetry and analytical reasoning. In a nutshell, this means being faithful to the ever-present nature of poetry in everyday life. And also, being faithful to how such presence materializes in human creativity, from techno science to the arts.

5 – Michel Henry

The richness of the phenomenological scene is well illustrated through the diversity of Henry's (1963, 1985, 1987) areas of study. From the arts, with Kandinsky, to ideology, through Marx, Henry was able to give a rich account of the power of phenomenology to capture the sophistication and subtleness of human knowledge production.

Henry is often referred to as a philosopher of religion, yet such understanding is reductive in the sense that his work dives deep down into human manifestations as diverse instances of existence. Henry's later in life focus on spiritual spheres is nothing else than the exemplification of such manifestation process.

The early work of the "Essence of Manifestation" (1963) situates Henry's phenomenology in relation to the creative tension between manifestation and

participation. Human's existence is permeated by its openness to the infinite, in the sense that reality manifests itself in endless ways, and through its limited and time and space bound capacity to participate in such unfolding of reality. This tension is referred to as life, as radical life, so that Henry's phenomenology is considered to be radical phenomenology and also material phenomenology.

Life is taken to be the overarching container of Henry's phenomenology. In a creative and inspiring move, life is connected to human rationalization capacity. In historical terms, Henry (1985) reinterprets Descartes' cogito and offers a powerful reading of Modernity. Instead of the "I think, therefore I am" of the Cartesian mantra, Henry argues that what is being meant is indeed "I feel, therefore I am". I feel, the world of affects, is taken to be pure rationality, rationality understood as a plural and complex whole. For Henry, the self-consciousness attitude of self-reflection, the *ipseité*, the way each individual expresses its individuality in a unique way, is triggered by Cartesian thought as the inauguration of the Modern self.

Henry's work on the "Genealogy of Psychoanalysis" (1985) captures such novelty as the expression of human's capacity to interpret reality, taking into account affections, manifestation, participation and life. Humans inner and outer worlds are mutually feeding realities and it is the permeability between such spheres that enables the experience of boundary crossing and of horizon expansion, which is characteristic of Henry's life phenomenology.

The dense and intense richness of Henry's oeuvre, together with its deep felt authenticity, enable the application of this theoretical work in practical settings, in wide apart environments. The diversity of Henrian inspired practical work includes the areas of education, social work, psychotherapy, health care, feminism, aesthetics and even accounting. The reason for such wide apart applications is connected to Henry's radicalism. In a certain sense, what is shared in all these domains is a radical practical philosophy, as a way of life. That is, a certain mode of existence, which is open to all living humans, independent of the historical or geographical context, and that stresses and highlights existence as such, as a manifestation process, and as an impossible to refuse participation in such unfolding of reality.

The power and radicalism of Henry's work is also its difficulty. Like poetry or artistic fruition, Henry's work requires care and attention to how it is handled, incorporated and appropriated by his readers. It is not a gnostic production, which requires initiation. Quite the opposite, as Henry's life time intention is to denounce the "barbarian" atmosphere of ready made cultures, which reduce human existence to

dry and repetitive performances, tied to empty pseudo-scientific achievements. Henry's (1987) strong criticism of the alienated nature of contemporary societies is also a strong cry for sound and thoroughly grounded phenomenological work, able to disclose blockages and to open up new venues for social change.

Life is understood as an overflowing spring of infinite energy, inspiration and drive. Human existence is taken as openness to the infinite nature of how reality manifests itself. Like riding a bicycle, one has to keep moving in order not to fall. It is this down to earth practical and applied nature of Henry's work that has made it such a fertile ground for research in the widest ranging settings. Simultaneously, the theoretical developments performed by Henry's categories have also opened up new opportunities for phenomenological inspired and informed contributions to philosophical thought. And that is the aim of his radical phenomenology.

6 – The importance of texts

Every text emerges out of a creative tension. Like the acrobats, dancing over a tensely stretched line, a text is driven by the urgency of expression – “just say it” – and the resistance against losing the dream like nature of proto-texts, with their infinite openness to the unknown.

Academic texts, in particular, reduce the elements present in the creative tension polarity to three blocks. First, the assertion of the totalitarian nature of texts, based on the assumption that humans are text creatures, insatiable readers and writers, urging the infinite to fit into their wording. Second, academia based reasoning claims the limits of language, language as a prison, in need for institutions to free them, all centered around the model of scientific communities, monasteries, philosophical schools, or the communal camp fire, whether one is considering the Enlightenment period or earlier eras. And third, academia is a producer and consumer of knowledge and meaning, a disseminator and a reproducer of new and old significations and an element of dispute between the public and private sphere of action, and, this said, this meaning-making process is constitutive of academic settings, in research, education and publishing, and is formed by two essential activities, which are the use of language and the participation in social practices.

Addressing phenomenology as a philosophical option, as a school of thought and as an academic tradition, it is important to introduce a spoiler alert: the hero does not die in the end. Phenomenology, in philosophical terms, is merely that which is already present before an explicit and formal philosophical reasoning is performed.

In other words, phenomenology is already there, present in human reasoning, philosophical or otherwise. Moreover, practical phenomenology, the practical consequences and real life impact of phenomenological texts, thinking and discourse, are already present throughout the history of humankind as a constitutive and unavoidable element of what it means to be human.

Is phenomenology anthropology? No. Taking a non-anthropocentric and non-prescriptive stance, phenomenology is necessarily an ontological phenomenology or, rather, a phenomenological ontology. That is, phenomenology characterizes the process through which humans engage with reality, participate in reality and such participation is an instance of manifestation of reality itself.

Is phenomenology an epistemology? No. Epistemic considerations are useful because they enable mapping spectrums: analytical and constructivist perspectives may be confronted as two ends of a spectrum. However, when phenomenology comes into the equation it implies that both positivist, analytical as well as constructivist and social oriented traditions become a single whole, merged together as corresponding to a focus on how individuals come to grips with their circumstances, their overall environment, their own reality, including themselves and their self-consciousness.

Phenomenology forces a radical change in perspective. It acknowledges the artificial nature of that which becomes present in thought, language and action, including the artificial idea of nature and culture. That is, culture, from a phenomenological perspective, is a direct product of life endeavors, activities and dynamics. Nature is then a product of culture: no access to reality is possible, including the reality of the automatic performance of daily tasks, without a model, a structure, which was carefully crafted, generation after generation, through language, through engaging in social practices, in phenomenological terms, that is, through being open to participate in the process of how reality manifests itself, in polyhedron forms and in hyperbolic fashions.

Science, techno science, the Arts, politics, religion, history, varied forms of human knowledge and of the institutions and social practices that host and articulate such production and reproduction processes of human creativity, bring novelty into the process through often counter-intuitive reasoning. Humans were not made to spontaneously see the Sun as the star at the center of the Solar system. The aesthetical fruition of humans observing nature, birds' chants, or a scenery,

exemplify an instance of participation of humans, often experienced as a form of excess, of something that cannot be refused or rejected.

Religious texts, both the doctrines and the mystical references, embody an effort to reify such experiences of excess. Scientific production equally captures the Eureka moment of thinking anew and of figuring out an answer or a solution to a problem.

However, once scientific discoveries are established, the application and reproduction of their insights corresponds to freezing and crystalizing their rationale. Nevertheless, every science has to keep an openness to novelty otherwise it will perish. It becomes a dead science and the same is true with language, religion, history or politics, both political science, philosophy or policy making, normative or positive.

7 - What if humans have got it wrong?

Some humans drive cars; in order to be a good driver, only minimal mechanical knowledge is needed. Some humans enjoy the exercise of free thought; in order to be a free thinker, only minimal knowledge of the mechanics of reasoning is needed.

Phenomenology, from Husserl, to Heidegger or Henry, does not address humans' so called problems. Rather, it places reality at a level of immediateness that imposes a whole new approach. Sometimes presents or gifts come in beautiful wrap-up packages. Cereals, chocolates or toothpaste also vary in terms of packaging.

Phenomenology is like the package of breakfast cereal. It has always been there and, consequently, it is hard to notice. Banal and futile, it captures the absolute useless and inutile function of merely helping humans notice whatever being human implies. Phenomenology forces that weird angle and uncomfortable position whereas new adventures may arise, though they seem so unlikely that the gut feeling is one of immediate rejection. In fairy tales, many signs warn the hero not to follow certain tracks, not to go into dark castles and not to cross certain lines ("those that have entered here have not come back"). Phenomenology is that imaginary land from which no return is possible.

An ideal vision of phenomenology may offer easy recipes for wonderland – or for Nirvana. For Albert Einstein, logic enables going from A to B, though imagination opens infinite alternative routes and destinations. For Carl Sagan, humans are the way the Cosmos may think about itself. For Pablo Picasso, when he first visited the astonishing artistry of the Altamira caves, he announced that humans have learnt nothing since pre-historic times. Phenomenology implies considering human's

imagination, a non-anthropocentric Cosmo vision, and the capacity to become bewildered by something utterly new.

Parmenides, Herodotus or Aristotle, all could exemplify instances of phenomenological emergence. Taking the evolution of humankind as a whole, it is possible to consider that, sometime along the way, something got lost.

History, science, religion or the arts help to develop a narrative through which the ambiguities of certain perspectives – those that accept paradox, conflict and frailty in human reality – are somewhat solved. That is, several plausible or even credible accounts are possible, which work as self-fulfilling prophecies and as wishful thinking mechanisms for self and collective empowerment. Nevertheless, when considering current circumstances, some aspects of contemporary societies may be considered to be a caricature, soap opera like, of that which humanity stands for, represents or embodies. Discourses related to ethics and to humanism may be misleading, as they may conceal the creation of an abstract ideal, which is then imposed as a no-alternative path. Even the discussions around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights might seem like a restricted model.

The issue is that different cultures and civilizations promote, explore and develop different elements of that which is constitutive of the human species. Humanity cannot be considered as something static but rather as a dynamic and multilayered complex whole. More importantly, that which is experienced in individual terms as something authentic, dense and intense also corresponds to the collective experience of being human. In other words, humanity is an open process whereas each individual or collectivity may explore and expand whatever characterizes humanity itself. Athletes breaking their own records not only expand their individual and collective possibilities as well as enable the setting of new standards for what is possible to be achieved.

Civilizations and historical eras capture specific features of what life in society means. Each culture represents unique combinations of institutional and relational settings and mindsets. In order to understand the impact and depth and breadth of phenomenology it is important to highlight two processes or two domains. On one hand, the process of historical change, in which dominant thinking contrasts with peripheral, heterodox and dispersed positions. As time evolves, the central and hegemonic positions loose ground in order to be replaced by the suddenly trendy previous peripheral positions. As a snake that leaves its old skin behind and replaces

it for a new one, so successive layers of new fashions become the obvious taken for granted thing to do, think or act.

On another hand, although change does occur at a superficial level, at a deeper register there may be considered underlying currents of thought that are stable, long term and never go away; they merely evolve and, such evolution corresponds to new achievements and new perspectives regarding that which is constitutive of humanity itself.

Bricks may be positioned side by side and one on the top of the other. With bricks, walls and towers may be built. There is not much else that may be done with a brick, apart from trimming its edges and trying to make them fit wherever they are meant to fit. Liquids in a cocktail mixture are different from layering bricks. Ideas, culture, civilizations and the millenary process of evolution of humankind across time resemble more a liquid mix than a succession of layers of bricks. However, such complexity is puzzling. Therefore, it is easier to consider a set of bricks and a specific wall, and then, at a certain stage, there is change, and then new bricks and a new wall is built.

In full contact combat sports each player becomes covered in his or hers opponent sweat and the smell of one and of the other becomes indistinguishable. Each one takes away with him or with her the smell of his / her enemy's sweat. The same is true with human reality and it is phenomenology that is best placed to take into account such infinite layers of fluid and of smell mixtures.

8 – Historical eras

Values are the end of the line. Habits, moral and ethics are close to the end of the line. Belief systems are the value chain mechanism through which culture is crafted and stabilized. Historical eras are chronological and non-chronological. In other words, once a historic event takes place, two processes are merged. On one hand, it is possible to situate such event onto a time line, no matter the calendar or time measurement being used. On the other hand, that which becomes visible, that emerges, that is unquestionable, in a similar way to the tip of an iceberg, is also an instance of a constant flow of reality manifesting itself.

The historical figure Charlemagne, if described as an open interpretation process, implies that every time this historical figure is mentioned it is necessary to actualize, to specify and to characterize what is being meant. Usually the contextual setting enables this task to be executed as an automatic function with seamless ease.

However, it is possible to find out and to explore infinite ways of interpreting this historical figure. Expressions such as “look; look again” or “think; think twice”, capture the hidden process of dissecting the different layers of an onion present in all reality.

Alexander the Great founded the Ancient city of Alexandria, when he was very young, and he never visited again the town in his lifetime. What stands for the founding of this Ancient city was present at the time as an impulse, a drive, a necessary action that was needed to fulfill whatever craving, or collective necessity, that captured the whole historical setting and of which Alexander stood as simply its visible element. Such process is still open today in the sense that to mention that city, which still exists, implies capturing, exploring and interpreting all the layers of meaning that lay open in every significant historical event.

One thing is to narrate historical facts and chronological sequences, yet historicity captures duration, time as an open process, which not only enables but also rather forces, as an impossible to refuse drive to reframe and to reinterpret whatever is being considered. A conversation between a two-year-old child and a four year old about a past event may illustrate this open process of reinterpreting life as it opens itself. The process that forces humans to say, think again, look back, is phenomenology at its best.

Phenomenology is the default mode of existence. It sets the terms of reference against which new standards may be set. Reality does not fall off the plate. In other words, reality unfolds, new and novel tones become visible and yet such emergence of novelty is merely humanity or reality or culture finding, crafting, developing and presenting its best version of itself. A sculptor takes a block of stone and takes away the excess of stone that hides the figure of a horse that is hidden inside and invisible in the block of stone. Phenomenology decodes the functioning of human endeavors in a way that enables the emergence of new dimensions of whatever is constitutive of being human.

9 – Alice in Wonderland

Texts in general and literature in particular capture that which is the kernel dynamics of human self-reflection capacity. Intentionally or not, in texts, subtexts and contexts, new reality emerges. What is critical to highlight is that answering the question of whether philosophy, theology and literature may serve as a real life testimony of human endeavors, that is, of what triggers humans to think and act, whatever the answer, it will be more faithful in describing a point of view, the particular view point of whoever is answering, than in shedding light upon whatever is being meant by

these instances of participation in reality, in the manifestation power of reality itself. In other words, such accounts tell us more about the narrator than about the thing being described.

This said, it is not indifferent from what particular starting point the journey starts. Like the cat in Alice in Wonderland, whichever way you will follow, there will be an answer, it will get you somewhere. That is, whatever the route, it will lead somewhere; patience and perseverance in the searching process, will pay off.

However, in order to understand the power of phenomenology it is crucial to acknowledge that literature, philosophy and theology, in contemporary contexts, open successive doors, in this order. Literature as the widely diverse and contradictory mixture of ways that words and sentences may be mixed in order to offer new shades of interpreting reality – intertextuality and granularity help to capture this subtle and yet powerful process. Philosophy, like the owl, as Hegel put it, comes in at the end of the day; that is, it dissects reality, which has already been put forward in texts, in life, in significant existential experiences and in life changing events. And theology is becoming a wildly cosmopolitan area of research; from feminist theology, to laic spirituality, evidence abounds to illustrate how sacred texts, doctrines and rituals help to fuel the imagination of the new creators of the transcendental ecosystem.

Again, phenomenology crucially helps to differentiate between that which is to be considered as the transcendence, the abstract and idealistic notion of transcendence, versus that which is taken to be the transcendent, that is, “The” concrete real life examples of experiencing transcendence. Experiences of limit situations or else situations of self-overcoming, in a sports competition or in academic exams, illustrate the awe and surprise that may occur in unexpected events.

The artistic, technical, scientific and romance like processes of creative production, the enthusiasm and the feeling of being attracted to or overwhelmed by unanticipated discoveries, the sense of adventure that sometimes interrupts the repetitive flow of routine, that is, all in all, the hint of the presence of an experience of novelty. However, only when it becomes visible and repetitive, and it is appropriated as a new skill, task, hobby, addiction, habit, function or profession, does it become as if a continuation of one’s body, as a second skin. Consequently, the acknowledgement of an experience of novelty needs repetition and training, awareness rising and self-consciousness.

Knowing, not knowledge, as Wittgenstein claims. Becoming, not being, as Schopenhauer highlights as Plato's paramount statement. In the language of poets and writers – Hillesum, Lispector, Llansol, Kavafis and Helder – and in the publicity of a trademark, "just do it".

Phenomenology is the adventure process that deciphers the hermeneutical task through which each sentence of a text, taking a sentence as a unit of meaning, unfolds and brings novelty to each new reading event. Time's duration is present in artistic fruition as every time an oeuvre is contemplated it opens up new meanings. Such novelty, such feeling of surprise, as the expansion of one's horizons and as an experience of excess, like a border-crossing adventure, is captured by phenomenology.

Crucially, though each deep felt individual experience is that which connects each individual to an universal connectivity, so that each lover will read the Cosmos as an instance of his or hers experience of being in love, when seen from the outside, only geographically local realities can be traced and pin-pointed as existing in real and concrete terms.

Human knowledge illustrates this creative tension between, firstly, that which is open to each individual - and that corresponds to the experience of existence, whether fragmented or as a whole, it is not relevant here - together with the real life concrete instance that triggers such vision of the whole, of the universe, of the Cosmos, or of the infinite, and then, secondly, the geographically local diversity and infinite process of differentiation and of segmentation that may be traced in each specific and idiosyncratic real life case. Knowledge is universal in the dynamic, creative and open process of knowing and yet, every time it is made concrete, it is bound by concrete instances of time and space.

In different traditional schools of thought and in different philosophical traditions, often unexpected similitudes are present. Both Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1974) refer to the human process of creating new realities. Such novel hermeneutics are a way through which to interpret life, reality or the world. This corresponds to the Greek world of wholesome meanings, as an iterative and repetitive spiral like movement, as a never-ending carousel that each new individual and each new generation inaugurate and yet connects humans to their archetype experiences.

For Saussure, words are aleatory, random like pieces of a puzzle that produce meaning through a constant process of continuous differentiation. It is X, not Y; or

better, Xy, not Yx. In other words, words may be combined infinitely so that each combination may capture successive new differentiation possibilities.

In this sense, humans use language in as much as language uses humans in order to say itself. Language illustrates the never-ending process of successive layers of use and of practice that constitutes human heritage both regarding its past and also its present and its future. This is the phenomenologist's adventure.

For Peirce, the iterative cycle is embodied into the process itself so that each instance of interpretation may be isolated and taken out of its context and reinterpreted infinitely, in a never-ending process. For Saussure, it is language use that automatically performs the infinite power of language to force, or invite or suggest new meanings, new approaches to whatever is being considered. For Peirce, it is intrinsic, embodied and embedded in the process of enunciation itself, as a mandatory imperative to "spit it out": "just say it". Neither author addresses communication as an exchange but rather aim at capturing the creative and intrinsically human domain of language creation and use. Communication is a consequence of something prior, of the dynamic impulse to create and to figure out whatever may be said about a particular event.

The distinctions between, firstly, subjective knowledge of life, in real and original terms, and, secondly, of the objective and abstract knowledge, are both compressed and merged in phenomenological approaches. When going into a shop one may use natural language to ask for a pear or an apple, and there is the implied agreement of what is being meant. However, if either or both the buyer and the seller are passionate about pears or apples, an infinite story may begin, trying to capture the differentiation and limitless process of charactering every instance of pleasure that may be cherished from the fruition of such apparently common object of trade in fruit shops.

Water is probably one of the most extraordinary examples of the mythological and endless like capacity of capturing something that is both common and ordinary, in a colloquial use, as well as it is an infinite source of metaphors and of symbolic reasoning, when stretched to its limits, on the other end of the spectrum.

Phenomenology deals with infinite layers of meaning because it aims at creating a particular attitude and state of mind that indeed acknowledges the immediateness of how reality presents itself whilst, at the same time, recognizes the thickness, opaqueness and resistance to being captured that is present in concrete real life

reality. This creative tension leads to instances of interpretation that open up new venues for human thought and action.

No matter the geographical location or the historic era, phenomenology enables this starting position to be adopted as an ultimate instance of reification of whatever means to be human. In other words, phenomenology enables the rejection of a stable anthropology or even of a range of epistemological positions because it captures the constitutive process of reality that, in human terms, emerges as language, as written texts or as self-consciousness. Existential statements, instances when something is said by someone, stand for episodes that illustrate how humanity is constantly reinventing itself in a constant state of flux. It is not specific to humanity that change processes occur, neither that differentiation advances uninterrupted. However, phenomenology helps to make clear that human made interpretations of reality, in turn, create reality.

10 – Questions and answers

Three parts of a story help to describe phenomenology: what, why and so what? The less important one, what is phenomenology, is a slippery stage, as it risks never reaching the other parts. After the – short – first phase, where phenomenology is characterized, the second phase stands for why it is important. And finally, the last stage, why should one bother about phenomenology.

What? For the sake of the argument, one may assume whatever definition comes handy.

Why? Because it enables deconstructing and reconstructing the thought edifice of present reality, regarding one's self, others, the world, the Cosmos and the transcendent.

So what? So that one may learn to use one's capabilities, individually and collectively. So that one may learn to acknowledge the power of iterative and interactive thought processes, which break misleading patterns and vicious reasoning. So that one may learn to participate in full in whatever life has to offer, and to take the full potential of reality manifesting itself. Fulfillment, sense of achievement, of plenitude or of happiness: living life to the full, whatever that may mean. That is phenomenology's offer. What is the price that has to be paid? Indeed the price is life itself. It is through living life through its own rationale that phenomenology is performed, conducted and used.

Three elements of phenomenology: participation, manifestation and values. Phenomenology is part of an Alice in Wonderland setting – or a terror movie or a hard-core film. The more you think you understand it and control it, the furthest away from the truth you get.

Not everything corresponds to the label it shows. A bottle labeled “do not drink me”, may suit what phenomenology stands for. If any of the alternative theories and methods worked, phenomenology would never have been created.

Phenomenology cuts across time and space barriers. Neither here, nor there, it works as a trick, a magical fancy or an illusionist trait. Like a belief system, it may be ignored or acknowledged. What makes it work is also what makes it hard to grasp. The surface of an egg hides its inside; this inside can be seen once the crust is broken; yet, once broken, it is no longer a whole egg.

Phenomenology is a helping hand. However, this helping hand is similar to the help given to a moribund. No saving is possible and consequently one might as well be there ready to hold one’s hand tight, without being able to say “I’m with you in this”.

Phenomenology, like death, has many sides. Polyhedral in nature, it forces one to think about, first, the abstract notion of death; second, the experience of death through the death of others; and, third, the constant certainty of one’s death, sometime in the future, and the open and unknown hypothesis of its timing circumstances.

In present times, Homo sapiens are the only human species present on planet Earth. All previous human species shared a single characteristic, which is taken as constitutive of humanity itself: they took care of their sick and they buried their dead.

Archetype ideas related to hunters and gatherers, as well as to masculine and feminine traits, tend to stress and to highlight competition, which includes combativeness, resilience and drive to succeed. However, competition is not an instance of zero-sum, cowboy like, life or death, black or white results, with clear-cut linear like causes and consequences. Competition is like romantic love: it works better when both work in the same direction. Competition, humane competition, is intrinsically and unavoidably cooperative and collaborative. No matter the destructiveness of present and past human behavior, no survival of the species would have been possible if there were not other levels, registers and orders of what it means to compete.

Competition is a relative measure of success and can only be used in reference to an external standard. Being competitive implies being at least as effective as whatever terms of reference are being used. In a race, in a war or in a fight, it is possible to imagine a situation that breaks away the terms of reference being used. Like a tip over effect, at certain stage, saturation occurs and polarities are inversed. "The stone age did not end because we have run out of stones."

A posteriori, it is possible to offer plausible accounts that may justify the sequence of events. However, history is a constantly open process because in each era, that which stands as being relevant and significant, changes. In other words, history is permanently being updated and rewritten. Historicity itself captures such notion of openness to infinite levels of interpretation present in all reality.

Phenomenology is historicity and vice-versa. Like the river water that passes through under a bridge, it is never the same water. Reality is like plumbs and flows. If one focuses on the plumbing, one tends to forget the flow and vice-versa. Like a flow or a stock variable, both dimensions are necessary. Phenomenology as well as historicity captures the paradox of the container and the contained. If one can imagine a container that may hold certain content, as long as such content is understood as being an overflow, an experience of excess, no container is imaginable. Yet reality is a whole. No matter how fragmented it gets, it does not cease to be a fragmented whole.

Reality does not fall off the plate. There is no escape from reality. Car stickers offer free advice: "Reality is for those who have no imagination."; "Don't follow me. I'm lost too." Phenomenology is peace. Once understood, acknowledged and recognized, every conflict-binding situation holds in itself the seeds of peace.

Phenomenology is important: so what? Where does that lead? Who cares or who should care?

Phenomenology is like a corridor of distorted mirrors (as they had in Old Fairs): what one experiences affects further experiences, in a never-ending process.

Phenomenology is both closure and openness: like a door, it may be shut or it may be opened.

("What do you see?"; "I see a door."; "What is a door?"; "It is a pass way between two different spaces and the door enables both passing through it, when opened, and blocking one's way, when closed.")

Phenomenology is not experience as such: experience is always a new experience - and phenomenology has to enable learning to occur, in order to be noticed.

Phenomenology is like a bad habit: it is acquired without noticing it and it remains present long after it has been noticed.

Phenomenology is like a good habit: it is hard to get, yet, it enables the repeat mode once it becomes accessible.

Phenomenology is like life: life itself is present in biological registers, yet, it depends upon the presence of non-biological elements.

Phenomenology is a different order ecosystem: it revises taken for granted assumptions, forcing the acknowledgement of the presence of long run structural instances.

Phenomenology is like a bad joke: the more you explain it, the less it works.

Phenomenology is like a good joke: the more you understand it, the more it makes you laugh. Phenomenology teaches you to laugh at yourself.

Phenomenology is more than can be said or written about it: it captures the subtle awareness of being alive.

Theory and practice assume a misconception of phenomenology: once it is noticed, it is already there. ("There is nothing so practical as a good theory." – Kurt Lewin)

Plain language is needed in order to give an account of phenomenological processes: such an account is simultaneously singular first person and plural third person.

Phenomenology corresponds to the default mode of existence: Artificial Intelligence, together with hard-core pornography, are phenomenology's direct competitors.

Life is of the order of a promise: human survival, individually and collectively, implies moving forward without asking too many questions.

Belief systems are phenomenological processes. Philosophy, techno-science, religion and the Arts are phenomenological structures. Innovation, creativity and novelty capture the phenomenological drive: they are thought in action.

Phenomenology is like the Ride of the Valkyries, the Cavalcade of Brunnhilde's sisters, of Wagner's "Die Walkure" opera: nothing can stop them.

11 - Conclusion

That which is critical to retain in the present text is that phenomenology is able to perform a dual task, once spread broadly - as Husserl's oeuvre was able to do, opening up new venues for future development across a wide range of possibilities.

On one hand, phenomenology enables denouncing the closed loop problematic of Western educational and value systems. Such systems have historically and systematically promoted a repetition and reinforcement of a command and control approach to reality, suspicious of the unknown. And, on the other hand, phenomenology enunciates the openness, trust and confidence that emerges from human thought and action, through language use and participation in social practices.

Both the processes of singular individuation and of collective community building, present, for instance, in peace promoting circumstances, are concrete and real life examples of phenomenological practical insights being put to the service of human development. In educational settings and in local geographical instances, it is possible to acknowledge the power of phenomenology's inspiration. European Union's educational reform (e.g., Bologna Process, in the 1990') stresses a shift in values. The Latin American educationist, Paulo Freire, and his work on critical education and on pedagogical legacy (in the 1970', through to the nineties) call for educational action for social change. Both examples focus their attention on the student and not on the teacher; they focus on the student's interests and not primarily on the contents; and they both specifically aim at making each student the leader of their own learning process. Equally importantly, the social movement of open science is parallel to these transversal changes.

Democratization of knowledge is also present in therapeutically directed relationships, where contribution from both ends – user and care provider - are valued and promoted, as opposed to the conventional asymmetrical and expert exclusiveness of the control of the evolution of the therapeutic process. In political and ideological terms, the example of a failure in a European policy enables positive and rich lessons from a social impact point of view. The so-called Lisbon Strategy (a development plan for the 2000-2010 period) addressed twenty-first century economic competitiveness as if it were a zero-sum race: for economy A to win, economy B has to lose. On the contrary, all the assumptions of this policy were right except for the realization and the acknowledgement that human development is a global achievement, where no one may be left behind.

Phenomenology forces the re-evaluation of taken for granted assumptions and opens new ventures for exploration, for trial and error and for the promotion of inclusiveness and of social cohesion on a global scale. Western as well as other civilizations regard human knowledge as a source of goodness for humankind. Phenomenology stresses such intention and offers powerful interpretations that enable disclosing the paradoxes and ambiguities of ideologies that have lost touch with reality. In other words, mature educational and value systems go unnoticed. They need no propaganda because they speak for themselves. However, long standing peace in large global regions help to create hopeful narratives and positive public discourses. This, in turn, nurtures future dreams of sustainable development and global change for social inclusion. Again, such inclusion is already present in multiple ways, yet, when well functioning, it goes unnoticed. Probably the most important task for future phenomenologists is to track humane achievement in public policy or else where. Aesthetics, religion and techno science, are all fertile grounds for the identification of powerful examples of phenomenology in action.

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