

WHAT IS PHENOMENOLOGICAL ABOUT CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY? GUENTHER, AL-SAJI, AND THE HUSSERLIAN ACCOUNT OF ATTITUDES

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Since Gayle Salamon's 2018 article "What is Critical about Critical Phenomenology?," phenomenologists and critical theorists have offered various responses to the question this title poses. In doing this, they articulated the following considerations: is renewed criticality targeting the phenomenological method itself, does it expand its subject matter to marginalized experiences, does it retool key phenomenological concepts?¹ One aspect of this debate that has been left under-interrogated, however, is the word "phenomenology" itself. There is after all another question to ask in this context: what is *phenomenological* about critical phenomenology? Many avenues of response are of course possible. Phenomenology could most broadly be meant as an approach that concerns itself with what is given in experience in order to describe the structures of that givenness. From a Husserlian perspective, pure phenomenology is the science which concerns itself with phenomena in the full and diverse sense of the word—not as understood by specific natural or human sciences. What is distinctive of phenomenology is thus not what subset or type of phenomena it is interested in but *how* it relates to them, which, as Husserl introduces *Ideas I*, happens "in a completely different attitude."²

While no agreement has been reached about the term "critical phenomenology," a consensus has nevertheless emerged: this "critical turn" involves a commitment to something more than description, namely to a practice with specific, situated ends. The introduction to *50 Concepts for a Critical* Phenomenology* labels it an "ameliorative" project (Weiss, Murphy, and Salamon, 2020, xiv). Duane D. Davis (2020) suggests intersectional

¹ See notably Aldea, Smaranda Andra, David Carr and Sara Heinämaa, eds. 2021 (forthcoming); Lisa Guenther (2020, 2021); Al-Saji (2019).

² The notion of attitudes is central to phenomenology, yet its various differentiations are not as often developed as the main distinction between the natural and phenomenological attitudes. In his very informative book *Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology: Nature, Spirit, and Life* (2014), Andrea Staiti lists many of those different attitudes in view of showing how the Husserlian notion of attitude responds to the Neo-Kantian account of standpoint (104-08). Even Staiti, however, does not specifically distinguish between the volitive and evaluative attitudes, or track the differences between attitudes which correspond to the different spheres of reason. Yet this is a distinction which is crucial to present purposes, because the evaluative sphere is affective, or can also be called aesthetic, while strictly speaking only the volitive concerns the realm of praxis. What is more, even when scholarship turns to Husserl's ethics in particular, those distinctions are usually not emphasized. See notably: Ullrich Melle (2007); Sophie Loidolt (2009); Henning Peucker (2008); Sara Heinämaa (2014), to name only a few.

phenomenology even holds “praxial promise” (6). Lisa Guenther perhaps most explicitly ties critical phenomenology to a political practice, defining it as a “struggle for liberation” and a commitment to a “restructuring [of] the world” (15). In describing the world-destroying effects of prolonged solitary confinement, or how perceptual practices of suspicious surveillance expose targeted others to state violence, Guenther performs what she calls a “hybrid phenomenological practice” of description and calls for transformation.³ Alia Al-Saji importantly differs from Guenther in this respect by engaging Frantz Fanon’s aporetic account of liberation. Fanon does not adhere to a clear single philosophical method, and Al-Saji (2019a) suggests that no practical program or hopes of “changing the world” should guide critical phenomenology (2).⁴ Instead, she develops a phenomenology of racialized affect that proposes to dwell on, even touch, as Fanon writes, the wounds of colonialism.

Despite critical phenomenology’s tendency to focus on developing a type of critical praxis, both the differences and continuities between Guenther’s and Al-Saji’s perspectives can be productively explored through the lens of Husserlian phenomenology. Specifically, turning to Husserl’s account of attitude reveals how critical phenomenology can be understood as employing a plurality of “methods” through what turns out to be a plurality of attitudes. While Guenther and Al-Saji answer differently to Salamon’s question “what is critical about critical phenomenology,” such a focus on attitudes is able to connect their accounts while clarifying what separates them, in particular when it comes to understanding the role of transformative praxis.

For Husserl, there are three spheres of reason (*Vernunftssphäre*)—judging, valuing and willing—which allow for their distinctive attitudes: theoretical, aesthetic or affective, and practical.⁵ Accordingly, a complete phenomenology of reason has to include branches dedicated not only to judgment, but to axiology and praxis. What is important about this parallel is that while to judge is to posit being, valuing and willing involve different position takings.⁶ To value and will, feel, act, or desire, are intentional acts that constitute sense, but this sense is not reducible to the doxic theses, as Husserl calls them, implicit in such acts.

³ See Guenther (2013, 2019).

⁴ Al-Saji cites: “There is a point where methods devour themselves” [*Il y a un point où les méthodes se résorbent*] (Fanon 1967, 5).

⁵ Husserl makes this recurring point in various contexts. See notably Husserl, *Ideas I*, 291/304 and 349ff.; *The Idea of Phenomenology*, 70; Hua 37, 260-01; See also Dominique Pradelle (2009) for an account of the difficulty to understand these different spheres as unified under the label of “general reason.” Additionally, though the plurality of attitudes corresponding to these spheres usually goes unnoticed, see Andrea Staiti (2014, 98) for an account of the many kinds of attitudes.

⁶ “Positionality” broadly refers, as Husserl describes in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, to the any taking of position, whether judicative, volitive or valuative, and whether explicit or implicit, that is, whether it is also made thematic in a doxic position or not (see Husserl 1969, 136; 2014, 233). The sense of the proposition that correlates with the position is the “something meant” in a broadened manner (see Husserl 2004, 260; Husserl 2014, 227). Moreover, Husserl constantly makes passing references to these other attitudes and the distinct reflections they allow. See notably *First Philosophy*, 2019, 227/23-24; 303/99, *Ideas II*, 1989, 183-94/173-85, and *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 1969, 135/120, and perhaps most explicitly, from Husserl’s 1920 lectures on ethics, the section entitled “*Der Unterschied zwischen der axiologischen und der ethischen Einstellung*” (2004, 244-47).

What I intend through a feeling of value, for example, is not the same as what I intend through the doxic act on which the feeling is founded; perceiving a flower *as* beautiful is not the same as positing this flower as being. This difference between valuing and judging holds even if what Husserl thinks is a *feeling* of value (in this case beauty) is dependent on a judgment about the being of the flower. In other words, for Husserl, each sphere of reason is defined by different manners of givenness: something valued and something willed give themselves differently, and are constituted differently, than something that I perceive (as being). This central insight of Husserlian phenomenology entails that different spheres of reason allow for their particular type of reflection. If I can reflect on acts of valuing and willing to make their implicit doxic theses thematic, such as by reflecting on my valuing of this flower as beautiful to make explicit the thesis of the flower as being, then there are ways to attend to those same acts and what is given in them through practical and aesthetic reflections that lead to corresponding attitudes. While it is certainly possible to relate to phenomena theoretically, which can mean in a phenomenological attitude, it is also possible to relate to them practically and aesthetically, i.e., in different attitudes.

On the basis of this plural, often-unnoticed aspect of the Husserlian notions of attitude, one answer to the question of what connects Guenther's and Al-Saji's accounts is that they adopt attitudes defined phenomenologically; attitudes that display interests in the given, or manners of relating to phenomena, that a general phenomenology of constitution classifies as distinct though interrelated; respectively practical and affective attitudes. The broad question "what is phenomenological about critical phenomenology" can be reformulated as follows: what kinds of attitudes does critical phenomenology employ?

One of the strengths of critical phenomenology may be the plurality of attitudes it adopts, not just in each of its instantiations but in what concerns the variety of thinkers it can accommodate under the umbrella of its community. However, if Guenther's version of critical phenomenology is primarily practical while Al-Saji's is affective and, as such, does not commit to transformative ends in the same way Guenther does, such a plurality of attitudes may also harbor a tension internal to critical phenomenology. This difficulty motivates a turn to Husserl's own account of how various attitudes relate to each other and of how they relate to the phenomenological attitude, or indeed to phenomenology in general.

I. PHENOMENOLOGY AND ITS MANY ATTITUDES

While there is only one pure theoretical attitude, Husserl uses a multitude of other terms to describe the theoretical, practical, and aesthetic attitudes. In *Ideas II*, for example, he refers to the practical as a personalist, motivational, or "spiritual" attitude (1989, 199). The main distinction between the natural and phenomenological attitudes allows for many further differentiations. Within the natural attitude, I may be interested in the world in a multitude of ways, including some, like the naturalist, which serve narrower, theoretical purposes. Importantly, while the phenomenological attitude is sharply set apart from any regional scientific endeavor, it is still a theoretical attitude. As a science, then, Husserlian

phenomenology considers the most important sphere of reason to be judgment, not axiology or praxis. For Husserl, judgment has a clear privilege over valuing and willing: only acts of judging are objectifying acts in the strong sense of the term. In other words, to value and to will is always dependent on doxic theses, even if they are only implicit. This shows that the relation between different attitudes, including the phenomenological one, has to be determined by the relation between spheres of reason themselves.

A first important consideration is the dependence of valuative and volitive acts on acts of judgment. This dependence explains why only judgment can be studied in isolation through an abstractive process which brackets valuing and willing.⁷ However, this was always meant as a temporary limitation, and Husserl (2014) constantly notes that much remains to be learned from investigating the valuative and volitive spheres (277-79). In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl spells out the methodological reasons for his own initial limitation to judgment. There are three different meanings to the word *logos*: speaking (*Reden*), thinking (*Denken*), and what is thought (*Gedachtes*). The second is the crucial one, since it signifies both reason itself and rational thinking (Husserl 1969, 18-19/1974, 22). Importantly, with these descriptions Husserl clarifies that *scientific thinking*, which must guide a science of *logos*, is only one of the specific characters of reason; “thought” in general—he puts the word in brackets—is much broader than judgment and must be attended to as “the frame within which the specifically logical must be isolated” (1969, 26/1974, 30). In other words, there is much more to *Denken* than its scientific lane. Yet Husserl goes on, after such an announcement, to nonetheless quite rapidly limit himself to judgment, thereby isolating the logical, as is the aim of the book. Immediately after having enumerated judicative, valuing and practical reason, he further specifies:

If we follow the signification of the word *logos* which is the richest in content and has been, so to speak, raised to a higher power, namely reason, and if we also give pre-eminence to *scientific reason*, we have already thereby delimited at the same time a distinctive sphere of acts and significations, precisely as a sphere to which science, as a rational activity, relates particularly. Scientific thinking, the continual activity of the scientist, is *judicative* thinking: not just any judicative thinking, but one that is formed, ordered, connected, in certain manners—according to final ideas of reason (26/30).

For Husserl, it is because genuine science must be restricted to investigating the pure possibilities of rational life, because it must be free from any “restriction to the factual,” that scientific thinking is judicative and not valuative or volitive. It is also because of the centrality of judicative thinking for science that later in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, when Husserl mentions the need for an expansion of logic to “the whole positional sphere,” such an expansion would still maintain only a theoretical interest in the spheres of valuing and

⁷ This peculiarity of willing in particular, namely that it cannot be studied in isolation, amazes Husserl in his lectures on ethics from 1920. He writes: “But the essence of willing is so wonderful that it cannot, like judging, have its truth in isolation” [*Aber so wunderbar ist das Wesen des Wollens, dass es nicht wie das Urteilen seine Wahrheit in der Isolierung haben kann*] (2004, 252, author’s translation).

willing (Husserl 1969, 135/1974, 140).⁸ The new doctrines of reason emerging thereby are pure axiology and a pure theory of practice; though they turn their attention to other spheres of thinking, they still bracket specific acts of the same kinds. Simply put, as pure sciences, pure axiology and praxis must be as equally free from acts of valuing and willing as formal logic. Nevertheless, despite Husserl's own emphasis, if pre-eminence is no longer given to scientific thinking, the broader signification of the word *logos* can re-enter the stage. Husserl himself does also discuss, after all, the possibility not just of an expansion of scientific thinking to valuative and volitional acts but of distinctly practical and aesthetic attitudes.

The aesthetic attitude involves feelings of value, but also sensory and emotive experiences, such as joy, pain, love, or pleasure. In *First Philosophy*, Husserl gives the example of a botanist looking at a flower who could thereby be theoretically interested in it or aesthetically interested in the same object (*Gegenstand*). For Husserl, if there is a change of interest from the theoretical to the aesthetic and vice versa, there is also a change of attitudes; the flower can be experienced as bearing natural properties, but it can also be experienced as beautiful, or as having a pleasant smell (2019, 303/1996, 99). Importantly, aesthetic experience is originally a feeling and occurs at an affective level. Accordingly, while it is a law of essence that any valuative act can be made doxically thematic, such that the flower can be now posited to *be* beautiful, such explicit positing is in no way necessary for the experience of the flower as beautiful to be possible, nor can the sense of my feeling of value be reduced to the doxic proposition “the flower *is* beautiful.”⁹ For Husserl, experiencing the world and the objects given in it as in some manner valuable, in this aesthetic or affective attitude, consists in an entire sphere of what it means to “think”—or of *logos* in the second sense of the term.

The practical attitude, closely related to the personalist attitude in *Ideas II*, centers on acts of willing, desiring, or wishing instead of on acts of valuing. For this reason, it is sometimes identified with the natural attitude itself, as it simply refers to the manner in which a person habitually posits and strives to realize various ends in her personal world of praxis, or in the lifeworld. In the practical attitude, the ego is a fully concrete person who is simply living through her multiple activities and levels of passivity.¹⁰ An interesting further differentiation within the practical attitude itself, however, which Husserl (2004) sketches in his lectures on ethics from the 1920s, is that there is also an *ethical* attitude which, contra the naïveté of the personalist one, involves reflection on praxis (244-58). That Husserl develops a specifically ethical attitude brings him much closer to critical phenomenology than his description of a broadly practical attitude in *Ideas II* does, since what is distinctive about

⁸ Husserl (1969) writes: “Now it is instructive to note also that what we have said about judging and judgment-sense holds good for the *whole sphere of positional consciousness*.” He continues: “This has great significance, because it opens up the possibility of broadening the idea of *formal logic to include a formal axiology and a formal theory of practice*” (136).

⁹ Husserl (2014) makes this most clear in *Ideas I*: “Each “posit,” e.g., each wish-posit, can thus be transformed into a doxic posit . . . and a wish-posit” (233).

¹⁰ See notably paragraph 49 of *Ideas II*, “The personalistic attitude versus the naturalistic” (Husserl 1989, 183-222).

ethics is that it requires a reflection on the motives of value guiding the will. This attitude practically reflects on how these values act as norms that standardize action and does so by turning to the web of motivations making up personal and social life (Husserl 2014, 234). Importantly, this is still no transcendental attitude, since it does not bracket valuing and willing but on the contrary evaluates the specific practical possibilities of a person. The ethical attitude therefore involves a type of reflection that is moved neither by pure nor theoretical interests but by distinctly practical ones. For Husserl, value motives and posited ends are reflected on but not doxically neutralized—their accompanying doxic theses are not suspended—since the practical goal is precisely to figure out what to do given those specific circumstances, and not to determine what are the *a priori* structures of valuing and willing in general. This would be the task of pure axiology and praxis, not of personalist ethics.

In sum, what Husserl (2014) establishes as “the possibility, indeed, the necessity” of a theory *of* praxis and value, expanding from an initial focus on judgment to other spheres of reason, quickly turns into the broader and difficult question of the meaning of phenomenology *as* praxis (234). When Husserlian phenomenology refrains from bracketing all acts of valuing and willing in order to access the field of pure lived experience, and instead continues to have practical and affective interests, new attitudes emerge.

II. GUENTHER BETWEEN HUSSERL AND FOUCAULT: ON PHENOMENOLOGY AS PRACTICE

Guenther (2020) describes and employs phenomenology as praxis and, more specifically, as a “hybrid phenomenological practice,” because it targets not just transcendental structures of consciousness but “quasi-transcendental social structures” (15). The latter include though are not limited to patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and settler colonialism. Importantly, the “quasi” modifies the transcendental in order to account for the contingent and specifically oppressive historical genesis of such structures, along with their sedimentation and normativity.¹¹ To the extent that the “ultimate goal of critical phenomenology is not just to interpret the world, but also to change it,” Guenther contends that, as its practitioners, we should not restrict ourselves to engaging with what is invariant in lived experience but must pay phenomenological attention to historically situated, specific circumstances (16). The question is what such phenomenological attention amounts to and whether and how it also adopts a Husserlian account of the phenomenological attitude.

¹¹ The sense in which I use “normativity” in this paper is distinct from normalization, which is prominently used in fields like disability studies, feminist ethics, and queer theory, and as such is distinct also from the Foucauldian concept of normalizing power. Rather, my use of normativity simply refers to the positing of a basic value as the norm of a given activity, i.e., the adherence to this norm as the “good” to be realized. It tracks Husserl’s (1970) definition of normativity in the *Logical Investigations* and as it evolves in particular in his digression to the 1920 lectures on ethics (34; 2004, 321-62). Though Husserl also speaks of normalization (*Normalisierung*), and while normativity clearly contributes to normalization, i.e., the positing of a specific norm can itself be normalized, it is normativity that this paper mainly discusses.

Does the investigation of quasi-transcendental structure require a continued description of transcendental ones? If Guenther works with both the transcendental and the quasi-transcendental, as she comes to confirm in her paper published in this volume, then the question turns to how exactly critical phenomenology continues to use a phenomenological method while also working in what can be conceived as a practical attitude. The notion of attitude becomes very useful in clarifying not just what is phenomenological about phenomenology, but whether what is critical about it entails a rejection of the possibility of a pure phenomenological attitude. Unlike an approach that would follow Merleau-Ponty in pointing to the impossibility of completing the phenomenological reduction and of accessing the realm of pure consciousness, the alliance of the phenomenological attitude in the Husserlian sense with a different, practical attitude, might be precisely what Guenther means by a hybrid phenomenological practice.

Guenther's account of quasi-transcendental structures, however, is similar to a Foucauldian stance and, specifically, to Foucault's version of the Husserlian notion of the historical *a priori* that Husserl develops mainly in the *Crisis* texts (Foucault 1972, 142-48).¹² Importantly, Guenther echoes Foucault's transformed account more than Husserl's because the "quasi-transcendental" historicizes the *a priori* further than Husserl ever did. As Burt C. Hopkins (2005) notes, what is most important for Husserl with this historical *a priori* is that it demonstrates not a contradiction between contingency and necessity but "the inseparable connection between the *meaning* [Sinn] proper to the ideal *a priori* that is the defining characteristic of objective knowledge and the historicity of this meaning's origination" (180). For Husserl, the historical *a priori* does not compromise the sharp distinction between forms of essence, whether formal or material, and historically specific norms, values, or practices. Rather, historical apriority concerns the teleological structure of sense (*Sinn*) itself and accordingly recognizes its historical origination as inseparable from its ideality (Husserl 1954, 380-83; 553).

By contrast, what Foucault describes in *The Archeology of Knowledge* and what Guenther proposes as "quasi-transcendental structures" is no defining characteristic of objective knowledge. Rather, both think that conditions for the validity of propositions, or, for Foucault, the conditions for the positivity of discourse, are epoch-specific. Foucault (1972) writes: "what I mean by the term is an *a priori* that is not a condition of validity for judgments, but a condition of reality for statements." He further describes it as "an *a priori* not of truths that might never be said, or really given in experience, but the *a priori* of a history that is given, since it is that of things actually said" (127). Guenther would agree with Foucault here, since her interest is also in those structures which, contra formal ones, have no jurisdiction independent of contingency, as he puts it. The interest of Foucault is for the real, not the ideal in a Husserlian sense: the structures one might find to be binding in a form of discourse are not revealed by adopting a pure phenomenological attitude, because their "apriority" and invariance has historical boundaries; their apriority itself has a history. What Guenther describes as quasi-transcendental structures function similarly.

¹² See the whole chapter section "The Historical *a priori* and the Archive." Foucault does not make explicit mention of Husserl, but the reference is nonetheless clear.

At the same time, Guenther is also a phenomenologist. She does retain the Husserlian phenomenological concept of constitution, notably, and thereby finds herself between Husserl and Foucault, as it were, juggling an acknowledgment of what “makes the lived experience of consciousness possible and meaningful” at a transcendental level, and the recognition that power shapes the constitution of sense in all its strata, even in the simplest cases of external perceptions (2019a, 11). Patriarchy, for example, certainly has a history and is thus in a sense “contingent,” yet as a quasi-transcendental structure, it prescribes, or rather structures, in ways that can be described phenomenologically, both forms of perceiving and manners of givenness.

For Guenther (2021), there is a difference between forms of consciousness described by “classical” phenomenology and those specific forms of patriarchal consciousness that critical phenomenology is interested in. This difference would seem to require different methods of description: describing the essential forms of perceiving, feeling, imagining, acting, and describing the historically specific patriarchal “ways of perceiving, feeling, imagining, acting.” Guenther’s position can then be read as another revised historical *a priori* invested in the idea that there are regularities to be described in socio-historically generated manners of being directed at the world and objects given in it. This is not quite a Husserlian position, because it is interested in the quasi-transcendental; nor is it fully Foucauldian, because it remains committed to the phenomenological notions of intentionality and the constitution of sense. Guenther’s (2019b) article “Seeing Like a Cop: A Critical Phenomenology of Whiteness as Property” provides a very clear example of this: there are regularities to perceptual practices of suspicious surveillance which are based on the protection of whiteness as property and involve the exposure of targeted others to state violence. Such a phenomenological description of a manner of perceiving and of its violent effects is simultaneously meant to disrupt that same manner of perceiving. This is a new method for describing the historical *a priori* with the intent of transforming what it describes.

A further key implication of Guenther’s (2021) hybrid practice is that this praxis is an ethical one; crucial to the method is “an ethical orientation toward practices of freedom.” It aims for transformations that are guided by specific values, guided by the will to make things “less wrong, less harmful, less oppressive” (19). Guenther even goes as far as to call freedom “not just contingently preferable to oppression” but “an *a priori* good” (14). This interestingly makes her approach akin to what Husserl sketches, in his 1920 lectures on ethics, as an ethical attitude. Such an attitude is distinct from a broadly construed practical attitude, or simply from the natural attitude, specifically because it involves reflection on and critique of the value motives and ends that guide any activity (Husserl 2004, 246-47). At the same time, the ethical attitude is distinct from the transcendental attitude because it purposefully does not neutralize all positions (whether doxic, axiological or practical). Rather, since the aim of the ethical attitude is to evaluate what a person should do in the specific circumstances of her life, it requires consideration for personal limitations to what

would otherwise be much broader practical possibilities.¹³ Perhaps most importantly, the ethical attitude thereby describes what it means to be resolved to given ends and to be motivated by given values, while being reflective about how those same values and ends standardize action. This reflected life is an ethical one, precisely because of its striving toward self-transparency not just about what positions are taken but about whether their normativity is justified, or, for Husserl, whether it is rational. As such, the ethical attitude can describe Guenther's own approach to critique as analysis of power but also provide the frame for a phenomenological self-critique of value-commitments. Making a similar point, Guenther cites Iris Marion Young's (1990) definition of critical theory, which in some surprising ways resonates with Husserl:

Normative reflection must begin from historically and socially specific circumstances because there is nothing but what is, *the given*, *the situated interest in justice*, from which to start (5, quoted in Guenther 2021, 13, her emphasis).

Consider these passages from Husserl's (2004) lectures on ethics:

What should I do, what does my life-situation require of me as what should be (*das Gesollte*) done in the here and now? (7, author's translation).

It belongs to all ethical wills and doings that they are not a naïve doing, nor a naïve rational will, but that the same rational thing is willed in the consciousness of its normativity (*Normhaftigkeit*) and is also motivated by the normativity (246-47, author's translation).

This paper cannot address the complex question of the relation between Husserl's ethics and critical theory. However, it does propose that if Guenther calls critical phenomenology a hybrid practice, it could also be understood as shifting between two different attitudes: the phenomenological and the ethical; one interested in transcendental structures of consciousness, the other in the specificities of different lifeworlds, while at the same time being committed to a series of situated posited ends, including to the reduction of harm and the striving toward liberation or freedom.

¹³ Husserl makes this point not just in his lectures on ethics but in *Ideas II*, where he writes about the spiritual "I can" and the notion of practical possibility as irreducible to physical possibility but limited to what a person would or would not usually do. He writes: "I could do it"—that is the neutrality modification of the action and the practical possibility derived from it. "Yet I could not do it"—I am lacking the original consciousness of being able to do this action or of having the power for this action (which, even in the case of a fictional action, is an originary non-neutralized consciousness); this action contradicts the kind of person that I am, my way of letting myself be motivated" (1989, 277/1952, 265). This focus on the person and her abilities, personality, and environment, has led to an identification of Husserl's ethics as a personalist one, where living an ethical life is a matter of living one's "best possible life" (Husserl 2004, 244; Melle 2007; Peucker 2008; Heinämaa 2014).

The precise relation between the ethical and phenomenological attitudes, however, remains an open question. Husserl himself never clarifies this rapport, in part because the notion of the ethical attitude is under-defined, and because his ethical thinking in general is never systematically developed but only presented through lectures and unpublished manuscripts.¹⁴ In turning to Guenther we may ask: does her descriptive practice targeting quasi-transcendental structures really need to be complemented by a description of transcendental structures? The answer seems to be affirmative, even if the precise meaning of “transcendental” remains to be determined.¹⁵ While Guenther (2021) speaks of critical phenomenology not as a science but as a praxis, she does also recognize that there are “necessary but insufficient” meanings of critique, including transcendental inquiry, to be found in “classical phenomenology” (10). This lack of sufficiency is what motivates a turn to what can be called an “ethical attitude,” but it does not efface the necessity of a transcendental critique of reason that would determine its essential features. The meaning of the purity of such inquiry, and while the sharpness of the distinction between the natural and phenomenological attitudes, are matters of debate that cannot be settled here. Nevertheless, an ethical attitude does turn to the given, describe manners of givenness and forms of intentionality, understand intentional acts to be motivated and not caused, recognize that phenomenological perception of lived experience is possible without reducing it to inner perception, and understand practical possibility in terms of the lived body and its correlated environment. In other words, insofar as the ethical attitude continues to use core phenomenological concepts, it is not foreclosing but on the contrary seems to be requiring the possibility of adopting various attitudes, including the phenomenological one.

In short, in the striking words of Foucault (1972) himself, admittedly in a very different context: “The formal *a priori* and the historical *a priori* share neither the same level nor the same nature: if they intersect, it is because they occupy two different dimensions” (144).¹⁶ Translating this back to Husserl’s vocabulary: formal investigation of the spheres of reason may lead to forms of essence, differentiating for example between forms of perceiving and valuing, but the geneses of historically specific circumstances and their regularities can only

¹⁴ Husserl’s lectures on ethics are published in his *Einleitung in die Ethik. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1920 und 1924* (Hua 37), and most of his unpublished manuscripts of the same period (from after the war onwards) are collected in the *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Hua 42).

¹⁵ One ambiguity of Guenther’s hybrid practice is indeed whether the transcendental inquiry that accompanies a turn to quasi-transcendental structures entails that the phenomenological attitude is a *pure* phenomenological attitude. While the meaning of “purity” changes throughout Husserl’s work, and needs not mean abstraction from concrete or factual circumstances, the difficulty of establishing the relation between the phenomenological attitude as a (possibly pure) theoretical attitude and the ethical attitude as a practical one reflects the challenge of critical phenomenology itself as an investigation which aims both at description and transformation. While there is clearly a sense in which Guenther’s hybrid practice means that the phenomenological attitude itself needs to be ethically deployed, there is a difference between an ethical phenomenological attitude and a phenomenologically conceived ethical praxis, i.e., an ethical attitude. Importantly, these questions will be asked very differently by Al-Saji.

¹⁶ The translation has been modified to better illustrate the contrast between the two kinds of *a priors*.

be approached in attitudes that do not bracket those same circumstances, and as such are not performing the universal *epoché*, even if they are reflexive, as is the ethical attitude. In this sense, there is no need to choose between “classical” and “critical” phenomenology; on the contrary, it can be understood as a strength of the critical phenomenological approach that it is interested in both transcendental and quasi-transcendental structures. Through a renewed investigation of both kinds of structures, phenomenology, shifting between a plurality of attitudes, can continue to clarify its subject matter.¹⁷

III. AL-SAJI AND THE FANONIAN PHENOMENOLOGY OF AFFECT

There is another attitude to consider, which further strengthens the idea of critical phenomenology as employing a plurality of attitudes. If Guenther understands critical phenomenology primarily as a praxis, Al-Saji develops of a phenomenology of affect that can analogously be read as adopting a primarily affective orientation—that is, neither a theoretical nor a practical one. In her lectures at the 2019 *Collegium Phaenomenologicum*, Al-Saji develops a Fanonian phenomenology of affect and touch. Referencing a passage from the last chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, she cites: “we need to touch all the wounds that score the black livery” [*nous avons besoin de toucher du doigt toutes les plaies qui zèbrent la livrée noire*] (2019a, 7; Fanon 1967, 187). For Fanon, this “need” is related to what he identifies as the threat to Black intellectuals that they become mired by universals. The danger is for the specificity of Black experience to become lost to universal and overly theoretical, intellectualized claims, including theories on violence, for example. With this passage, Fanon is suggesting that such a problematic universal standpoint can be avoided if the wounds of colonialism are “touched” instead of observed from afar. He states as an explicit goal of his writing that it aims to “feel from within [*ressentir du dedans*] the despair of the

¹⁷ Duane D. Davis (2020), in his piece “The Phenomenological Method” in *50 Concepts for a Critical* Phenomenology*, suggests that in *Ideas I*, Husserl’s use of the term *überschiebung* (overlapping) to describe the relation between the natural and phenomenological attitudes, is key to understanding how the radical distinction between both attitudes does not preclude their close connection, overlapping, or intercrossing (6). If the phenomenological attitude targets “objects as meant” or “objects as intended” all the while suspending their doxic theses, its targets indeed “overlap” with those objects that appear to me in the natural attitude. Something similar could be said of the ethical attitude: even if we maintain a distinction between it and the phenomenological, or even it and the natural, insofar as it involves practical reflection, the “objects” it targets—the intended objects of my wills and valuations—are no different from those that appear to me in the natural attitude when I am not questioning them (7). In her 2018 article “The Difference of Feminist Phenomenology: The Case of Shame,” Bonnie Mann provides another reference point for understanding what moving between attitudes might be: the idea of oscillation she takes up from Beauvoir. This oscillation moves “from the most concrete, particular, and located events and perspectives, to the general features of human experience, and back again” (57). Moving between the phenomenological and the ethical attitudes specifies what such a movement might entail: not quite an oscillation between the general and the particular but between the phenomenological and the practical; this indeed does not mean finding the pure experience “behind” the contingent but could be read as changing attitudes to look at the same, concrete circumstances.

man of color confronting the white man.”¹⁸ He also writes, though the tactile meaning is lost in translation, “In this work I have made a point to convey [*toucher*] the misery of the Black man. Physically [*Tactilement*] and affectively” (Fanon 1967, 86; see Al-Saji 2019b, 19). In short, a Fanonian phenomenology of affect warns of the risks of jumping to new arches and universal principles. On Al-Saji’s reading, this is in part why Fanon instead wants to take the time to attend to the concrete and specific wounds of colonialism; to touch them, dwell on them, feel them from within. The advantage of reading this as an affective attitude, then, is that it accounts for how this is no practical attitude—it is not committed to transformative ends from the start—and how it can still affectively intervene, as it were, or disrupt, manners of perceiving and feeling.

Such fore-grounding of affect involves feeling (*ressentir*) or enduring (*éprouver*) more than looking at, more than turning into a visual spectacle, or, on the contrary, altogether forgetting what Fanon describes in “The North African Syndrome” as the continuing burn of the colonial past (2006, 12; see Al-Saji 2019a, 3).¹⁹ In contrast to Guenther, Fanon’s phenomenology of affect dwells and waits: it is not a praxis aimed at transformation. As such, dwelling in a present that carries the affective past, and specifically the colonial past, preserves a deep ambivalence with respect to the future. By focusing on this touching of Black pain that Fanon announces as one of the goals of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Al-Saji seems to be bracketing the entire debate surrounding the Fanonian description of decolonization as having to begin with a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate for a new humanism and a new man. In other words, this emphasis on dwelling is bracketing how to read Fanon’s “narrative of liberation” (Taylor 1989). Al-Saji (2019b) herself explicitly contrasts her work with that of David Scott and Fred Moten and their insistence on the potential for liberation (12). Her approach is also different from the work of Lewis C. Gordon, whose reading of Fanon, like Al-Saji’s, focuses on Black lived experience though still reads him as a revolutionary existential humanist who, identifying the true crisis of European Man in its racism and colonialism, “demands a forward leap on the question and questioning of humanity” (1995, 38). It is significant that Al-Saji does not take this second step. To dwell is precisely not to leap. The result is that the cumbersome normative question surrounding Fanonian teleology and universal dialectics is, while not ignored, at least reborn, reformulated, re-localized, even “somatized” in the subtler though no less dramatic movement of touching the wounds of colonialism.

Importantly, dwelling is also not, strictly speaking, an activity. In a related manner, Al-Saji shows that the level at which Fanon speaks of affect and pain remains well below that of intentional acts of constitution. It is in this context that she turns to Husserl, reading him through Fanon to critically retool two phenomenological concepts: sensings (*Empfindnisse*)

¹⁸ The translation has been modified not to lose the meaning of “*ressentir du dedans*” as akin to an internal sensation, pointing at once to psychological and affective dimensions.

¹⁹ Al-Saji cites Fanon’s (2006) original French: “*un passé cuisant*” from “Le ‘syndrome nord africain’” in *Pour la révolution africaine*.

and the affective relief.²⁰ The key aspect of specifically touch sensings for Al-Saji is precisely that, though “they are preconditions for the Body to become an organ of will (“I can”), touch sensings fail to reach the level of explicit egoic activity” (2019a, 14; Husserl 1989, 152). Sensings are non-objectivating; rather, they found the lived body through sensibility. This is what Husserl (1989) calls a “hyletic substrate” (*hyletische Unterlage*) in *Ideas II*: the basic layer of experience which founds all objectivities (*Gegenständlichkeiten*) through varying degrees of mediacy (160). Hyle is a term Husserl uses to designate the “stuff” (*Stoff*) that gives its content to any intentional act animating it, forming a unity of sense. In his *Analyses on Passive Syntheses*, he develops a notion of affective relief that complicates this prior account of hyletic data, no longer pictured as points. Sensings are now understood to form an entire field, which importantly is not a mere plane, as if it were reducible to the surface of the skin. Rather, it involves an affective relief, that is, a whole landscape registering the depth of sensation both materially and temporally, with varying degrees of affective pull (2001, 212).

Additionally, if it is the wounds of the colonial past that are touched by Fanon’s writing, then a phenomenology of racialization is not just a phenomenology of affect but of time. Turning to this temporal question, Al-Saji coins the term *colonial duration* to account for enduring presence at an affective and bodily level. Colonial duration carries the affective weight of the past *as past* in the present, not just as a sedimented social structure but in “experiences” such as unlocalizable pain, affective pathologies, and other disrupting bodily affects. Interestingly, Al-Saji here breaks with Husserl, turning to Bergson instead, because affective weight has *longue durée*. Specifically, the colonial past is present as past without the need for an act of remembrance; it does not rely on subjective activity or even passivity to be present. It is there materially in the pain. As Al-Saji (2019c) concludes her *Collegium* lectures, echoing the words of Édouard Glissant, “to live under the weight of colonial duration is to experience a ‘painful sense of time’” (23).

Yet the key to this entire framework of affect and time is that the rhythms of such colonial duration can be sabotaged, even interrupted. Al-Saji (2019a) speaks of how Fanon’s writing “resuscitates” colonial wounds as “feelings,” enlivening a past that would otherwise be seen as dead (11). I read her phenomenology of affect and touch as letting “dead time” endure, *laisser durer le temps mort*, not for directly practical or theoretical reasons but affective ones, indeed with the sole initial aim of dwelling on wounds. Though Al-Saji does not use this language, such dwelling and waiting can be understood as an affective attitude because it apprehends what is felt through feeling itself instead of through theoretical or practical reason. Feeling can be broadly understood as including its basic psychosomatic

²⁰ There is an important difference between what Al-Saji herself cites as sensible feelings and drives from “the sphere of the heart” and those coming from the sphere of judgment (Husserl 2001, 150; Al-Saji 2019b, 2). Quite interestingly, in his lectures on ethics, Husserl describes the most basic value-feelings as analogous to sensings; they too are the most basic stratum to constitution, now in the sphere of valuing instead of judging broadly construed (as doxic positing) (see Husserl 2004, 260-01; 1988, 205). Though this sphere of feeling still has a doxic substrate, Husserl does write of this sphere that it involves “*ein Gefühlsmeinen mit einem sozusagen fühlenden Erfahren, einem fühlenden Selbst-Haben des Wertes, des Wertes selbst in seiner vollen*” [the meaning of a feeling with a so to speak fulfilling experience, a fulfilling self-having of the value, of the value itself in its fullness] (224, author’s translation). In other words, values are value-feelings which can be more or less fulfilled, as something *meant* in that feeling, by an experience of value.

sense along with emotions, feeling (*Gefühl*) or what Husserl calls a felt disposition (*Gemüt*). Though Husserl mostly describes affective orientations through the example of aesthetic feelings of value, such as appreciation for the beauty of a flower, this can be extended to any feeling, indeed to the whole affective sphere. The key aspect of the kind of the approach Al-Saji reads in Fanon is that it occurs at a passive level, prior to the activity that would be involved in liberatory praxis. Letting painful affects *endure*—a word particularly well-suited to this case—can be disruptive at a passive level.²¹ This means the idea of “dead time” is not just opposed to the liveliness of the colonial lifeworld: it also suspends its temporality. It is literally a time-out, a time for a break. This is a path of sensibility, affect, and passivity, a path through affective reliefs themselves, toward the interruption of colonial duration.

The relation between affect and time is thus crucial, but so is the relation between time and possibility. For Al-Saji, colonial duration forecloses “the very structure of practical possibility.” This statement is much stronger than the thought that the practical possibilities of the colonized are determined by the colonial world. Rather, the realm of practical possibilities itself is being killed off—there is no room to act for the colonized. And it is precisely “the *affective relief* of the present” that is “left without leeway” (2019a, 3). Between the I and the affective pull of objects, there is supposed to be such *Spielraum*, room to breathe, to play, to will, to desire, to choose, to feel, to resist.

Al-Saji (2019b) references specifically practical possibilities in this passage, but it is also implicitly the case when she speaks of how Fanon’s writing “permits us to be conscious of ‘*une possibilité d’exister*’ [a possibility of existence] other than what colonialism projects for us” (18; Fanon 1967, 100/97). Simply put, practical possibilities are foreclosed but consciousness of alternatives is not. Al-Saji (2019b) makes a similar point when she writes that touch, in Fanon, “can take the form of interruptive transport and nostalgic re-memory of foreclosed possibilities” (18). These possibilities, while presently closed off, are not impossible to be felt. Al-Saji’s (2019c) interpretation of Fanon’s description of “explosion” in *Black Skin, White Masks* speaks of the same thing: “the *possibility* of exploding (and not just the reality of explosion) *has yet to be created*” (2, Al-Saji’s emphasis). Again, it is the very possibility of existing differently that is lacking. Fanon too makes a similar point when commenting on how “utopian” it is to expect of the Black or the Arab that they integrate abstract values to their worldview if they hardly ever have enough to eat. He writes: “in the absolute sense, nothing stands in the way of such things. Nothing—except that the people in question lack the opportunities [*les intéressés n’en ont pas la possibilité*] (1967, 96/1952, 93). The tone here is almost humorous: nothing stands in their way, apart from the fact that circumstances make it impossible. In this specific case, it is the affect of hunger that forecloses the possible. Al-Saji (2019c) takes up this passage and concludes: “The affect of the colonized calls for more than nutrition; it calls for inventing sociality and ways of living and dying, on one’s own terms, from the reconfigured ruin of foreclosed and dead possibilities” (6).

²¹ The verb “to endure” is particularly well suited here, because it translates the French word “*éprouver*” as much as “*durer*” which respectively mean to feel and to last.

With this revealing statement, Al-Saji has moved from the affective sphere to that of praxis, though from a different perspective than Guenther. This is a pivotal point in her writing, because it shows the close connection between affect and what are distinctly practical possibilities. The distinction between affective and practical attitudes accounts for why the foreclosure of practical possibilities forecloses also the whole sphere of acts of the will—and, crucially, it also explains why an affective attitude may have to be initially adopted. In a sense, the point Al-Saji is making is that *praxis is not an option* for the colonized, but that affect can never be foreclosed in the same way. Pain can always be felt, even if action is rendered impossible.

What Fanon wants his patients to acquire is the possibility to choose, even between activity or passivity, in face of what turns out to be the real source of the conflict: not their unconscious, or the so-called inferiority complex, but social structures (1967, 100/1952, 97). In other words, he wants them to enter the realm of praxis, to no longer be governed by paralyzing affects. A turn to the notion of attitudes shows that what Al-Saji calls the sabotage of colonial duration, a dwelling on the wounds of colonialism, turns out to move between affect and praxis; in the end, it does target those same structures which Guenther calls “quasi-transcendental” though from a different attitude.

IV. CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY: TURNING TO PHENOMENA THROUGH A PLURALITY OF ATTITUDES

The natural attitude is not fixed or unalterable but on the contrary is a developmental phenomenon, constantly changing along with the environment of a person. There are ethical, practical, affective modes to the natural attitude that can be transformative for the natural attitude itself. One can indeed gain many phenomenological insights while remaining in it. Gail Weiss (2016) discusses this point in her article “De-Naturalizing the Natural Attitude: A Husserlian Legacy to Social Phenomenology,” showing the diversity and frequency of experiences which can disrupt the natural attitude from within, as it were. She references, as an example, how the Rodney King and Trayvon Martin cases “profoundly disrupted the natural attitude of many white Americans” by putting in question their assumptions about fairness and justice in the United States (13). At the same time, it should be noted that another feature of the natural attitude is that it quite forcefully resists radical change. Weiss (2016) nonetheless concludes:

These experiences and these conversations are precisely what are needed, not to eradicate the natural attitude, for that is neither possible nor desirable, but rather to guarantee that it will continue to transform, rather than remain fixed, in response to new experiences that pose challenges to it. This, for me, is precisely the promise of the not so natural, natural attitude, as Husserl first described it over a century ago (. . .). Rather than viewing the natural attitude, and even phenomenology for that matter, as an outdated concept and method that must be jettisoned in favor of newer terms and newer methods that are explicitly geared toward our current experiences, I

believe they still have their whole lives before them, waiting for us to take them up in our own distinctive ways and put them to work. (14)

One way to put the natural attitude to work is to explore its many modes, shifting not just between regions of being, but between spheres of reason—from how and what we judge, to how and what we value and will, and even to how and what we feel. Guenther’s and Al-Saji’s respective approaches to critical phenomenology show how ethical and affective attitudes can continue to transform the natural attitude itself.

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