

Phenomenologizing through Ethical Experience

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Susi Ferrarello & Nicolle Zapien, *Ethical Experience: A Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2018, 252 p.

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One thing that struck me about this book is its simple content, wide applicability and relevance. For philosophy academics like me, experience plays a vital role in allowing philosophy to be part of everyday living. This makes the book very interesting to read. In teaching philosophy, varied perspectives in using phenomenology are much needed to widen my view. It supplies added intellectual ammunition for understanding ethics and deriving meaning from experience as demonstrated in practice. I consider the book exceptional, commendable, and interesting to read and review. It must be read from the lens of ethics, phenomenology, and psychology.

It is in the ethical experience that lies the seeds of philosophizing. Ethical experience is indeed a venue for phenomenological dialogue between theory and practice, and between psychology and philosophy. Being conscious of these interplays prepares the reader to explore how phenomenology can be applied in everyday life. It is truly a practical and theoretically rigorous model that is handy in studying ethics, hermeneutics and practical philosophy.

Susi Ferrarello and Nicolle Zapien brought to light the useful interaction between theory and practice. Appropriated theory and practice work hand in hand in the pursuit of practical philosophy. The authors form a very good tandem in utilizing philosophy as a guide. Their expertise in their own fields made me appreciate more my effort to be a pracademic.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is more theoretical, consisting of six chapters: 1. The phenomenological method, a theoretical application, 2. Husserl's ethics and psychology, 3. The Trinitarian relationship of the world, 4. Pathological and mystical time, 5. The ethics of intimacy, and 6. Forced intimacy. It attempts to explain the theoretical foundation of the phenomenological method. The intent is to derive "reactive meanings" while keeping "emphatic contact with life" throughout the analysis of the lived experience (p.183). The second part is the application part, mirrored in the form of explorations of actual examples featured in four chapters: 1. Phenomenological research and ethical experience, 2. A leadership challenge, 3. A parent's ethical dilemma, and 4. The beginning of an affair. I would say that part one is more philosophical while part two is more psychological. The link between the philosophy and psychology is forged by studying ethics in lived experiences. Throughout the discussions, the authors used phenomenology as their method of study.

I like the manner how theory and practice were made to work and complement one another. I also saw that philosophy and psychology are best complements in examining relationships. In the authors' words, "The study of ethics is frequently framed as an exclusively technical philosophical topic, or as a domain of psychological or neuroscientific theories which, whatever their explanatory power, does not speak directly to the ways in which ethical decision making is experienced in everyday life." (2) They need each other. The authors succeeded in demonstrating how they help one another, complement and supplement one another. We need to fill in our philosophical observations to derive psychological understandings for practical purposes.

The book's pragmatic clarity and concreteness will appeal to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as teachers and

professionals in philosophy and psychology. Its attention on what it means to be human will inspire and direct students to phenomenology and to meaningful reflection and introspection. The book is a good companion in continuous learning through philosophical observations concerning human nature that are reflected in the lived experiences of actual human beings.

The authors were able to reappropriate phenomenology by applying ethical phenomena viewed through “the lens of Husserl’s analysis of the interplay of passive and active intentionality.” (3) They were able to answer the following questions: What is ethical experience from Husserl’s phenomenological standpoint? Is there Husserlian ethics? How does Husserl conceive the paradigm of a practical life? From Husserl’s phenomenology of ethics, the authors explored how “ethical experiences are lived and grasped through narrative, and how such narratives are both expressions of and constitutive of self-identity and the reality they experience.” (3) The examples of the authors in Part two is “dedicated to the empirical study of time, intimacy, and reality analyzed through the cases of the experience of an ethical dilemma arising from an unexpected leadership challenge, a dilemma in raising a child, and the beginning of an affair.” (8)

I entitled this book review as *Phenomenologizing through ethical experience*. The authors brought phenomenology closer to everyday life by applying phenomenology in processing ethical experiences. I love this adage: *Primum vivere deinde philosophari*. First live, then do philosophy. I think the two authors were able to deal with this adage by involving life and lived experience.

In this book we examined real life through practical lived experience and firsthand interviews with the hope to foster an education of reality, time and intimacy that goes beyond the limits of one’s cognitive perspective and expands what is intersubjectively accepted and validated. (3)

Furthermore,

For this reason, in the book we chose to look at reality and the ethical choices through the themes of time and intimacy because, emergent from philosophical analysis, time seems to be, in its organic and spiritual quality, the most basic element of our being and intimacy

seems to be the way we can gain access to all its layers and implied meanings which in turn gives us new choices. (4)

This book is a result of good reflection, of deriving insights and learnings from life experiences aided by philosophy and psychology. Truly, a practical philosophy or applied philosophy. It is interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating and integrating Husserl's phenomenology, ethics, psychology, and empirical studies.

The authors' phenomenological method and their interpretation of Husserl's ethics is used in service of understanding reality and human experience. "Through the philosophical investigation they discover how our ethical way of interacting with lived experience is made possible through intimacy and time." (10) Truly, "they use the empirical analysis of specific lived experiences to see how a more aware understanding of these notions might help to improve our ethical choices and therefore our well-being." (10)

The application of phenomenology in everyday life is beneficial in rethinking and reflecting about ethical experience of living. It shows how phenomenology can elucidate the essence of crucial everyday ethical problems that everyone encounters.

Since this book is a fascinating and captivating material, I highly recommend this to graduate or undergraduate students, to professionals in any field, and for anyone who is in a relationship. They can be enlightened by the use of phenomenology and reappropriate it to learn more from their everyday life and ethical dilemmas. Once a reader starts reading, one engages oneself in the situation and one could not stop reading. I would suggest for the authors to make subsequent editions. Using the same framework, they can expand into other ethical issues encountered in everyday life. More empirical studies, more cases and scenarios are needed to demonstrate practical philosophy. I could think of ethical issues around the pandemic, educational system, politics, economic problems, social unrest, etc. In this way, Husserl's ethics, phenomenology, psychology, and any philosophical theory can be of more use and greater relevance today.

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