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Husserl on Shared Intentionality and Normativity.

Abstract

The paper offers a systematic reconstruction of the relations that, in Husserl's work, bind together our shared social world ("the spiritual world") with shared intentionality. It is claimed that, by sharing experiences, persons create social reasons and that these reasons impose a normative structure on the social world. Because there are two ways in which persons can share experiences (depending on whether these experiences rest on mutual communication or on group's identity), social normativity comes in two kinds. It is either directed (it has an addressee) or it is collective or absolute (it applies to all group members). Social normativity should be distinguished from axiological normativity: The first is grounded in shared intentionality, the second in values.

Keywords: Edmund Husserl, Motivation, Social Normativity, Directed Obligations, Absolute Obligations, Social World.

1. Introduction: Shared Intentionality and the Spiritual World¹

One of the most fascinating ideas of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is that natural sciences are not able to give an exhaustive and adequate description of the world we inhabit. Of course, the scientific worldview is the most powerful explanatory program humans have developed to understand the natural world.² However, the natural world is only a fraction of the world we share. In addition to physical forces, muons, electrons, black holes, molecular compounds of any sort, electromagnetic waves, etc., our world is also populated by minded beings (you, me, my cat, etc.), social groups (your family, our friendship, the community of black metal fans, etc.), institutions (the European Research Council, the Office of the Presidency of the United States, etc.), historical events (the Munich Invasion of Göttingen, the *Anschluss*, etc.), artefacts (be they concrete like my mug, your car, etc. or abstract like Albert Speer's plan of Berlin's *Volkshalle*, etc.), and many other—sometimes bizarre—entities (*fiat* boundaries, financial products, etc.).

Entities that escape treatment by the natural sciences are labelled by Husserl "spiritual" (*geistig*). Spiritual entities are "unities of Body and sense," and encompass "not only individual humans but also

¹ Unless specified otherwise, all translations from German into English are mine.

² "The scientific rigor of all these disciplines, the convincingness of their theoretical accomplishments, and their enduringly compelling successes are unquestionable", see Husserl (1954, Eng. trans. p. 4).

human communities, all cultural formations, all individual and social works, institutions, etc.”³ They populate what Husserl, in *Ideas II*, calls the “spiritual world [*geistige Welt*],” in contradistinction to the “natural world.” Crucial to the spiritual world is the idea that its understanding requires appeal to persons and, in particular, to *social* persons, i.e., to persons, who, among other abilities, are capable of sharing experiences.⁴ As the paper will show, humans create particular reasons for their attitudes and actions by sharing experiences. These reasons are social (not private or intra-personal) and can be said to be the ultimate ground of the spiritual world. Two preliminary considerations show why social reasons ground the spiritual world.

First, they are at the basis of the motivational structure, which is the very fabric of that world. For instance, and to simplify, the Munich Invasion of Göttingen was motivated by the interest shared by young Munich phenomenologists to attend Husserl’s lectures in Göttingen. And that event initiates new chains of motivation that led, say, to the foundation of the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung*. It would be impossible to understand this series of events unless one takes into consideration the reasons and, esp., the social or shared reasons of the parties involved in these events.

Second, in imposing a motivational structure on the spiritual world, shared experiences, by the same token, also impose a normative structure on it. To elaborate further on the previous example, memberships in the *Göttingen Philosophical Society* provided their members with social reasons that they otherwise would not have been subjected to (e.g., as a member of the *Göttingen Philosophical Society*, you are supposed to know the *Phänomenologenlied*). And, once these reasons are in place, the attitudes or actions of the members will be assessed in light of those reasons. Accordingly, the spiritual world is a world that finds in motivation and normativity its two fundamental pillars.

This paper offers a systematic reconstruction of the relations that, in Husserl’s work, bind together the spiritual world with that specific capability some creatures have to share mental states like emotions, beliefs, intentions (i.e., to live through mental states like emotions, beliefs, intentions *together*), which nowadays goes under the label of “shared intentionality.”⁵ Here, I will be mainly drawing on *Ideas II*

³ Husserl (1952, Eng. trans. p. 255). Of course, Husserl is quick in noting that not all spiritual objects have a sensuous existing body, see Husserl (1952, Eng. trans. p. 255): Albert Speer’s plan of Berlin’s *Volkshalle* or the Beethoven’s sixth symphony are not anchored in a physical support.

⁴ It is hard to overlook the fact that Husserl is here putting forward very similar claims to those of Searle (1995), which almost 80 years later (re-)ignited the debate on social ontology. On the phenomenological approach to social ontology, see Salice (2013), Salice & Schmid (2016), Moran & Szanto (2016).

⁵ On shared, or collective (in a broad sense), intentionality in Husserl, see also Caminada (2016), (2019), Chelstrom (2013), Perreau (2013), Szanto (2016), Zahavi (2015), among others.

and on the three volumes on the *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*.⁶ The hypothesis guiding this reconstruction is that the spiritual world is animated by nexuses of motivation and, because of that, it is an intrinsically normative world. Humans impose motivation on this world by creating (social) reasons or motives and they do so by engaging in shared intentionality. But there's more. For shared intentionality comes in at least two main forms (dyadic or collective) and this distinction should lead one to distinguishing between two kinds of social reasons: "Dyadic" or "collective" reasons, which differ in terms of their normative structure.

This is the structure of the paper. In Section 2 I provide a general overview of how the spiritual world, shared intentionality, and normativity hang together. Section 3 expands on dyadic intentionality and dyadic reasons, whereas section 4 focuses on the collective counterpart of those notions. The conclusion briefly elaborates on the distinction between social normativity and axiological (or value-based) normativity.

2. Motivation and Normativity

Spiritual reality not only is what first and foremost matters or is significant *to us* ("*geistig* bedeutsame [Wirklichkeit]"), it also is a reality *for us* ("eine Wirklichkeit [...] *für* den Geist").⁷ In which sense is it *for us*? One way to spell out this idea is that this reality is for us in the sense that the spiritual world is fundamentally regulated by motivation and that *social* persons infuse motivation in the spiritual world.⁸ To illustrate this idea, I start this section with a brief characterization of motivation.

This paper is not in a position to do full justice to Husserl's multifaceted notion of motivation, but I think it is fair to say that, in its essence, motivation is a relation that has experiences as its *relata*.⁹ For instance, perceiving a viciously barking dog motivates—or gives you a reason for—your emotion of fear. Importantly, motivation is *not* causality. There are many reasons for distinguishing these two kinds of relations, but one of the main differences between them is that motivation is a *normative* relation,

⁶ The paper focuses exclusively on Husserl, leaving aside the discussion on the foundation of the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) Husserl was engaging with in his work.

⁷ Husserl (1952, p. 197).

⁸ "Of course, it is possible to conceive an isolated entity of a human species and, therefore, it is possible to conceive a purely individual culture. But the way the human actually is, he is only and from the very beginning in a communal relation [...] All doing and producing of an individual [...] eventually becomes somehow socially significant" Husserl (2012, p. 113).

⁹ In talking of experiences as the *relata* of motivation, I refer (somewhat ambiguously) to both, their noetic and noematic components, leaving more fine-grained discussions for another time. For focused treatments of Husserl's notion of motivation, see Mulligan (2021) and Walsh (2013). On various theories of motivation in realist phenomenology (esp. Pfänder, Geiger, and Stein), see Uemura & Salice (2019).

whereas causality is not.¹⁰ Not only reasons or motives can be assessed as good or bad (in the broader sense of practical rationality), the experiences or actions that rely on reasons can also be assessed accordingly. A causal link, by contrast, either exists or does not exist. Again, an example might be of help to illustrate the point. If you intend to publish a paper, then this generates a reason for you to respect the deadline for submission. And if you work on your paper the night before the deadline, then there is a sense in which your action is good because it is performed on a good reason: Your intention to respect the deadline is good given the goal you have set for yourself. By contrast, if you get drunk on the night before the deadline and, as a result, you miss the deadline, then, your reason—say, the desire to party on which you acted on that night—was a bad one (again, given your goal of publishing a paper). Something entirely different happens if you miss the deadline because your computer crashes on the day of the submission. That event just is the effect of certain causes and it would make no sense to assess it as good or bad in relation to its causes (say, a short-circuit). That is also why you wouldn't blame the computer for crashing (and you would be irrational in doing so): As people say, s*** happens. Motivation, not causality, is subject to norms of rationality.¹¹

Motivation regulates intra-personal experiences, but we also have the capacity to offload motivation onto the world, as it were. In fact, the spiritual world is held together by motivation (whereas causality holds together the natural world).¹² For instance, the Munich Invasion of Göttingen was motivated by the interests of young Munich phenomenologists to attend Husserl's lectures in Göttingen. And that event motivated the creation of the *Göttingen Philosophical Society*. Motivation is injected in the world by persons because persons, quite literally, generate reasons in virtue of their psychological life. Establishing relations of motivation is one of the topics social scientists are interested in:

In the sphere of the human sciences [...] to say that historians, sociologists, or cultural anthropologists “explain” human-scientific [*geisteswissenschaftliche*] facts means that they want to clarify motivations, to make intelligible how the people in question “came to do it,” came to behave in such and such a way, which influences they underwent and which ones they themselves exercised, what it was that determined them in and toward the community of action, etc. [...] The historian asks what the members of the society in their communal life represented, thought, valued, desired, etc. How have these people “determined” themselves reciprocally [*wechselseitig*], how have they allowed themselves

¹⁰ Another reason for distinguishing the two relations is that something you have no awareness of does not have motivational power, but can very well have causal power, see Husserl (1952, p. 231).

¹¹ See Husserl (1952, p. 221). Strictly speaking, this claim does not apply to motivation *tout court*, but only to motivation that holds between attitudes (*Stellungnahmen*) like judgments, emotions, or acts of the will. In this context, Husserl speaks of rational motivation (*Vernunftmotivation*).

¹² See Husserl (1952, p. 189).

to be determined by the surrounding world of things, how have they, for their part, shaped the world in turn, etc.?¹³

As the final sentences of this quote suggest, not all reasons or motives are of equal relevance to the spiritual world, though: The social scientist, Husserl argues, is first and foremost interested in the reasons that persons create *together* (e.g., what they have communally experienced or how they have reciprocally determined themselves). More precisely, the genuinely social or historical aspects of the spiritual world are to be traced back to social (not private) reasons. And, again, as those sentences gesture towards, there are two main kinds of social reasons.

First, we have a typically dyadic form of shared intentionality, where individuals determine themselves reciprocally (*wechselseitig*). Individuals, who determine themselves reciprocally, form personal communities.¹⁴ These communities are personal because the individuals perform social or communicative acts addressed to others and are addressed by social or communicative acts performed by others. Even though Husserl does not use the term “shared intentionality,” the capacity required to be part of personal communities can be cashed out in terms of dyadically shared intentionality. Personal communities are “I-Thou communities.”¹⁵ These communities sometimes can evolve into “higher-order personalities.”¹⁶

Second, groups such as linguistic communities, corporations, social classes, etc., are impersonal: The individuals here act upon each other only indirectly.¹⁷ To be a member of an impersonal community (and/or of a large-scale personality of higher order), does not require I-Thou interactions with all their members (partly because there are too many members). Membership in these large communities, it will be claimed below, is characterised by the fact that individuals engage in a collective (not dyadic) form of shared intentionality, which is about the way in which individuals, in their communal life, i.e., collectively, represent, think, value, desire, etc.¹⁸

¹³ Husserl (1952, Eng. trans. p. 241).

¹⁴ See Husserl (1952, p. 166).

¹⁵ Husserl (1973c, p. 476). Personal communities are also sometimes called “I-Thou relation or contact [*Ich-Du-Beziehung bzw. Berührung*]” Husserl (1973b, p. 170).

¹⁶ Husserl (1973b, pp. 175, 201).

¹⁷ See (Husserl (1973b, p. 182).

¹⁸ Against the background of philosophical debate on collective intentionality, it is admittedly idiosyncratic to reserve the phrase “collective intentionality” to characterise the forms of interaction within large-scale communities; in fact, the paradigmatic examples of collective intentionality in that debate have been taken to be small I-Thou interactions (painting a house, dancing tango, walking together, etc.). However, this usage aligns with the way the phrase is employed nowadays especially by Tomasello, see his (2016).

In addition, these two forms of shared intentionality are at the basis of distinct forms of what could be called “social normativity:” Being part of a personal or of an impersonal community provide individuals with particular reasons that they would not have had, had they not been members of a community. Two examples should highlight the distinction between these two forms of shared intentionality and the different kinds of reasons they generate.

If you and I decide to go to the cinema together, then I have a reason to go to the cinema (and you do, too). This reason is different from the one that I form when I, alone, decide to go to the cinema (perhaps because I like the movie). In the latter case, I can change my mind anytime by revising my decision. In a sense, I have the power to obliterate my private reason, and nobody needs to be consulted about that. By contrast, I don’t have that power in the former case. Regardless of how I exactly intend to proceed (informing the other that I won’t show up, apologizing to the other for not showing up, asking the other for the permission of not showing up, etc.), the other will have to be involved one way or the other: They have to be consulted. And if they are not consulted, then I can expect that they will get back to me anyway, perhaps to rebuke me. My reason here is not private, it is social (in the dyadic sense I specify below).

Consider now this other case. If I decide not to grow a beard (perhaps because I don’t like beards), then I have a reason not to grow a beard. This reason is different from the one that I, as a member of the New York Yankees, form in deciding to shave every morning: Members of the New York Yankees are not supposed to grow a beard.¹⁹ These two reasons are, again, different. In the first case, I can change my mind without the need to consult with anybody: I might fall in love with the hipster culture, adjust my preferences, and decide to grow a beard. Again, I have the power to dispel my reason because this is a private reason. In the latter case, my reason is social (in the collective sense that I specify below). Suppose I show up on the field with a beard, then the New York Yankees as a group (or each member as representative of the group) can and will have a say on my shameful appearance—to the point in which I even might be ostracized by the group. Finally, note that this *collective* reason is different from the *dyadic* one: Whereas dyadic reasons are generated by face-to-face interactions with the other, collective reasons are rather inherited by the subject insofar as they are member of a group.

Now, of course, these are just examples which only serve the purpose of introducing a more detailed discussion of the relevant notions. The next two sections enter that discussion.

3. Dyadically Shared Intentionality

¹⁹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Yankees_appearance_policy (last accessed 11.06.2021)

What are I-Thou communities and, relatedly, what is dyadic shared intentionality? In a nutshell, these are communities that are constituted in virtue of their members engaging in communication among each other. But this answer, of course, calls for a clarification of what is meant by communication and of how, and in which sense, communication creates reasons. Communication is a *Gestalt*-like phenomenon as it emerges out of the combination of different parts.

The process is triggered by particular acts performed by the speaker. These acts are called “social acts” by Husserl.²⁰ Yet, the phrase is most likely coined by Reinach in his 1913 (2012) seminal theory of social acts.²¹ The two phenomenologists concur in the idea that social acts encompasses acts like promises, orders, requests, the act of informing somebody about something etc. These are acts that, importantly, *address* the other.²² Following Husserl, a social act is a multi-layered experience where a given experience (like a desire or an act of the will) is uttered with the concomitant intention that the act be communicated to the addressee:

The articulate sound-complex [...] first becomes a spoken word or a communicative bit of speech, when a speaker produces it with the intention of ‘expressing something about something’ through its means or, to put this in other words, when he endows it in certain mental acts with a sense, which he wants to communicate to the hearer.²³

Communication takes place when the hearer correctly understands the experience that is conveyed by the speaker’s utterance: “This communication becomes first possible, when the hearer understands the intention of the speaker.”²⁴ One of Husserl’s favourite example is the act of ordering. When I issue an order to you by uttering “get out,” my order is constituted by three different experiences: (1) my will that you leave the room; (2) my judgment that I want you to leave the room; and (3) my will that you

²⁰ Husserl (1973b, p. 165).

²¹ The expression “social acts” is used with a cognate meaning already by Thomas Reid. Although Kurt Peters—a member of the Munich Circle—submitted a dissertation on Reid (1909), there is no historical indication that Reinach adopted that locution from Reid, see Mulligan (1989, p. 33). On the history of social acts from Aristotle, passing through Reid, to phenomenology, see Smith (1990).

²² Despite the adoption of the same terminology, there are substantial differences between the theories of Reinach and Husserl. It exceeds the purposes of this paper to elaborate on these points, but briefly: Reinach argues that, in virtue of their essence, social acts generate normative relations (claims, obligations, etc.), when they are understood (“heard”) by their addressees. This model is different from the one articulated by Husserl, who emphasises the communicative intention of the speaker and the importance for this intention to be grasped by the hearer (this view resonates with Grice’s “intentionalist” model of communication, Grice (1957)). In fact, as far as I know, nowhere does Husserl assign a proper essence to the various types of social acts, but spells these types out in terms of the internal acts that accompany the communicative intentions.

²³ Husserl (1984, Eng. trans. mod. p. 189).

²⁴ Husserl (1984, Eng. trans. mod. p. 189).

understand my judgment. “Get out” intimates the judgment (2) in the narrower sense (this is what “get out” immediately expresses: My judgment that I want you to leave the room); but it also intimates the will (1) in the wider sense (this is what “get out” mediately, i.e., by means of my judgment expresses: I want you to leave the room). However, it is crucial that (3), too, is understood by the hearer: “Communication emerges when I not only create or put forward a sign in general to determine that the other accomplishes the denotation [*um den anderen zum Vollzug einer Bezeichnung zu bestimmen*], but when I do so communicatively, that means, *when the other can understand my intention and when I can apperceive him as understanding me.*”²⁵ Only if (3) is understood, can the hearer understand that “get out” is the expression of an order *directed to* them, rather than a mere act of the will *concerning* them.

Three comments are in order to appreciate the importance of communication for an understanding of the I-Thou relationship.

First, the hearer’s understanding of (1)-(3) is *not* (or does not have to be) conceptual understanding.²⁶ Rather this understanding is secured by acts of empathy. And, as the *Logical Investigations* already indicate, empathy is a perceptual ability. This comment is important because, even though the paradigmatic example of communication is linguistic communication (communication by means of linguistic expressions), communication can also run non verbally: Our lived-body is “a unity of Body and sense,” which can express mental states just as linguistic expressions do. Think of how meaningful communication can be when I smile *at* you (as opposed to the case where you just perceive me smiling while lost in my phantasies). If that is on the right track, then I-Thou communities do not have to be necessarily linguistic.²⁷

The *second* comment concerns the concatenation of acts required for communication to be established. Because understanding is secured by empathy, communication demands that not only the speaker’s social act be targeted by (and thereby understood thanks to) the hearer’s empathic act, for that act of empathy, too, must be targeted by (and thereby understood thanks to) the speaker’s act of empathy (and vice versa). It then follows that I-thou communities are *intentionally* brought about and that their intentional structure shows a recursive structure:

In an act, in which an I is directed to the other, it is first and foremost fundamental [that]:
I₁ grasps empathically I₂ and I₂ empathically I₁, but not only this: I₁ experiences

²⁵ Husserl (2005, p. 87, my emph.).

²⁶ See (Husserl (1984, p. 40).

²⁷ See Husserl (1952, p. 235).

(understands) I_2 as one who understandingly experiences I_1 , and vice versa. I see the other as somebody who sees and understands me, and it lies in there that I “know” that the other on his end knows to be seen by me. We understand each other and we are close to each other in mutual understanding, in contact.²⁸

The *third* comment relates to what happens after the hearer has correctly understood the speaker’s social act. At this stage, the experience the speaker is conveying acquires the power to *motivate* the hearer. The hearer can take that experience as a reason for their action:

I turn to the other in desires, orders, I address them and expect an answer from them; they fulfil my desire, they answer me, we enter a personal interaction [*Wechselverkehr*] [...] my subjective desires, orders, etc., insofar as they are experienced and known by the other, determine him as such.²⁹

So, for instance, after hearing my order, you could take my will to be a reason for leaving the room.³⁰ Furthermore, this reason is *normative* and can be assessed as such, e.g., you could protest: “How dare you? On whose authority can you demand of me to leave the room?” What is particularly interesting in this case is that not only the intentional, but also the normative structure of communication has a dyadic intentional structure: Just as an I addresses a Thou and the Thou responds accordingly, so the reason, too, has the same dyadic structure built into it.³¹ Suppose Pam hears our conversation. Although Pam correctly understands what I am communicating to you, she will not take my will as a reason *for her* to leave the room (and I will not reprimand Pam if she doesn’t leave the room). And if Pam takes that to be a reason for her, then she would be mistaken.³² This highlights the fact that my social act has put only me and you in a social relation: Only you and I are part of that specific I-Thou community.

The scenario just portrayed is characterised by a certain asymmetry: The other is expected to respond to my act as the reason I have created is a reason only for them. No further reason accrues to me until

²⁸ Husserl (1973b, p. 211).

²⁹ Husserl (1973b, p. 369).

³⁰ The point can be generalised to all communicative acts. For instance, after hearing me asking you what time it is, you take my desire of knowing the time as a reason for answering my question; after hearing my report about mental state (“I am feeling sad”), you have a reason for believing that I am feeling sad.

³¹ To use a slightly different terminology, these reasons are “directed” or “relational” precisely because they are directed *towards* somebody, see Gilbert (2018, esp. pp. 174-181); Darwall (2006); Reinach (2012).

³² Interestingly, testimony appears to work differently: If I tell you that *p*, you have a reason to believe that *p*. And yet Pam, whom I am not addressing, now seems to have a reason to believe that *p* if she hears our conversation. (I am thankful to Genki Uemura for raising this point.)

and unless the other responds to me in a way that calls for a reply from me. To put this differently, I have created a reason for you and, in principle, there might be no reason for me to further act or respond to you in any given way. This sort of asymmetric situations “clearly are personal relations, which go from an I to [another] I, but they’re no association [or unification, *Verein*], no personality of higher order.”³³

However, I-Thou interactions can be symmetric, too. In this case, the reason that has been created is a reason for all the parties involved.³⁴ To go back to the example at the end of the previous section, suppose that I ask you “Shall we go to the movies tonight?” and you reply “Sure.” Now it is not only you who has a reason to go to the movies, for that reason is mine, too. In fact, that reason is *ours*. But it is ours only insofar as and to the extent in which it is mine *and* yours. To put this differently, that reason still retains an I-Thou structure. Your approval of my suggestion motivates me to go to the cinema and my suggestion, approved by you, motivates you to go to the cinema. And if any of us defects, the other can rebuke. This I-Thou structure can, again, be highlighted by the following scenario: Suppose that Pam hears our conversation. Pam will not have a motive to go to the cinema and, if she happens not to go to the cinema, neither I nor you will have reason to reprimand her.

“Symmetric” or “reciprocal” I-Thou communications create personalities of higher order:³⁵ “In the communication we ‘touch’ us all, we construct a personal unity of a higher level [...] in the communication, the subject acts [*wirkt*] through the other consciousness-I in the form of the other’s acts of striving and willing.”³⁶ And, similarly, “just as I self-determine myself thematically by performing I-self-acts, so I determine the others in social acts. This efficacious motivating in acts of personal motivation connects the person to a community.”³⁷ One typical trait of personalities of higher order (among other traits, see the next section) is their capacity to acquire a unified perspective. As talking of “higher order” suggests, these communities can be attributed affective, conative, or doxastic attitudes of their own, which do not reduce to first-order attitudes (i.e., the attitudes of their members), although they are founded by them: “There is a possible reign of common—and conscious for us as common—

³³ Husserl (1973b, p. 183, see also p. 168).

³⁴ See Husserl (1973b), p. 170).

³⁵ Note that symmetry and reciprocity do not accompany all personalities of higher-order. Those personalities that rely on collectively (rather than dyadically) shared intentionality do not (see the next section).

³⁶ Husserl (1973b, p. 194). Sometimes, reciprocal I-thou relations are also called “practical communities of will.” see in particular Husserl (1973b, p. 169). Interestingly, the metaphor of an I-Thou “touching” and, indeed, the very idea of two distinct kinds of communities—I-Thou and collective we-communities—is at the centre of Dietrich von Hildebrand’s social ontology; see von Hildebrand (1930) and Salice (2016).

³⁷ Husserl (1973b, p. 371). And it is because of that, one could add, that communities are “constituted” in social acts, see Salice & Uemura (2019).

lasting needs (wishes, desires), lasting strivings and intentions [...] there is a communal belief, a communal valuation, a communal intention, a communal action.”³⁸

4. Collectively Shared Intentionality

Paradigmatic examples of personal or I-Thou communities are small scale groups like families, group of friends, love relationships, etc. There is an obvious reason for that: Personal communities, typically, are small groups because they require personal and communicative relationships among their members and there are only that many persons one can foster personal relationships with (apparently, individuals can only have intimate knowledge of approx. 150 individuals at a time because any number higher than that would exceed our social memory capacities, see Dunbar (1998)).

However, we certainly are members of groups that are much larger in scale than families and groups of friends. And we do engage in practices that are collective in the sense that they could not be understood if not considered in the context of group membership. For instance, the fact that I grow no beard will find a different interpretation depending on whether I am a member of the New York Yankees or not.

However, the existence of these communities cannot rest on communication as it would be preposterous to assume that all their members engage in communication with each other. Husserl identifies two senses in which a community may not be grounded in communication.

According to the first sense, the community is not and cannot be grounded in *actual* communication among all its members. Yet, this does not exclude the fact that one’s activity does not entail an element of address—a communicative intention—towards the other members (even though that intention cannot turn into actual communication). One example Husserl makes for this kind of group is the community of researchers: If you are a philosopher, there is no way for you to engage with, say, past philosophers and maybe even with some living philosophers (even though internet has made things easier nowadays). And yet, there is a sense according to which, when you, e.g., discuss the work of Aristotle, your thoughts address Aristotle: “Insofar as researchers [...] think of their co-researchers, insofar as they address them

³⁸ Husserl (1973b, p. 193). Are these attitudes unified in the sense that a collective attitude is a (one) structure consisting of many individual attitudes or in the sense that it is a numerically single attitude? If one sticks to the reconstruction offered so far and, in particular, to the idea that personalities of higher order are founded in recursions of empathic acts, then one can only opt for the first option. However, there are passages in Husserl’s texts which lend themselves to a different interpretation: “Communication creates unity. Particular things remain external, they can lie together and touch each other, but then can never have anything *identical* in common. However, consciousness actually coincides [*sich deckt*] with consciousness; consciousness, comprehending another consciousness, constitutes the same in itself of what the other has constituted; *both are one in the same*” Husserl (1973b, p. 199, my emph.).

spiritually and are aware of themselves as being addressed by them, they form a personal relation, but certainly not an association [or unification, *Verein*], which has its constitution.”³⁹

According to the second sense in which a community is not founded upon communication, a member may be part of that community without addressing other members. The main examples here are linguistic communities (or national communities without a practical project or a “national will”).⁴⁰ When speaking a language, the element of address is entirely absent (or at least can be entirely absent): When I speak Italian, I do not address the other speakers of my mother-tongue; nor do I share with them any practical project. While communities belonging to the first kind still count as personal, the second are not personal: “A linguistic community is not a personal relation, which creates a personal whole [...] by means of a formed expression, which ‘finds approval’ [*Anklang findet*], the *linguistic comrade* [*Sprachgenosse*] has effect in the wide linguistic community, *but not in a personal way*.”⁴¹

As far as I can see, Husserl does not fully elaborate on how to neatly distinguish these two kinds of communities: When is it that one stops to spiritually address the other members in their activities? For instance, it is not immediately evident why being part of a linguistic community may not have personal significance (as Stavenhagen, e.g., would claim: For him, a mother-tongue encapsulates a system of evaluations that is typical of a linguistic community and that the speakers implicitly endorse and propagate, see Stavenhagen (1934), Salice (2020)). Perhaps one way to interpret Husserl’s view is that the element of addressing the other members comes in degree (sometimes it is more explicit, sometimes less) and that, accordingly, the distinction between large-scale personal communities and impersonal communities, too, is not one of kinds, but one of degrees. On this view, fully personal or fully impersonal communities are two opposite poles in a continuum.⁴²

I will not further explore this issue, for my attention rather goes to the form of shared intentionality that supports the existence of large groups (be they personal or impersonal). For all communities that are not grounded in actual communication and that, therefore, are not sustained by the recursive structure of empathic acts, will require a different mental capacity to subtend their existence. Here, collectively

³⁹ Husserl (1973b, p. 183).

⁴⁰ See Husserl (1952, p. 316).

⁴¹ (Husserl (1973b, p. 182).

⁴² Another possible way of cashing out the distinction between personal and impersonal communities is to conceive of large scale personal communities as personalities of higher order (like a nation state [*Staatsvolk*] or an association [*Verein*]). These communities, while being larger social units than the I-Thou communities discussed in the previous section, retain a unified perspective thanks to I-centeredness (*Ichzentrierung*) and lasting habituality, see Husserl (1973b, p. 405). On this characterization, impersonal communities do not qualify as personalities of higher order.

(as opposed to dyadically) shared intentionality is essential. But how should one understand this notion? I submit that Husserl's story consists—or can be construed as consisting—of two main parts.

The first part of the story has to do with the idea that a member of large communities is subject to collective reasons. These reasons come in a large variety of kinds—precisely because there are various kinds of large communities. An association, e.g., typically has a codified statute or constitution that sets certain reasons for their members. As we have seen, the New York Yankees have an explicit policy that regulates the appearances of their players (no beards, but moustaches allowed!). That policy gives players reasons that motivate them to pursue a certain conduct. But other communities rely on reasons that are not explicitly codified: Members of the community of philosophers, e.g., are supposed to be sensitive to the pressure of engaging in a dialogue with other members and to open themselves to others' criticisms. And, of course, members of linguistic communities, too, are subject to all sorts of linguistic norms. These reasons are all created differently. Sometimes, they are consciously generated by the members of the community, perhaps as a result of previous I-Thou interactions involving a limited number of members (e.g., in the case of personalities of higher order like associations). In other cases, they emerge spontaneously from the practice itself (engaging in a dialogue is part and parcel of what it means to do philosophy).⁴³ And in yet different cases, they are mere habitualities that consolidate themselves into norms.⁴⁴

Now, this brief overview is by no means an exhaustive account of collective reasons and of their generation.⁴⁵ However, I would argue that all collective reasons have one element in common: They are “inherited” by the community members. By that I certainly do not mean that the members cannot modify those reasons (for they usually can and do). Rather, I want to point to a phenomenological feature: The way the members experience those reasons is not by creating them or being addressed by them (as it was in the case of I-Thou communities), but it rather is by acquiring them, being confronted with them, or learning about them as reasons that *group members encounter already there*, so to say.

⁴³ Husserl's main example is about the emergence of reasons from family life: “Every member of the family is responsible subject; a subject, which has an I-ought [*Ich-soll*], which is generally outlined, determined in the particular case, [and] belonging to this generality” Husserl (1973b, p. 180).

⁴⁴ “The normal [*das Übliche*] as such already has, in a certain sense, its norm, the norm of the familiar [*Gewohnten*], according to which one again expects the familiar under similar circumstances. The unfamiliar bothers [...] We react with *disapproval* when humans speaks differently from how ‘one’ speaks, from how it is normal” Husserl (1973b, p. 229). On the intersection between normality and normativity, see Taipale 2012.

⁴⁵ Another, I believe, equally important way to generate collective reasons should be assigned to the role of models (*Vorbilder*) and the way in which the conduct of models play an exemplary role for community members. On this idea, see esp. Scheler (1986).

This leads us to the second part of the story about collectively shared intentionality: If the capacity to grasp and understand collective reasons is part of what it means to activate collective intentionality (i.e., to act or live through experiences on the basis of collective reasons), then why is it that the community member understands these reasons as reasons *for* themselves, i.e., as reasons *they* are subject to? After all, nobody has addressed them in a communicative act imposing those reasons on them (and they have not created those reasons for themselves or others). I believe the answer to this question should be looked for in the subject's self-understanding as a community member. It is because the subject understands themselves as a community member that those reasons are reasons *for* them (*qua* community member). Husserl puts the thought this way:

The members of the community, of marriage and of the family, of the social class, of the union, of the borough, of the state, of the church, etc., “know” themselves as their members, consciously realize that they are dependent on them, and perhaps consciously react back on them.⁴⁶

This quote also illuminates why collective intentionality does not have a dyadic structure. In large communities, members are not required to engage in any I-Thou interaction.⁴⁷ However, in understanding themselves as community members, subjects become sensitive to collective reasons and factor these in in their experiences and actions. These reasons, to put this differently, *motivate* the subject in a certain way. Consequently, those experiences and actions of a subject, which occur *on the basis of those reasons*, could not be fully understood unless one takes into consideration the community which those reasons stem from and which the subject belongs to.

If the structure of collective reasons is not dyadic, then it is to be expected that their normative structure, too, is not dyadic. And this is precisely how we should characterise these reasons: Husserl does not

⁴⁶ Husserl (1952, Eng. trans. p. 192). In a similar vein one can also read, in relation to epistemic communities, “We know of ourselves reciprocally as “judging” the same [...]” Husserl (1973b, p. 193) and, in relation to practical communities (or communities of the will—*Willensgemeinschaften*), “in this community not only each [of the members] strives, but each is also objectively given to himself as striving, he is not only pre-given to himself as such, but also objectively given. Of course, not objectively as a theoretical theme [...]; but *practically* objectively, i.e., belonging to the practical theme” Husserl (1973b, p. 171). If my interpretation is correct, the way in which subjects “know of themselves” or are “given to themselves” is as co-subject (co-judgers or co-agents); meaning: as group members.

⁴⁷ This quote highlights another important point: Dyadic and collective intentionality are not mutually exclusive. While collective intentionality and dyadic intentionality can be exemplified separately, it is possible for members of I-Thou communities to activate collective intentionality and, vice versa, for members of large, potentially impersonal, communities to entertain I-Thou relationships. However, note that, if Zahavi (2015) is correct in suggesting that the group members acquire their sense of membership primarily in virtue of recursive empathy, then dyadically shared intentionality is prior to collective intentionality.

introduce a technical term to label them, but we might call them “absolute reasons” or “reasons period” by stipulating that these reasons are absolute not in the sense that they are universally valid, but rather in the sense that they have no specific addressee and that they are reasons for everybody who is member of that specific community.⁴⁸ This is how Husserl formulates the view:

[...] in some groups, but not in all, a communal norm subsists, which stands in front of the eyes of every social individual. [...] This is not directed to a particular other, but it rather concerns rules of reciprocal conduct, which are valid for everybody and for every situation of social intercourse, which everybody can enter. This is demanded and this is how one conducts oneself, and the other party has the right to demand that conduct. [This is] *a unity of demands and counterdemands, which go through the entire social community, indeed, which are first and foremost formative of community; a system of duties and rights, which creates unity vis-à-vis a mere aggregation of individuals, who ‘turn’ [verkehren] to each other.*⁴⁹

Because collective reasons apply to all community’s members and determine how, in general, members are supposed to behave normally, they are not “directed towards.” Let us go back to our example to illustrate the point. Suppose you show up for the usual practice on the baseball field with a beard. Given the reasons you are expected to be subject to as a member of the New York Yankees: Shame on you! Even though no single other member of the community has imposed on you the reason of shaving every morning (this point perhaps never was a matter of discussion between you and the other members), every single member of the community is entitled to rebuke you. For what you have disrespected is a collective reason: A reason that is supposed to motivate you *qua* member of the community.

5. Conclusion

⁴⁸ The terminology is inspired by Reinach (2012) and Darwall (2013, esp. pp. 20-40), who respectively talks of “absolute obligations” and “obligations period” to refer to obligations that have no addressees (note, however, that while Reinach distinguishes between moral and non-moral absolute obligations, the notion of obligation period, for Darwall, is moral all the way through).

⁴⁹ Husserl (1973a, p. 105). A few lines later, Husserl seems to suggest that linguistic communities work differently. But just slightly differently: “Things are somehow different in the case of language. ‘One [*Man*]’ expresses oneself this way, one speaks in the linguistic community this way. One does that obviously, nobody follows here a felt duty and sense an entitlement against the addressor” Husserl (1973a, p. 105). Note that the difference here is not about the collective nature of the reasons that are followed by the speakers of a linguistic community. The difference rather consists in the way these reasons are experienced—they do not present themselves as duties or entitlements (demanding compliance), but they are always already followed (in an “obvious” way).

Time to recap. The world we inhabit is by and large a spiritual world. This is a world, which is populated by entities that rely, for their existence, on human capacities. In particular, the motivational structure of the spiritual world, and its related normativity, are originated in us and in our ability to create reasons and motives. The most important kind of reasons for the spiritual world encompasses social reasons. These reasons derive from experiences that we share. However, we can share experiences in different ways: We can share them by communicating (verbally or non-verbally). Or we can share experiences purely in virtue of our membership in a group—potentially in absence of any face-to-face encounter. The reasons we become susceptible to in the two forms of sharing are different: They are directed or relational in the first case, but they are “absolute” (in the sense specified above) in the second case.

In these concluding lines, I would like to offer a final characterization of the notion of normativity discussed in this paper: This is *social* normativity. It is a social kind of normativity because it is grounded in our psychology and, in particular, in our capacity to share intentional states. If you have promised Pam to go to the movies with her and subsequently I ask you: “Why *should* you go to the movies?” your reply will be “*because* I promised that.” If you shave every morning and I ask you: “Why *should* you shave every morning?” your reply will be “*because* I am a member of the New York Yankees (and this is how we do things).” But not all normativity is social normativity. Compare these questions with the one where you are asked “why *should* you not torture babies?” In this case, the (right) answer to that question, I contend, cannot possibly appeal to shared intentionality.

Certainly, the answer cannot appeal to dyadically shared intentionality: It is not that you hold this normative demand *against somebody* such that, if you torture babies, only that very person (against whom you have the demand) can rebuke you. For everybody is legitimately entitled to rebuke you, if you torture babies. However, the answer can’t appeal to collectively shared intentionality either. For suppose it is so. Then that would entail the idea that only members of a given community stand under the demand of not torturing babies. And this would again entail the possibility that, for members of other communities, it would be alright to torture babies (you guys might do things this way, we do them other ways). This can’t be correct, though, for the demand dictates universal compliance. *Everybody* shouldn’t torture babies—regardless of their group memberships. It is not the case that the wrong of torturing babies (and therefore the demand of not doing so) stems from the fact that one’s community holds it to be wrong. Rather, one’s community holds (or should hold) it to be wrong *because* torturing babies is wrong.

“Why should you not torture babies?” *not*: “*Because* this is how we do things,” *but*: “*Because* nobody should!” If all this is on the right track, then it shows that social normativity is constitutive of our social world, but it is different from and ultimately subject to moral normativity.⁵⁰

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6. Literature

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⁵⁰ What then generates moral normativity? The answer, I submit, is that moral reasons are grounded in values (and not in psychological capacities of the mind). Although the question of how to articulate this idea and whether (or to what extent) Husserlian phenomenology supports it can only be the topic for another paper, there are indications that Husserl’s position is at least compatible with this solution. Consider the following ideas: *First*, modal predicates like “ought/should” or “ought/should not” are argued by Husserl to be grounded in values, see Husserl (1975, p. 53) and also Reinach (2012, p. 49, fn 11). On this understanding, “ought/should” are modal *deontic* predicates. For instance, you ought/should not torture babies because that is cruel, where cruelty is understood as a disvalue. (Of course, this idea is not uncontroversial as one could claim that the modality of “ought/should” is not deontic, but *aretaic*, and that it thereby prescribes the best possible action one can do, rather than the right action one ought to do. For obvious reasons, I am not in a position to defend my interpretation here.) *Second*, because values are disclosed in affective and volitive attitudes (see Husserl 2004, p. 73), and because, as mentioned, communities can be subjects of collectively affective and volitive attitudes, (see Husserl 1973b, p. 192), communities stand under the moral demand to act rightfully (see Husserl 2004, p. 282).

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