



**THINKING, ACTING
AND BEING**

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Abstract: Thinking, acting and being are pivotal poles of our daily life, involving epistemological and practical faculties. To understand the balance between what we know and we do, we should figure out to what extent our being affects epistemological and practical choices. The questions I raise in this paper concern the boundaries of logic, ethics and psychology and the influence mutually exerted. My aim here is to display the part taken by logic and ethics in every identity and to figure out how fluid their presence is (if any). I wonder, particularly if there is a kind of paradox in moral philosophy. Indeed, we learn from the Delphic and Socratic saying the wise imperative –“γνῶθι σεαυτόν” (“know thyself”)– but it is quite apparent that we cannot get all that we know about ourselves out. Hence in this paper I am going to sift the meaning of this imperative in order to figure out if we have to take it as a sort of epistemological imperative or as an ethical one.

Key words: Logic, ethics, psychology, phenomenology, values, *epoché*, *eudaimonía*.

PENSAR, ACTUAR Y SER

Resumen: pensar, actuar y ser son actividades cruciales de nuestra vida diaria. Estas actividades implican un trabajo práctico y epistemológico, base de la comprensión de las nuestras elecciones. En primer término se presentarán las generalidades sobre el pensamiento, los valores, y las normas morales como expresión de los valores personales. En segundo lugar, se explicarán los límites de la lógica, la ética y la psicología en la expresión de la identidad individual. En particular, me pregunto si hay una paradoja en la filosofía moral. En efecto, nosotros aprendemos la máxima délfica bien presente en el pensamiento de Sócrates –“γνῶθι σεαυτόν” (“Conócete a ti mismo”)– pero no podemos siempre toda nuestra identidad. Por tanto, el objetivo de este trabajo es investigar esta máxima y su significación lógica, psicológica y moral.

Palabras clave: lógica, ética, valor, psicología, fenomenología, *epoché*, *eudaimonía*.

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THINKING, ACTING AND BEING

1. INTRODUCTION

Thinking, acting and being are pivotal poles of our daily life, involving epistemological and practical faculties. To understand the balance between what we know and we do, we should figure out to what extent our being affects epistemological and practical choices. The questions I raise in this paper concern the boundaries of logic, ethics and psychology and the influence mutually exerted.

All the values and judgments I decide to follow in my social life shape in a certain way my social and personal identity. Nevertheless, with time they do not fit in the fluency of my identity. As Baumann remarked: "In a fluid constantly changing environment the idea of (...) lasting values immune to the flow of time has no grounding in human experience" (Baumann, 2004: 73). If the fluidity of my identity does not match my axiological hierarchy, it is possible that the equilibrium between who I am supposed to be and who I really am could be occasionally unbalanced toward the former, in a sham ethical way. For example, according to my personhood, I could decide to be driven by the value of freedom in my life until I feel the desire to have a baby. In that case, the possibility of this event strikes me so much that freedom comes in conflict with other values I should embrace as a mother, that is reliability and responsibility. Or, if we think about fidelity, which is an important value in a marriage or at work, we can easily turn out that it could represent a problem whether I changed the feelings toward my partner or I understood my job prevents to me from my pursuing for happiness.

My aim here is to display the part taken by logic and ethics in every identity and to figure out how fluid is their presence (if any). Particularly, I wonder if there is a kind of paradox in moral philosophy. As Parfit and Smilanski showed in their works, we can run into several moral paradoxes (Parfit, 1984 – Smilanski, 2007); "γνῶθι

σεαυτόν" ("know thyself") could be one of these. We learn from the Delphic and Socratic saying this very wise imperative but it is quite apparent that we cannot get all that we know about ourselves out.

We have been taught to know ourselves and concurrently to put aside or at least to inhibit certain parts. So I wonder if we have to take it as a sort of epistemological imperative or rather as an ethical one. If the latter is true, it could be considered as a kind of paradox because it is a moral principle which compels us not to do what it rules. Practically we cannot use all the knowledge we acquire from introspection.

Therefore, this paper will be articulated in the following way. In the second and third paragraph I will draw a tentative definition of ethics, its connection with logic and psychology. In the fourth paragraph I will try to figure out how values relate between themselves and if they can operate in a consistent and fluid hierarchy. Finally, in the fifth paragraph I will establish the balance between ethics and identity in the categorical imperative. The author I will follow for this quest is essentially Edmund Husserl, particularly his early lectures on ethics (Husserl, 1988) and his articles published in the *Kaizo* review (Husserl, 1987). In the lectures he faced the issue of the relationship between psychology and philosophy in order to found a pure ethics which could grant the well being of human life.

2. ACTING AND BEING

It is possible to give multiple definitions of what tradition means with ethics. Etymologically both morality (*mos*) and ethics (ἠθός) are two interchangeable words indicating habits, custom or manners of a group. Commonly, these words describe a very social and intersubjective pattern which belongs to our way of living the world.

Some philosophers retain that ethics is strictly connected to psychology. Taylor, for instance, considers any evaluation an inescapable feature of a personhood, as every choice is the result of what a person considers right according to her parameters (Taylor, 1985: 16-17, 32-33). Conversely, others state that psychological assumptions lay behind traditional ethics. A personal ethical choice could be made independently of the traits of one's personhood and it could accomplish just what it is supposed to be good to do. Typical traits affect the development of a personal growth but they could be put aside or even erased in the natural evolution of one's own morality.

With typical traits we mean somatic dispositions like deft or awkward, activity or passivity. These traits could be evaluated as good or bad from a moral point of view, but they could be ineffective within a moral choice. One can decide to

become a thief independently of his/her skill, although this trait probably will affect involuntarily his/her choice. Typical traits are a kind of psychological strength which is easily distinguishable from the normative or moral authority, because they do not point up how we ought to be, but just how we are. For instance, a teacher can shape his/her pedagogic method according to his/her own temperament and in case of conflict he/she can choose to apply his/her traits in a prevailing or recessive way. This should be considered not anymore as a moral decision but as a psychological one, since the teacher resolves on expressing a side of herself in his/her professional context. In this sense Sandel (1982: 179) retains deontological ethics independent from all that pertains to psychological identity as if it were never “tied to our aims and attachments to various communities”. He points up ethics just as a *Sollen* which is always distant to what we really are. Also for Read the social role is a constituent of each identity which flows in our ethics but it is separated from it because ethics has often a prescriptive sense (Read, 1955: 278, 276).

According to these arguments should we accept that there is a clear distinction between ethics and psychology? It is quite evident that all the somatic, psychological and social components take part in the process of constitution of our own idea of ethics, although they do not concur intentionally to the decision making process. At the same time ethics represents an ought which is distant from our own personality. It constraints or shapes the ideal of what we would like to become, but it does not even touch upon our actual identity because it remains a *Sollen*. On this purpose, I will use the phenomenological model of Husserl’s ethics, which goes through the relationship between psychology and pure philosophy, as a mean conducive to argue on this issue.

3. THINKING, ACTING AND BEING WITHIN HUSSERL’S PHENOMENOLOGY

Husserl’s first works on ethics dates back to 1902 (Husserl, 1988). At that time he had already raised the issue on the relationship between pure philosophy and psychology with his studies on logic (considered as the discipline of knowledge) published in his *Logical Investigations*. These studies will be precious to Husserl’s ethical research because they will work as a model of ethical discipline. On his view, ethics could be considered as a philosophical discipline akin to logic, as both find their roots in the pure reason of consciousness. Husserl proposes a parallelism between thinking and acting since they are two similar activities rationally grounded on a superior form of reason, that of a pure consciousness (Husserl, 1988: 8). Therefore, the foundation of the ethical discipline will be shaped on the same two steps passed through with logic (Husserl 1975: 34-37): a refutation of empiricism, especially psychologism and, second, an exposition of some fundamental a priori laws for the sphere of axiology and practice (Husserl, 1988: 36-37).

As it concerns the first step (which will be useful to our previous question concerning the boundaries between ethics and psychology), Husserl saw fit to overcome logical psychologism because he wanted to invalidate its attempts of grounding logic on psychology as a natural science. On this purpose Husserl revealed the absurdity of such an attempt by showing its presuppositions and its skeptical consequences. Grounding logic on psychology would reduce logical laws to those empirical laws which govern the activities of our brains; it would reduce the validity of logical laws to that of the merely factual results of the empirical sciences, which are only valid under certain specific conditions in space and time. Consequently the principle of non contradiction would be a principle worth just under specific practical conditions. According to Husserl, such an approach would not only misinterpret the meaning of logic and its laws as unconditionally valid ideal laws but also lead to relativistic consequences, since it would make impossible to speak about truth in an absolute sense.

Husserl sees analogous skeptical-relativistic consequences in any attempt to ground ethics on psychology. Thus, following the strict parallelism with logic, he also attacks an empiricist position that he calls “ethical psychologism” (Husserl, 1988: 35). Ethical psychologism grounds ethics on a psychological investigation of our factual mental processes or behavior. For Husserl such an approach damages the pure sense of ethics because its relativistic consequences distort the absolute meaning of ethical laws and obligations into merely psychologically, historically, or culturally valid facts. For Husserl, this kind of relativism would undermine the possibility of ethics and pervert the meaning of ethical terms like “good” and “bad,” connecting them to certain conditioned usages in a particular group or society. A psychological basis would lead ethics to an anthropological relativism and its laws would be just factual matter of facts. On the contrary, any a priori ethical or logical law is to be provided by a pure theoretical discipline that serves as the philosophical basis of Husserl’s early idea of science. As for ethics this basis is given by axiology which constitutes the second relevant step to found an ethical science.

The laws of formal axiology and practice serve to correct formally evaluations and acts of will. Thinking, evaluating and acting are governed by particular a priori laws which have an ideal character that cannot be traced back to psychological or any other empirical facts. In Husserl’s foundation of ethics, these axiological laws are the most basic laws since they manage our acts of evaluating something, and evaluating always stands prior to willing, for we can never want something that we have not first evaluated in a positive manner. In the next paragraph I will come back on this point to elucidate how Husserl conceives this realm. For now what interests to my research is the limit between psychology, ethics and logic drawn by Husserl’s philosophical foundation.

To explain the passage between the empirical domain of psychological facts to the domain of pure ethics and logic, Husserl introduces the device of epoché. This device allows us to distinguish empirical facts from pure principles. Undoubtedly pure ethics or logic and psychology belong to two different realms, but they are bridged by the link of 'life'. In fact, what a person lives is actually different from what a philosopher vets by his/her analysis as the former concerns a matter of fact. Although the sense of good or bad could not be reduced to the usage of a group, it always starts from the usage of a group. Thereof on one side there is the lived, on the other the givenness, *i.e.* what is given to the rational analysis. In brief, psychology reflects on what a person is living and philosophy studies what has been already lived. In Husserl's phenomenology epoché has been brought in to explain actually how to change the psychological into a philosophical attitude.

It consists simply of exerting a radical doubt on our knowledge which stops our psychological attitude. Husserl borrowed it from Cartesian *Mediationes*. In fact Descartes showed that ordinary experience of the world cannot provide with the kind of guaranteed foundation on which all other knowledge can be based. We are often disappointed to learn that what we have been taught are merely prejudices, and what our senses tell us is incorrect. That should make us reflect on the things we take for granted. To test whether what we think is truly correct, Descartes suggests that we first have to question everything we know. I mistrust every report of my senses, I regard the material world as nothing more than a dream, and I suppose that an omnipotent God renders false each proposition that I am even inclined to believe. Since everything therefore seems to be dubitable, does it follow that I can be certain of nothing at all? It does not. Descartes claimed that one thing emerges as true even under the strict doubt: "*cogito, ergo sum*" ("I think, therefore I am"), it is not merely an inference from the activity of thinking to the existence of an agent which performs that activity. It is intended rather as an intuition of one's own reality, an expression of the indubitability of first-person experience, the logical self-certification of self-conscious awareness in any form.

Husserl takes from Descartes this main reasoning and retains that every unshakeable truth can be gained only from *cogitationes*. The epistemological act is the main access to our lived and it discloses the content of every axiological or logical law. Psychology and pure philosophy can be distinguished by this change of attitude which brings forth the pure act of thinking. It works as an unshakable truth which allows us to come into the lived and reflect on it. In this sense ethics (or logic) results to be linked both to a psychological and epistemological lived. It is articulated on three different stages: those of facts, laws and knowledge. As

a matter of fact, practical acts come from what one has already experienced in his/her everyday life, from laws that drive the experience and finally from an epistemological reflection of what it has been done (Husserl, 1988: 141).

Applying this structure on a practical realm a person acts according to her pure ethics when she leaves aside her identity to follow her knowledge about facts and moral principles. Yet, the issue concerning the pureness of personal values, the fluidity of every axiological hierarchy and the personal well-being still holds. To explore these issues, I should come back to the second step of Husserl's ethical foundation, that is the description of axiology as a domain of laws.

4. HUSSERL'S AXIOLOGY

For Husserl, axiology is a realm of laws, the relations between them, and the corresponding acts of evaluation. Husserl's axiology is described as a reign of pure laws which are like formal logical laws. In fact, all of these axiological laws are uninformative and regulate correctly the formal conditions of acts evaluative. For example, there are mereological laws of value-summation and value absorption which claim that the sum of certain values has a higher value than each of its single values, and that a relatively high value will always be absorbed by the realization of an even higher value (Husserl, 1988: 93-99). Similarly, the formal logical laws cannot predict the factual validity of the content of a given sentence and do not evaluate the truth of any evaluation, but only set the rules for all formally well-formed evaluations.

Hart showed that formal axiology also plays a relevant role in our acts of volition (Hart, 1991: 297). To do good things we need to evaluate the rightness of our acts. Evaluating is always before willing and acting. The formal law which regulates the relationship between means and ends is a "categorical imperative" that Husserl took over from Brentano: "Do the best that is attainable" (Husserl, 1988: 137). This represents a fundamental law for the entire practical sphere and shows the formal condition of a correct will.

Following the critics raised by Geiger within the Munich Circle and deepened by the studies of Donoe (2004: 157), Hart (1991: 297-303) and Peucker (2008: 317), it is possible to detect certain limits of the imperative and all the axiological laws. In fact they cannot be actually applied because they do not take the different levels of values into any account and base the choice just on a logical reasoning or comparison. Indeed the best ought consists of a mathematical choice which entails a logical calculation of what is the best value to follow in a specific moment. Similarly to the law of absorption or value calculation, moral values are 'logical' values which should lead the choice. By them, a person does not express her psychological identity, but just her logical rationality. All the values are posed nearly on the same

stage, that of their reasonable understanding. The hierarchy of values which should lead the personal choice of a subject is made up of rational choices and not of personal values. Still, this hierarchy is not fluid and interchangeable according to the evolution of our identity, because it is blocked to our way of reasoning and this latter does not always correspond to what we practically feel and want.

If we test these laws on a practical realm, we can prove how they could appear distant from a personal need to accomplish one's own personhood. Taking for instance the examples given in the first paragraph, that of work. I am supposed to decide to quit or not my job. It has been useful to me until this moment, but now it makes me unhappy. I need to find a more suitable job which could emphasize my qualities. If my hierarchy of values is mainly based on the value of fidelity, naturally the best I can attain at that moment is to remain and keep my job. Although my needs are far from what I choose to do. In this way I would not be happy, I would not seek to understand who I became exactly, but I would deed rationally as I made my decision on what is the best I can attain now, that is my best and most expressive value: fidelity. Therefore, a philosophical rational hierarchy of values which brings in laws grounded on a logical or mathematical calculation, cannot grant my well-being because they are not able to evaluate what I am *feeling now*. They can only see what is the best thing attainable, according to laws grounded on a logical reasoning, which cannot be of any practical worth to me.

5. THE WELL-BEING IN AN ETHICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL LIFE

What does happen when Husserl introduce the meaning of person in his ethics? Husserl's ethics appeared on *Kaizo* review modifies the main structure we proposed above. This is due to the development of Husserl's phenomenology occurred in the 1920s. In these years he carried on researches concerning time-consciousness, the original associative genesis of meaning, the constitution of space, the differences between imagination, perception, and memory, the structures of consciousness in general, including especially the analyses of the consciousness of the ego at the center of all intentional life (Bernet, Kern, Marbach, 1993). In the 1920s it possible to detect a new conception of the ethical life as thoroughly shaped by reason. The basis of this conception is no longer logic but rather consists in a phenomenology of the person (Melle, 1991; Peucker, 2008).

The ego as a person is characterized by the variety of its lived-experiences and the dynamic processes among them. According to Husserl, personal life includes many affective tendencies and instincts on its lowest level, but also, on a higher level, strivings, wishes, volitions and body-consciousness, all aspects that have been put aside in Husserl's early ethics which was based on a strict parallelism with logic. It all stands in a dynamic process of arising and changing; lived-experiences

with their meaningful correlates rise from the background of consciousness into the center of attention and sink back, yet they do not totally disappear, since they are kept as habitual acquisitions (*"habituelle Erwerbe"*). Thus, the person has an individual history in which previous accomplishments always influence the upcoming lived-experiences.

The epoché does not neutralize the personal characteristics of these lived, but rather keep them as if they were picked up in an abstract glance. The *cogitatio* discloses not only epistemological but also practical data. The boundary between philosophy and psychology remains the same, but the richness of reflection changes because it is based on a dynamic analysis of person.

Differently from Husserl's early ethics, in the 1920s the phenomenologist emphasizes how personal life is determined by striving tendencies. "To the essence of the human life," Husserl says, "belongs continuous striving" (Husserl, 1987: 25). This moment of striving can be found already in the involuntary, affective levels of personal life, on which the meaningful and emotional strivings affect the tendencies of the "higher-ordered I" and find their way into conscious egoic expressions. Husserl describes this completely elementary field of personal life as pre-egoic. On top of this, the explicitly conscious and egoic sphere of the person has a character of striving which expresses itself in knowledge-intentions as a striving for clarity and fullness. "All life completes itself in the widest sense in the striving" (Husserl, 2004: 248). The ultimate ethical end of our strivings is, according to Husserl, a state of fulfilled happiness that he once called "*εὐδαιμονία*" (Husserl, 1987: 11).

As remarked in the third paragraph, Husserl's ethics seems not to envisage the human well being. If ethics is a philosophical discipline which prescribes ends posed on a different stage from the psychological one, I wonder if *εὐδαιμονία* could really coincide with the ends of a prescriptive ethics. Indeed, the accomplishment of *εὐδαιμονία* (translated with the Aristotelian sense as "well being") seems to lay in the paradox put in light in the first paragraph. Who we are is not often who we should be. A moral well being is not consistent with a personal well being if we intend it as a practical expression of our identity. Materially our pre-egoic life is not always a good life for the society where we live in. Yet Husserl talks about *εὐδαιμονία* as the ultimate end of our strivings in our common life. Its satisfaction leads to the "best possible" (Husserl, 2004: 252) or "perfect" (Husserl, 1987: 30) life, but as I think, it is not possible to accomplish this idea of perfect life mostly because of the duties imposed by the ethical prescriptions.

Following Husserl, the true identity of human beings shows itself in the fulfillment of their particular strivings. This is important for the practical orientation of ethics. On Husserl's view we should express our true identity to accomplish our moral ends, but this principle seems to fall in a paradox. Husserl's ethics teaches something ('know and express thyself') that cannot be always applied on daily life because

of ethical principles; ethics establishes the task to figure out our 'pre-egoic life' and realize it, so as to fix the idea of a fulfilled human life. Yet it cannot be put in practice even from an ethical point of view.

Husserl writes: "Ethics always wanted to be a theory and a practical discipline of the perfect human life and human being, a theory and practical discipline of the methods of the self-shaping of the subject and its life to perfection or to happiness" (Husserl, 1988: 22, 29, 33). Happiness or bliss is, according to Husserl, the perfect limit-state consisting of a fulfillment of all of our intentions; it would be "a consistent life in which all intentions and strivings would proceed permanently in the form of pure fulfillment" (Husserl, 2004: 44). The only limits Husserl sees within this ethics depend on the fact that our life is characterized by disappointments, errors and inhibitions. We fail to attain the ends of our strivings, and moreover, we posit aims which ultimately cannot satisfy us because of our errors. He concludes that "man generally lives an unhappy life" (Husserl, 2002: 44).

For Husserl unhappiness is linked up to our errors, while according to my analysis it is the logical consequence of the moral paradox. Ethics prescribes us for a social and intersubjective well being which does not encompass always what we are. Our sense of duty goes often against our need to express who we are. On Husserl's view, all our disappointments derive from the inhibition of strivings. This is undoubtedly true, but it is undoubted as well that an ethics has to inhibit certain strivings. Therefore the errors Husserl talks about can be caused by an ethical purpose.

Moreover, Husserl states that disappointment coming from errors could teach us to avoid mistakes and how we can improve our future life. On this point, Husserl wrote: "It is this motivation, which comes from the awkward cancellations and disappointments, which motivates the need for such a critique and the particular striving toward truth (*Wahrheitsstreben*), or alternatively, the striving toward confirmation, toward ultimate insightful justification" (Husserl, 1987:30). For Husserl, such critique affects not only the theoretical sphere of knowledge, but also the sphere of praxis and will. Critique of knowledge and, first of all, critique of will serves as a protection against the experience of errors, disappointments and cancellations, but it is motivated by these psychological experiences read under the lens of philosophy. The result of it would be a complete re-organization of one's whole life that Husserl calls renewal ("*Erneuerung*"). Thanks to the epoché we can overcome mistakes by interrupting the stream of our psychological life and reflect on what we want to gain from it. People are capable of such a radical criticism, because they stand in a relation to themselves that take place in several different forms: self-consciousness ("*Selbstbewusstsein*"), "personal self-contemplation" ("*personale Selbstbetrachtung*"), "self-evaluation" ("*Selbstbewertung*"), and "practical self-determination" ("*praktische Selbstbestimmung*") (Husserl, 1987:23). Thus,

Husserl conceives persons as free and autonomous beings able to shape and determine their own lives.

Husserl illustrates our capability to shape our lives by reference to situations in which we choose our professions or careers as the examples proposed in the introduction. Our professions are one of the most influential factors in our lives. They occupy many hours of our everyday life and determine much of the course of our lifetime. Thus, by deciding for or against a certain profession we also govern our lives in accordance with the values that we connect with this profession. This means that, in choosing a profession we also choose a certain “form of life” (“*Lebensform*”) (Husserl, 1987: 29) which determines our own personal future identity. Such life-forms are structured by our professions and also by the things we are striving for. All these life-forms are the result of a deliberate orientation and an aware action of shaping, through which we hope ultimately to attain ‘happiness’. Husserl conceives an idea of life wholly guided by reason and free acts of volition. Such a life of universal self-regulation would be a life that would be “fully justifiable in all of its activities” (Husserl, 1987: 30); it would be a thoroughly rational and will-guided life. According to Husserl, *this life-form is the ethical life*. The ethical life is a life which would be guided as far as possible by a rational and volitional self-determination. The ethical life would be a life that we achieve when we live completely in accordance with rationality and it allows us to be true and aware human being. Yet ethical life can be contradictory because it compels us to know our pre-egoic life and be a true and aware human being but at the same time prevents us from being ourselves. A wholly rational life does not always leave room to identity. Although self-regulation and self-realization are rationally determined, they should prefer what is the best for the society we live in rather than our egoistic best. The example of the mother, that is repeated by Husserl in several places (Husserl, Ms. A V 21, 122 a/b – 1988, XLVII- XLVIII), shows clearly how everyone is told to reach duties which are not always good to us at all. A mother can always choose between the best of her baby and her own best. These two are not always consistent. But a good mother will choose probably the former and generally a prescriptive ethics does not encourage a mother not to care about her baby. The duties are unavoidable and could lead us to be a good person in a society albeit not exactly a ‘true’ person.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude I can claim that the harmony between our sense of duty and our need to express ourselves is deeply connected to the seeming contradiction laying at the bottom of the imperatives shaped on the Delphic and Socratic saying. The practical and moral imperative says to model ourselves on what we are, but concurrently ethics justifiably prevents us from doing so at all. This creates a space

between our practical and logical rationality: we know something that we cannot put in practice. The practical rationality is apparently doomed not to be entirely listened and this could be one of the many reasons of our 'unhappiness'.

According to Husserl's phenomenology, the act of thinking is the key to access the domain of a pure ethics thanks to *cogitatio*. Yet it keeps the practical reason distant from a fluid understanding of its needs as it is showed in the axiological and practical laws. Thinking represents the first philosophical truth by which one can gain the contents of lived without naturalizing the lived. It allows us to reckon the difference between psychology and philosophy (namely ethics) in virtue of their different attitudes. In fact, the former is focused on what we are living and ethics reflects on how we should live. Nevertheless, both disciplines can be involved in the same aim, that is discovering and expressing one's personal identity. In that case psychology accomplishes the purpose as it is, while ethics adds to it a prescriptive duty which narrows certain parts of a personal identity. Undoubtedly ethics takes factually part in our identity driving our choices and shaping what we are, but it does not always help this process. Since it has to rule on what we should be and asks for a knowledge which cannot be put in practice, it could make the quest of ourselves hard. The Delphic and Socratic saying, partly adopted by Husserl's ethics, seems to be destined to leave us uncompleted, albeit the phenomenological analysis could be helpful to fill the distance between personal and moral possibilities thanks to the device of *epoché*, which helps us to begin (whenever we need) the process of self-determination or self-evaluation. This instrument could provide us with the axiological fluidity we need. ◻

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