The Postmodern Anti-Realism of Value in Caputo and Butler, and its Phenomenological Grounding

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Abstract:

In this essay, I expose what I take to be implicit phenomenological commitments of both John D. Caputo and Judith Butler's anti-realist conception of value. As anti-realists and exemplars of what some might call the postmodern tradition of ethics, I can show how their views must presuppose the very phenomenology of moral experience these thinkers would deny, and thus anyone persuaded by the elements of these philosophers should embrace the value ontologies of what I call participatory realism rather than the uncritical and untenable assumptions of anti-realism that so many in the humanities embrace.

Keywords: Caputo, Butler, Postmodern ethics, Value anti-realism, Scheler, Participatory realism

In this essay, I will cite two examples of what might satisfy Continental anti-realism about value: John D. Caputo and Judith Butler. As the reader knows now from previous essays, participatory realism is the thesis that (the process of how a person's feelings and values are experienced) Scheler's account of affective-intentionality (specifically the act-being character of feeling acts) constitutes the values immanently connected to those feeling acts. The act-object relations are experienced by persons, and the facets of this entire process are mind-independent mechanisms that explain how subjects experience value in the world—while also explaining that in permeating and constituting experience itself there is no value-neutral standpoint. Human life is value-ladened. Therefore, participatory realism is a realism about the process that engenders the values we experience unlike the typical moral realisms that explain values as mind-independent reasons persons acquire.

In the case of Caputo and Butler, each version must rely upon affective intentionality to explain the aspects of experience both Caputo and Butler invoke. As such, each is committed to how intentional feeling acts are coupled with their corresponding value-correlates, yet this criticism is nuanced between both Caputo and Butler. Caputo's anti-realism is straightforward and follows

from his commitments to deconstructionism. For Butler, the story is more complex. Extricated from her central ethical work, Butler discloses another dimension to ethical experience that Scheler's intentional feeling of love can only unearth on the surface, and as such, Butler – if interpreted through phenomenology only – opens up a phenomenological dimension of relationality that still needs fleshed out. The very reasons they are considered anti-realists must give way to what underlies their positions. But this underlying commitment to a phenomenological realism is more of a conceptual claim and transcendental argument about both Continental and Analytic anti-realists in general. All ethical anti-realisms rely upon aspects of phenomenological realism about the process by which values are experienced, and phenomenology on its own, as I explained in the moral realism essay collapses the usual ontological separation of mind and world, subject and object.

What is Postmodernism?

Some years ago, I attended a dinner party put on by an unnamed psychologist. She made a quip against what she called "postmodernism," diagnosed it as part of larger divide between her scientific approach to truth and what she saw in the work her colleagues in the humanities. These quips are quite common: "postmodernism says that all truth is relative," or that "truth is historical only." If postmodernism amounts to a type of relativism or historicism, then how can it really help know and describe the world around us? At this time, I claimed the difference between phenomenology and postmodernism consisted in their treatment of truth. Needless to say, this claim was partly true, depending upon how one might conceive of both.

What I should have said is that there is nothing exactly like postmodernism *simpliciter*. The caricatures some maintain about their opponents are rarely ever accurate, and the caricature inspired by philosophers to those outside are extremely inaccurate. In this situation and numerous like it, *postmodernism* is a fancy term of art; mostly the term is used by those outside philosophy to generalize several French thinkers without coming to know their work in detail. Like William James's idea of truth, however, postmodern thought is more than what its opponents report it to be. Derrida's deconstructionism, Foucault's genealogy, and Lyotard's death of metanarrative are all singular skeptical efforts in their own right. Better put, there are many *postmodernisms*, and these *postmodernisms* are *skeptical about one or several aspects of philosophy's pretension to think universally about what is really real*. As such, Lyotard's eventual "incredulity for metanarratives" cuts two ways. First, postmodernists are skeptical about knowing reality. Second, postmodernists are skeptical about having access to reality itself as an object for speculation. Moving past the modern philosophy means giving up on the fact that reality is agent-accessible. For Derrida, the target is metaphysical language; for Foucault, the target is subjectivity and power; and for Lyotard, the target is the cultural conditions of scientific inquiry itself, which by itself could absorb and subsume both Foucault and Derrida's versions (and the reason why I pay a little attention to it here). Lyotard's discourse is the most general about the cultural conditions of inquiry whereas the efforts of Foucault and Derrida are more localized within specific horizons of inquiry.

In each philosopher, the "postmodern project" shifts depending on the target of that discourse. To boil down these specific projects to the overall implication of what those discourses might say about truth is simply a distortion of their overwhelming complexity and beauty—even if we fundamentally disagree with them. In analytic philosophy, the parallel might be thinking that while cultural relativism in ethics leads to the classical difficulties we all teach but, surely, Gilbert Harman's 1976 paper *Moral Relativism Defended* is a more refined and sophisticated piece than the relativism we teach in our introductory ethics classes. The same is true about any of the postmodern theorists.

In Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* a concentrated interrogation of Lyotard's *Preface* can introduce elements common enough to the various other thinkers, enough to set the stage for engaging in a lengthy discussion of Caputo's postmodern ethics. First, I will make some distinctions to refine our understanding of postmodernism itself.

Distinguishing the Complexity of Postmodern Critiques

Postmodernism can be divided into two distinctions: postmodern epistemological anti-realism and postmodern metaphysical anti-realism. Postmodern epistemological anti-realism is the view that epistemic agents cannot claim to know anything outside their own lived-contexts, and as such, knowing what there is created and bound to those same lived-contexts. In postmodern metaphysical anti-realism, the metaphysical thesis is that the only things that exist are the projects and fabrics of lived-contexts. The fabric of reality is a woven construction of mind-dependent factors inhering in lived-contexts. For both Lyotard (and Caputo to follow), they are both postmodern epistemological anti-realists and postmodern metaphysical anti-realists.[1] From the fact that human beings are no longer bound to metanarratives in terms of knowing also indicates that we have no access to reality itself apart from them.

In Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, he develops a conception of postmodernism as a report on the status of knowledge in the post-industrial age from the 1950s even until today. (Lyotard 1999, 3) In this way, his work could be understood as either a particular discourse in either social epistemology or the philosophy of science, but more broadly, his work could capture the spirit under which the other postmodernists might embrace. Ultimately, however, Lyotard's project amounts to a type of sociology of knowledge about science as it is practiced in today's *ethos*. Specifically, science seeks truth within its own discourse, but the legitimation of science, its contents, theories and practices is what Lyotard defines as philosophy. (Lyotard 1999, xxiii) Furthermore, Lyotard defines the modern as "any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative." (Lyotard 1999, xxiii) For example, Kant's first critique provides the possible conditions of possible knowledge such that it legitimates Newtonian mechanics. Put another way, Kant's transcendental critique defends why we experience objects of experience that Newtonian mechanics studies. In another example, Descartes removes the uncertainty about God and souls from 17th century natural philosophy's

domain in the *res extensa*, securing certainty of their existence in a realm untouchable by physics in his *res cogitans*. Therefore, the grand/meta narrative is that which grounds and motivates a particular discourse like in the examples above. The ground and motivation are often implicit in a discourse. What is implicit is brought to the surface. Lyotard attributes the role of the metanarrative historically to several examples: the dialects of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working class, or the creation of wealth. (Lyotard 1999, xxiii) One could easily imagine Hegel, Gadamer, Kant, Marx, or Smith in those examples.

In contrast to the modern, the postmodern is "an incredulity toward metanarratives." (Lyotard 1999, xxiv) Each metanarrative is an apparatus of legitimation that justifies the sciences at that particular historical moment. The purpose of what Lyotard labels postmodern knowledge is in the cultivated "sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable." (Lyotard 1999, xxv) In this way, the postmodern condition explains the condition under which information is controlled since the practices of legitimation are interlinked with the normative problems of ethics and politics. For Lyotard, the interlinkage between science *and* values (ethics and politics) "stem from the same perspective, the same 'choice' if you will, the choice of the Occident." (Lyotard 1999, 8) By that "choice," The West (since Plato) has always linked the normativity of what is just with the expectations of what knowledge can serve. The metaphysical and epistemological projects are tied to the social dimensions of knowledge and power—"revealing that knowledge and power are two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided?" (Lyotard 1999, 9) In addition, since both metaphysical and epistemological efforts can secure the social dimensions of knowledge and power, this *inextricability of the social* underlies both metaphysics and epistemology, and that provides evidence to the view established above, namely, that Lyotard is both a postmodern epistemological anti-realist and a postmodern metaphysical anti-realist.

Lyotard's method for assessing the condition of postmodernism is Wittgenstein's conception of a language game. For him, there are three features of language games and these features best elicit how the social dimensions of knowledge and power are at play in any particular discourse. First, the rules of language games are by no means insular; "they do not carry the within themselves their own legitimation." (Lyotard 1999, 10) Second, "if there are no moral rules, then there is no game." (Lyotard 1999, 10) In other words, even a slight modification of the tiniest rule changes the nature of the language game and if the participant makes a move not beholden to the current rules, then that participant is not playing that particular language game. Finally, "every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a language game." (Lyotard 1999, 10) Every utterance in speech or writing is like moving a chess piece. In other words, every utterance made in written and spoken form takes place within a specific language game, in a particular discourse interlinked to the dimensions of knowledge and power.

Lyotard's appropriation of the language game fits very well with Caputo's thought. There's good reason to think that Caputo does not think that any epistemological justification can be given

for any knowledge claim, but simply we can only give various interpretations about the way we talk and communicate about a given concept. According to Caputo, "[Postmodernism} is not simply a way to delimit human knowledge…it shows us more mercilessly how exposed we are to the possibility that the world is not known comprehensively." (Caputo 2005, 294) In very similar fashion, Richard Rorty thought that philosophers should move away from epistemology. Philosophers, he argued, should seek the resources of hermeneutics since hermeneutics *does not* assume that reality is agent-accessible and that various parts of reality, being so accessible, are commensurable. (Rorty 1979, 315-316) Like Lyotard, both Caputo and Rorty accept that reality is incommensurable because reality and our experience of it consists entirely of various moves in a language game. This Lyotardian emphasis (that all discourses are participation in language games) implies that reality is as incommensurable as Caputo and Rorty believe. Therefore, they are wholly compatible with anti-realist discourse. Anti-realism is the thesis that reality is incommensurable through and through and that no external standard apart from us fixes the truth of any discourse, no matter what it is about.

By contrast, phenomenology identifies the relationality we have with the world that Continental anti-realists draw from, but in the constitutive framework of phenomenomenology, the division between mind and world is collapsed. What is revealed is the co-relation to reality, the mechanisms that constitute the process by which values are discovered in the very medium of experience. In that way, phenomenological descriptions discover fundamental aspects of the world to which we all have access, and as such, reality just is the very agent-accessibility postmodernism denies since accessing what I've called "affective intentionality" is the source of value's being.

Clarifying Elements of Caputo's *Against Ethics*

For the last twenty years, no other statement of deconstructionist ethics has been as effective in its skepticism about ethics than John Caputo's *Against Ethics.* As such, I am singling out this work as the best example of a postmodern ethics. At the beginning, I will outline the opening of his text, and explain the central features of why Caputo is against ethics.

Caputo's situation, he claims, can be likened to a man adrift "who discovers that the ground he hitherto took to be *terra firma* is in fact an island adrift in a vast sea, so that even if he stands absolutely firm he is in fact in constant motion." (Caputo 1993, 3) For Caputo, ethics no longer has a secure path to its promised safe passage, its privileges, judgments, and concepts that compel us towards the good. The net of these safe concepts is exposed by deconstructionism. The idea of obligation "is not safe, that ethics cannot make it safe, that it is not nearly as safe as ethics would have believe." (Caputo 1993, 4) At first, one might read this claim as a reiteration of a concern about moral luck or the presence of contingency that could undermine moral experience.[3] However, Caputo's program is a deconstructionist attempt at understanding ethics. As such, understanding Caputo's position will involve two features. We must locate the exact reasons he is against ethics,

and that criticism turns on what he will say about obligation. Second, we must understand what grounds the deconstructionist critique of obligation.

Before we proceed, I want to speak a little about the experience of reading Caputo. At the very outset, Caputo's deconstructionism is performative. Caputo's *Against Ethics* is a text that is attempting to dissolve ethics right before us. When he writes, Caputo is implicitly committed to the tensions inherent in a deconstructionist interpretation of language and the reader is invited to accompany the dissolution of ethics. The real question is therefore: What does it mean to accompany the dissolution of ethics in Caputo's work? As a point of method, I will not impose upon Caputo the charge of obscurantism or the familiar incomprehensibility of those quick to dismiss deconstructionism (let alone any area of Continental philosophy one does not want to read), but let his analysis come to fruition on its own merits while accepting the limits of how Caputo employs deconstructionism. What we will find is that despite the claim that deconstructionism can undermine the stability of language, the givenness of obligation cannot be washed away from the concretion of its ontology so easily as Caputo thinks it can.

Caputo thinks the experience of obligation is messy, not as safe as ethicists (or metaethicists for that matter) pretend. This messiness is not a claim about ethics and its objectivity. Instead, the accompanying certainty of some moral philosophies claiming objectivity is a stance. Caputo is resisting this stance. Ethics is built around methodological pretensions to universal truth employed to secure obligation as a knowable concept. Caputo is not the only one that is very skeptical about the claims of universality and impartiality built into ethics. Bernard Williams achieved hallmark fame in the analytic world for his critique of the very same methodological pretensions that Caputo may be talking about. However, the problem with Caputo is that the lack of precision could amount to a number of things when interpreted back to those of us (even those of us that have tried to be philosophically ambidextrous) that work in ethics. Does resisting ethics here indicate Caputo's resistance advocates a form of moral particularism? Is it a form of skepticism about decision-procedures? Impartial standpoints? I take his resistance to indicate *all these things*, but I am not going to shy away from his rather bizarre—if not completely uncharitable and inflated presentation of what ethics could be. For Caputo, this resistance against ethics is not motivated by reasons independent of presupposing the legitimacy of deconstructionism.

With this admitted presupposition, Caputo is also never really clear what he means by ethics throughout *Against Ethics*. Like Kierkegaard assuming ethics means a system of universal principles that admit no exception in his own writings, the sense of the term ethics finds resonance neither with Levinas nor Kant completely, yet they are also called into question by Caputo's efforts. The generality of "ethics" conveys to us any philosophical attempt to render the content of morality clear to us. In general, moral philosophy/ethics means a sustained philosophical attempt that codifies morality by generating action-guiding principles for situations where the answer is not entirely clear, ambiguous, and confusing. These principles are often regarded as decision-

procedures. Decision-procedures that guide deliberation about morality are what makes "obligation safe."

Caputo on Obligation

As a long time scholar of Heidegger, Caputo reads obligation through the same factical givenness characteristic of Heidegger's early analysis of Dasein. "Obligation is a fact as it were, not of pure practical reason, as in Kant, but of our factical life." He continues and equates the appearance of obligations as prescriptives found in language. Even then, however "they do not succumb to reduction, that no one…is able to put them out of action, to bracket or suspend them. You may 'redescribe' them however as you wish but they still keep coming in, still keep arriving." (Caputo 1993, 25) According to Caputo, obligations exist outside of phenomenological study, along with factical life as well.

Despite the massive demandingness of obligation upon my life, obligation itself is unavoidable. It cannot be avoided. Obligations occur beyond my control. "They happen to me." (Caputo 1993, 7) They occur without warning and constitute the field of my experience. Caputo writes,

> Obligations do not ask for my consent. Obligation is not like a contract I have signed after having had a chance to review it carefully and to have consulted my lawyer. It is not anything I have agreed to be a party to. It binds me. It comes over me and binds me…Obligation is a feeling, the feeling of being bound (*ligare, obligare, re-ligare*), an element of my feeling (*Befindlichkeit*), but I cannot get on top of it, scale its height, catch a glimpse of its rising up. (Caputo 1993, 7)

Elsewhere, Caputo links obligation with feeling. "I cannot found or ground my obligations. I do not issue obligatory phrases; I receive them. I find myself under their spell; it is part of my *Befindlichkeit*." (Caputo 1993, 25) In embracing Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit*, Caputo has identified a self-contained ontologically constitutive category that has no order beyond its immanent manifestation.

On its own, obligation just happens, but it happens as an event of feeling. Like Gadamer's ontology of play of the artwork, obligation possesses its own intelligibility as it unfolds in activity, constituting a language game all on its own. Obligation plays. "It plays because it plays. It plays without a why, without any founding grounds or great grounding founders." (Caputo 1993, 25) This playing is the same self-concealing groundless ground that functions at the heart of Heidegger's thinking. As Michael Zimmerman states, the meaning of being is equal to "the temporal-historical (and thus non-foundational) context that makes possible any historical epochal understanding of Being." (Zimmerman 1998, 8) Here, Caputo draws on the mytho-poetic features of Heidegger's thinking that agrees, at least in principle, with Caputo that there is no foundation, no Geist, no Logos that cuts "all the way down."[2] (Caputo 1993, 234) Instead, every value-experience is singular and disclosive just like what Heidegger calls *Eriegnis,* which names self-concealing groundless

ground that gives and sends the various understandings of Being that governs the various historical epochs that configure it.[4]

Phenomenological Underpinning of Caputo's Obligation

Caputo entangles the sense of ought in feeling as a force that overpowers its experiencers. This affective (and evaluative) force determines both the obligation and the something that *moves me to respond.* Yet, even here the unity of sense and implicit claim of phenomenology can recover the unity of experience Caputo resists. Caputo is rejecting the familiar sense of the term ethics, but also explaining this unity of moral experience. Even as an event, such unity is discoverable in moral experience without succumbing to the deconstructionist dismissiveness he maintains about ethics and what he calls "value theory,"

> I do not hold "value theory" in high regard either, which is form me just more "ethics," i.e., more metaphysics...I am not prepared to turn over the question of "obligation" to value theory. I do not regard the bond that binds obligation to disaster to be a matter of a "value" we should "hold" or a "claim" we "make." Obligation is rather—this is what a poetics of obligations brings out and where it starts—a matter of being claimed, in which something has a hold on us, something that is older than us, that has us before we have it. (Caputo 1993, 31)

For Caputo, the skepticism of grounding obligation into a discipline called ethics is mistaken, and yet note the ambiguity about what "value theory" truly entails, naming it, labeling it, but never being exactly clear what he means by the term (just like ethics). Yet, in the following passage, we can see that skepticism of ethics is co-extensive with any attempt to ground the concept of obligation. All that Caputo tells us is that obligation comes to us, that it binds us, and we can never get on top of it. Obligation is based on its own power to pull us and attract us, to feel it working itself on us. Obligation is an event in feeling, but nothing more. So let me interpret the two co-extensive claims Caputo is arguing. On the one hand, ethics implies an untenable metaphysics and on the other hand, that untenable metaphysics corresponds directly to the fact that all forms of ethics cannot contain conceptually and explain obligations "just happening." As he says later, "the element of obligation, by which I mean the space of obligation, where obligations happen—down low, well below philosophical conceptuality." (Caputo 1993, 72) Scheler's phenomenology can accomplish these two tasks.

Phenomenologically, Caputo blurs the boundaries of feeling and the boundaries of the value-contents given to feeling. A deconstructionist is thoroughly committed to the playfulness of language and exploiting the ambiguity of the articulated experience and the inherent openness language captures. For the deconstructionist, language does not refer to a stable mind-independent world, and the propositions about the world uttered by the philosopher are not universal, impartial and ahistorical. As such, one can easily understand how I come to an anti-realist reading of deconstructionism and postmodernism. Accordingly, philosophical propositions, including those

of ethics, are constituted by the historicity of an epoch, its various implicit assumptions and biases of culture and the author infect the ideal of objectivity. The fact that deconstruction works at the in-between the universal and individual might be a reason to find comfort in Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics and why Caputo is looking to factical *Befindlichkeit* as a way of talking about obligation.[5] (Caputo 1993, 72-74)

Phenomenologically speaking, this complete openness can be resisted since the denial of the givenness of feeling does not negate the fact that something is given. Moreover, different forms of givenness demand their careful phenomenological discourse. As such, a phenomenology of value is different than a phenomenology of perception. For this reason, Scheler's phenomenology can interpret the explanatory force of the given and the constitution of consciousness in the very experience exposed as "factical life." Without intentionality in factical life, there can be no experience. Phenomenology opens us up to the immanent essences revealed in acts that constitute a person's interconnection between act and objects. If that is true, then there is a constituting/constituted relationship here underscoring Caputo's claim about obligation and ethics in *Against Ethics*. Caputo fails to dismiss the intentionality underlying his account. Put another way, Caputo blurs the phenomenological distinctness of obligation in its very givenness with the intentional feeling necessary to account for obligation's transcendence:

> Obligation has a kind of impenetrability and density that I cannot master that neither my knowledge nor my freedom can surmount, that prevents me from getting on top of it, on the side of it. Obligation transcends me; it is not one of my transcendental projects. If an obligation is 'mine' it is not one more there I comprehend and want to do, but something that intervenes and disrupts the sphere of I wants, something that troubles and disturbs the I, that pulls the I out of the circle of the same, as Levinas would say. (Caputo 1993, 8)

Caputo picks up on and articulates how value-laden personal life is. How easily do we let moral experience disrupt the congruence of a person's desires, how disturbed we are by the entrance of moral values into the field of our own subjectivity! They come from on top, from the side, and are themselves, like substance in Locke, the I-know-not-what for Caputo. Yet to speak of values, Caputo's efforts are an attempt to make the constitutive aspects of personal life more out of control, to give them a sense of mystery and allure beyond the coherence of meaning such constitutive aspects acquire in factical life and co-related to intentional feeling. This mystery is the fact of their givenness only. Since Caputo wants to find the manner in which obligation enters into experience in factical life, like Heidegger, Caputo stands on the fence of the very phenomenological givenness of factical life, but does not seek to get under experience anymore than calling for the excess of obligation's givenness.[6] Notice the move to disaster strictly after describing the ineffable movement of obligation and values that emerge in the event of experience. (See Caputo 1993, 27-30) Such a move involves thinking that obligations make demands upon us, but no values can contain the singularity of such disastrous events. And as such, we can find the whole of ethics wanting since no

ethical system or coherent way to articulate the event's givenness could be conceptually encompassed. Yet, why not think that the overflowing of value and obligation given in feeling acts might call for our response, but not quite delimit what the response needs to be? Certainly, we can have an ethics that responds to the demands of disaster and the Other without thinking that no such framework can be created or devised.

Had Caputo gone in a quasi-Levinasian direction, which admittedly is very similar to the Schelerian position that better explains why "obligation just happens," Caputo would not be confused as to the merits of his disparaging tendency towards "value theory." Caputo chooses, like Derrida, to avoid affirming ethical demands (or what he is calling obligation) to either a transcendence of the Other, or the infinity such transcendence implies. (Caputo 1993, 18) Ironically, Caputo retained the power of phenomenological description of experiencing value with how he describes obligation, he just never sought the phenomenological ontology of value and obligation to be rooted in experience.

Let's look at what would happen if we *did not* take a phenomenological approach. Let us assume a decision-procedure of the greatest happiness principle: An act is morally right just because it promotes the best consequences overall in one's particular situation. Say we are convinced of its utilitarian power to solve all practical problems. When we apply the greatest happiness principle, the content of morality is determined and funneled into a moral code. What the act utilitarian is after is a principle that could guide moral deliberation for all human beings no matter where they are in the world, what their situation is like, and the extra-rational factors surrounding it up to and including moral luck. In this way, the act utilitarian forces all singularity of moral events, people, and circumstance into one rubric—the same is true of Kant's "supreme principle of morality." Instead, there are phenomenological presuppositions that should first be investigated before we force the event and people through one rubric. Chief among them, Scheler discloses the pre-rational and emotional a priori structure of value that all ethical systems depend on.

Taken phenomenologically, persons are not held in hostage by values and obligation despite Caputo's misgivings. Instead, values and obligation are the manner in which persons experience life. With Scheler's *ordo amoris,* we cannot help but experience the whole of life as valuable. Hence, the "impenetrability" of obligation is the givenness of value-contents in feeling, and their appeal and demand of obligation "binding" us occurs in feeling-acts. The binding demand of an infant's vulnerability is felt more substantively than sating the desire for dessert. Value-contents cannot help but be experience as constituting experience at all. That's why "obligation just happens." The ultimacy of otherness in the person is the highest feeling capable and also that which pulls us to recognize the singular uniqueness of the Other - feelings and value of the Holy. The ultimacy is the excessive givenness of value entering into experience. That holds sway over us, especially for Levinas. For Scheler, the person is the locus of value and brings values into being through their realization, but it is in feeling these values that action, deeds, goods, and persons are valuable in the first place.

When Caputo mentioned numerous times that the factical life of obligation is exactly like Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit,* which means the emotional tonality life acquires in its pre-cognitive ontological dimension, he should have looked at the phenomenological depth of Scheler's affective intentionality. A value's relativity and absoluteness "is given in emotive immediacy." (Scheler 1973, 99) For Scheler, values are given in intentional feeling. "The value itself must be intuitively given or must refer back to that kind of givenness" and the only type of givenness in which values are experienced refers to those "non-formal qualities of contents possessing a determinate order of ranks with respect to higher and lower." (Scheler 1973, 14-17) The non-formal is the emotive content in feeling acts. "Values are given first in of all in feeling [*Fühlen*]." (Scheler 1973, 35) Caputo's mistake is remaining Heideggerian about obligation and feeling. They are not two separate moments let alone two separate things, but one experience. As I argued in my first article "Scheler, Heidegger, and the Hermeneutics of Value," (See Hackett 2013, 1-19) Heidegger has no order of preferencing, no "*logique du coeur*" in the Pascalian sense, to commensurate which of those value-qualities perceived in feeling and subsequently values cannot be ranked in Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity. Faced with the choice betwee two obligations is to be faced with two competing values in a situation about a good, deed, or ourselves. In that experience, we ought to prefer the higher to the lower. According to Scheler, there is pre-rational and therefore emotional basis for these values when compared to each other in the order of preferencing worked out in Scheler's phenomenology. Higher values *will always be given* as more enduring, indivisible, and fulfilling than lower values that are less enduring, more divisible, and less fulfilling. This fact follows from the givenness of value itself.

According to this value-ranking, the values of the Holy are the deepest, most endurable and more fulfilling, and I take special note of this deep and endurable sense of the Holy just as much as Caputo unites philosophical criticism in *Against Ethics* with the prophetic voice of the Biblical God, the God of justice and mercy. These Holy feelings permeate the entire dimension of the person to the point that in all experiences of spiritual feeling and Holy values, the dignity of the person is entirely felt (emotionally intuited) in love, and therefore valued for their singular uniqueness. At root of the Holy, the deepest forms of concrete love and acceptance of radical alterity take root. Quentin Lauer describes it best,

> [Scheler] describes [the ascetical preparation of value] as a "surrender" to being characterized by *love*, a willingness to be dominated rather than to dominate, to bathe in the richness of being rather than to impoverish being by seeking to control it for the sake of one's own subjective assurance. This attitude can scarcely be described more eloquently than it is by Scheler himself "This new attitude," he says, "might first of all be characterized vaguely enough from the emotional point of view as a surrender of self to the intuitional content of things," as a movement of profound trust in the unshakeableness of all that is simply and evidently "given," as a courageous letting-onself-go in intuition and in the loving movement toward the world in its capacity for being intuited. (Lauer 1965, 166)

The motive here is the love of being. Love is the form of intentional feeling that opens us up to ascending the value-rankings. Hatred closes us off and blinds us to the fact that a lower value may be standing in where a higher value ought to be. And while Lauer is right in one respect, he is wrong in emphasizing the complete submission to being required. In fact, the alleged surrender to being in love is but only mode of being possible given the process Scheler unearths. Accepting the intuitive contents of feeling consciousness as the proper account of where values originate and are experienced, persons cannot help but feel their efficacious pull on us. Love is the one intentional act that opens us up to the elevation of ever increasing "richness of being." Love does not ask us to control but let the phenomenon be as it is, and to promote what it is for the beloved to be. In this way, Scheler's phenomenology is more attuned to listen; it is in listening to Being and not a willingness to be dominated or surrender, but to remain attuned to the demands of ever actualizing spirit and the higher values that call us forth to act.

The fact that we find human life saturated with values and obligations is a phenomenological one. We find goods, others, and deeds valuable since we have the same capacity of co-feeling to sympathize and be opened to the same range of feeling acts and conjoined value-correlates as other persons, which also explains the phenomenological intersubjectivity of why we all experience life saturated in value. Since Caputo wants a poetics of obligation, he wants to respect the "just happening of obligation" to respect the uniqueness of the event, but not tie it down to untenable metaphysics as ethics often does. In tying obligation to feeling, he seems implicitly phenomenological. If he adopted the correct phenomenological approach (Schelerian), then phenomenology would lead Caputo to ontologize the descriptions, and that could help secure the ontological necessity of values emerging in feeling acts. Without an appropriate ontology, values cannot be secured as a real experience. To have answers to moral problems, however, values need to be experienced coherently as genuine answers to moral problems, and if we accept the quasi-pronouncements against metaphysics from Heidegger *qua* Caputo, then we might have the resources to explain how values and obligations are experienced and to secure an ontology of values in factical life. Such an ontology of value is, therefore, sought in the intelligibility of experience itself.

As such, we can dispel the two theses of his worry. Phenomenology is not an untenable metaphysics that precludes openness to others since values are felt through the emotional *a priori* intuitions of the same structure that attracted Caputo on its surface to find refuge in Heidegger's notion of attunement. Contrary to Caputo, a form of metaphysics would only be untenable if and only if the content never entered experience. The deconstructionist's worry about language unwittingly commits Caputo to be suspicious of the universal access phenomenology claims about the contents of experience. That's why the concretion of love coupled with the Holiness of the Other can be resources to further undermine Caputo's suspicions about ethical metaphysics. Second, in adopting the similar if not identical Levinasian radical alterity and the singular

uniqueness of Scheler's person, an ethicist can be as responsive to the uniqueness of the situation as Caputo desires.[7] In recognizing the higher value over the lower one, there is no precise prescriptive element. We are open to choose as we must in how we realize the higher value that calls us. The only injunction is to realize more love into the world! The decidability of the event is not foreclosed as a utilitarian or Kantian might have it, and it's debatable whether or not Scheler has given us a prescriptive ethics or an ethics of comportment in which we are charged with realizing more love into the world as a surrender and listening to Being. In my reading of Scheler, I prefer the latter. Assuming that reading, then, Caputo can have what he ultimately wanted, an ethics that respected the vulnerability, suffering, and catastrophe of ordinary people (Caputo 1993, 231-234) but without the uncritical and ambiguous jettisoning of ethical metaphysics that underlie what he adamantly denied but is no less present as a transcendental feature of value-experience.

Performativity for Ontology?

Judith Butler is usually regarded as a postmodern thinker, and the only thing that seemingly identifies her with this label is the host of thinkers employed in her thinking about gender. However, given the under-theorization of gender in the history of philosophy, the lesson about gender might be that one could not help but be "postmodern" in addressing the concept and its relations to other concepts. Butler's concern with gender also marks what is regarded as her most famous contribution to philosophy: her critique of the gender and sex distinction that cuts all the way through her work from her first book *Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions* (1988) to her often cited and very famous *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). One might even say that continuing threads of performativity in her works like *Excitable Speech*: *A Politics of the Performative* (1997). In many ways, the label "constructivist" is applied to many of her works since gender and sexual orientation are "constructed" out of their performance and continual repetition in performing acts. Indeed, someone looking for anything resembling an ontology in her work might just focus on the stylized performances and repetition of those acts in time and look only to performativity as the basis of an ontology. Then again, the reader of this essay knows the participation in intentional acts is somewhat similar, but carries a more significant ontological weight for Scheler than Butler. For Scheler, phenomenology identifies the realist elements by which values are experienced, Butler – like Caputo – relies on an affective dimension of experience that constitutes the value of another. The question: Is there is a structure underlying the manner in which values are constituted in their affective dimension she offers or if they are constructed out just those elements that constitute it?

In approaching this question, one might simply work from her thoughts that follow from the ontological limitations of performativity. It would seem that performativity is very much like Heidegger's being-in-the-world (*Sein-in-der-welt*), but without the quasi-transcendental of the care structure. She attempts to give a theory of ethics in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). In that text, Butler offers a theory of how the ethical subject forms in narration and identify the

problematic elements of self-transparent accounts of responsibility. As such, one could see that work to suggest a constructivism about values based on performativity and narrativity. However, Butler also thinks that an ethical relation between two people is illuminated when a story cannot be told, or has to be told again. As such, the failure in narration has ethical implications in her view. Therefore, I can investigate how the affective dimensions opens us up to that same ethical relationship in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* that underlies her thought and simultaneous engagement with Levinas.

Before that, however, I should mention what Butler means by ethics. In her essay, "Ethical Ambivalence," she is suspicious of ethics, and like Caputo somewhat unclear about what it means for her,

> I do not have much to say about why there is a return to ethics, if there is one, in recent years, except to say that I have for the most part resisted this return…I've worried that the return to ethics has constituted an escape from politics, and I've also worried that it has meant a certain heightening of moralism. (Butler 2009, 70)

Such a moralism can often oversimplify the unique singular event of how an Other is disclosed in the self-other relation and the situation with which he or she is accompanied by. This thought echoes the opening of Preface of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity,* "Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality." (Levinas 1969, 21) Butler uses ethics as, I think, Levinas intends the meaning of morality in the previous quote. The role of traditional ethical theory or moral theory tends to oversimplification for the purposes of theoretical unity. The oversimplification can often universalize the complexity of several facets the singular relation, the individuality of the one responsible, or the other we are responding to. All facets can be subsumed, all particular events into one-overall-sameness. As we saw before, this is especially true if one is a convinced act utilitarian or Kantian deontologist. In fact, ethical reflection and some versions of normative theories seem to rely on the oversimplifying and over-abstraction of the moral principles they supply to such an extent that one can escape, justify, and supply justified reasons over learning how best to execute what it takes to truly respond to the singularity of the other and the event of the self-other relation Butler demands. In many ways, Butler does not abandon these Levinasian assumptions, and in other ways, she develops them.

Grieving and Mourning

Butler attempts to rethink a way into the ethical self-other relation and specifically applies this within the specific cultural context of a post-9/11 discourse. Like Scheler, she opens up with the question about affective experience and she sees what those specific emotions reveal. Like Caputo's appropriation of Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit,* there is no ordering of feelings offered. In the essay, she targets mourning and grieving. These emotions open up to reveal a social and political order, revealing who counts as the Levinasian other. In her words, grieving "furnishes a sense of

political community of complex order, and does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility." (Butler 2006, 22) Her observation seems to be if we pay attention to who counts as a grievable person, "who counts as human," then we open up and are revealed to an ethical dimension of the self-other relationality that would allow for us to reimagine the social and political community in a post-9/11 world based in part on the vulnerability shared in such experiences.

There is little distinction between how she uses the terms "grieving" and "mourning." Both lead to a transformation, a revelatory insight contained within the experiences, but we submit to that experience. "The transformative effect of loss" and this effect "cannot be charted or planned." (Butler 2006, 21) As such, she is describing the experience as we undergo it. When I lose you, I don't just lose somebody distant as if they are just another person over there. In essence, I lose that very real constituting tie and relation that is in constant contact with a world of others. There is a sociality, or a public dimension to this experience for Butler, and in mourning, I can lose myself in the experience. When I submit to the transformative effect of loss, I can lose myself in the grieving process. I can find myself entirely absorbed in the experience of loss of that tie I found so necessary that "I can't go on." Somehow, I must learn to be without, and some never truly learn to cope with such loss. The only positive feature of this experience is *the tie*. Grieving reveals those ties and relations between self and others at the basis of Levinasian subjectivity. The ethical subject is revealed in the traumatic loss and attachment that such loss reveals.

Butler's Implicit Phenomenology of Vulnerability

Even more than that, this tie is the explanation of how my subjectivity is formed. If we see the formation of the subject's narrative or enactment in recognition, then Butler could simply be an anti-realist about values. We could see the performativity of ethical relationships and the performativity as two examples of incommensurable performativity that animated Rorty and Lyotard. However, the anti-realism does not fit here since the relevant ontology for Butler would still be identical in the medium of experience, the very medium of experience that vulnerability and gender both require.

Despite the inherent postmodern proclivity of her thinking, her claims about vulnerability are surprisingly phenomenological, and I'd recommend that we think of her claims in precisely that way. When we see performativity of ethical relationality and how the subject is formed in Butler's thought, we see her work as offering descriptions of affectivity. These are descriptions of emotions that lead us to unveil these constitutive ties of relationality. The very relation she defines in relation to vulnerability in her work, "ethical obligations not only depend upon our vulnerability to the claims of others but establishes us as creatures who are fundamentally defined by that ethical relation." (Butler 2012, 141) In that relationality, we discover the invariably public dimension of vulnerability and site of our vulnerability is corporeal. As such, these phenomenological descriptions are embodied in Merleau-Ponty-like fashion. Moreover, the constitution of this public

dimension finds concrete value in the meaning of our bodies and the embodied life we experience. My body is my own and not my own all at the same time. In this way, Butler discloses vulnerability in a twofold, but interrelated distinction between the individual subject and the intersubjective (what she calls the *public*) dimension. The meaning of these ties underscore the individualizing and intersubjective dimension of vulnerability, and these dimensions become the basis "for the ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives." (Butler 2006, 27)

There are two lessons to draw from the ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives based on the shared vulnerability and interdependence revealed in mourning. First, the self-other relationality is not just a theoretical device for explaining why obligation just happens. Instead, the self-other relation returns the possibility of ethics understood as an analysis and affirmation of the shared vulnerability forming the exact tie between the self and other. As such, Butler is still consistent with her earlier remarks about being suspicious of ethics escaping politics. Instead, vulnerability is very concrete, actual, and immanent in the unfolding of communal life, and within the ethical action, we don't know all the risks. To stand in that ethical relation is to risk oneself and the other. The ties that bind are risked, may be lessened and utterly destroyed. As such, Butler reminds us, "ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness." (Butler 2005, 136) Such actions demand that we risk ourselves for others, but also that others may in turn risk themselves for me. The risk comes at the price of possibly undoing ourselves since we may not know what will happen. As such, this risk is everywhere ontologically because we are vulnerable. This constitutes the very possibility of communal life. Understood as an "existential claim," she writes, "everyone is precarious and this follows from our social existence as bodily beings who depend upon one another for shelter and sustenance and who, therefore, are at risk of statelessness, homelessness, and destitution under unjust and unequal political conditions." (Butler 2012, 148)

While Butler will theorize vulnerability for the concrete political situation of our contemporary global and political situations, I would like to focus on the phenomenological insight gleaned from being led by the experience of mourning. In mourning, the self-other relationality is revealed and found necessarily vulnerable. In fact, vulnerability is the precondition of all social and political activity. In her words, "We cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it." (Butler 2006, 29) Vulnerability, we are told, "emerges with life itself," the source of which can never be recovered since vulnerability "precedes the formation of 'I'." (Butler 2006, 31)

For Butler, the recognition of this insight is important for its pragmatic effect. If we can identify vulnerability with the face-to-face encounter as the demand, which comes from "elsewhere, unbidden, and unexpected" (Butler 2006, 130) in the face-to-face encounter in which I am always addressed, then this identification opens up the possibility to preserve the ties that truly bind us since in preserving the other, we always preserve and create the conditions under which the vulnerability and singularity of the other is constantly recognized. "To respond to the face, to

understand its meaning means to be awake to what is precarious in another's life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself." (Butler 2006, 134) The precariousness of the face is the vulnerability of the tie and bonds that constitute us. Like Scheler, there's no decision procedure or method of deliberation to secure this insight other than its pure recognition of vulnerability in the face-to-face encounter, which is just recognizing the phenomenological insight of this relation. If we foster conditions of culture to respect difference and recognize the shared vulnerability of the ties between individuals, groups, and states, then that recognition can reconfigure the productive power of vulnerability itself, and as such, vulnerability becomes the content of those relational ties that continually present themselves to us such that there is a dimension of feeling that leads us into the ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives. Not only those realms, but this vulnerability precedes and constitutes any human activity. It is the condition to which we are continually delivered into.

Before deciding the anti-realism and realism of value in her philosophy, I wanted to present Butler's findings on the ethical relationships between self and other. I wholly admit that I also dissociate those self-other relations from the political context in *Precarious Life.* I needed to pause since the tone and projects reliant upon performativity are clearly anti-realist, but here the close proximity of vulnerability to Levinas takes on a non-formal approach to ethics similar with Scheler's efforts. In Scheler, the act intentionality of love is the elevation of participation to higher strata of feeling and value, and while there is no clear way to act when Holy values flash forth in feeling, the language of and commitment to infinite demand is marginally present in Butler. This marginal presence of the Holy is the secular language of vulnerability as a factical ontology and acquires *prima facie* religious invocation when she applies Levinas to support a Jewish ethics of nonviolence. Here, however, Judaism resonates only on the surface of Caputo's God of mercy and justice. Unlike Caputo, Butler views vulnerability as a concrete process, and as such, I find little reason to see her work under the postmodern epistemic anti-realism or postmodern metaphysical realism I outlined earlier that apply to Caputo.

If anything, this process-oriented view of vulnerability and grounding ethics in the sphere of intrapersonal relationships outlines a thinly-veiled process realism. For her, persons must recognize the vulnerability in the mutual self-other relations and ties that continually bind us and facilitate the reimagining the prospects for community organization and all levels of political activity. They must participate and comport themselves in such a way as to elevate the moral demands originating from the other, and therefore the whole person must participate and realize the values of otherness. These are insights opened up by a limited affective intentionality outlined in grieving and mourning, and in Scheler, they are opened up at the highest levels to which love can deliver us. As such, Levinas's thought, its active appropriation and synthesis in Butler, and Scheler articulate the highest dimension of singular otherness. Of course, I would hope and possibly argue in the future that love is a way to recognize this vulnerability as much as mourning's transformation of us.

These operative insights given to us in mourning command the same elements of Scheler's personalism. So far, I've discussed the benefits of recognizing vulnerability in Butler. What about the lack of vulnerability's recognition? If vulnerability is not recognized, then "derealization of loss, the insensitivity to human suffering and death becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished." (Butler 2006, 148) Violence is always enacted on the other's body, and in order to perpetuate violence one must constantly negate the other, pretend that one's own vulnerability is not called into question by finding oneself as human as the victim. In effect, this is de-personalization for Scheler. For Butler, this humanization of the other is her secular language, a Judaistic humanism that attempts to accomplish with the label "human" what Levinas employs as the "other." Moreover, her language refers to the really real and present elements of the process value-realization, the value of the other into the world through identifying with the human-other.

In the end, Butler discloses a level of human life that Levinas only implicitly details, and Scheler could not. In Scheler's thought, there is an ascetic component. The vital sphere and life-drives gravitate to higher forms of spirit to actualize ideals and values into life, but spirit must pause and suspend the life-drives of the body long enough for their manifestation. As such, Scheler's thought is still governed by the anciently-derived and always present opposition between the body and spirit found in religious asceticism and entrenched in the Platonism of Western religion. Butler's focus on vulnerability functions as a way to synthesize and develop vulnerability phenomenologically. Vulnerability is a mode of experience that works in tandem with the intentionality of loving acts to open us up to the efficacious reality of ontologically participating in values and being a co-creator with others since only persons are the origin and bearer of values. Through actualizing the spirit, we all participate in building the spirit of community together, and that is the true metaphysical origin of all values.

Endnotes

1. I really have to thank J. Aaron Simmons of Furman University for a discussion on this point.
2. The foundationless commitment that surpasses its own limit is what Caputo describes as "deflection" on p. 231. He borrows this term from Professor Foti in making sense of Heidegger, and I wonder if the term is fittingly ironic as I gauge Caputo's entire *Against Ethics.*
3. See Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) for the view I have in mind about how vulnerable our moral lives are from external threats outside of our control.
4. Clearly, a form of moral particularism, but such connections will have to wait.
5. For a complete description of how ethical claims are double-bound to speak about individuals universally in a discourse (let alone metaphysical discourse) despite the particular nature of being a proper name and individuated. This commitment to the indeterminacy of language itself is an attempt to preserve the uniqueness of individuals and not do violence to a being's particularity very much like Derrida attempts in *Violence and Metaphysics.* The interesting irony is this section of the book is to do justice to individuals can be sustained in Scheler's ethical

    personalism as much as it can be in Levinasian ethical demand of the face-to-face encounter of an-other's radical alterity.

6.   While one might want to say that it could be a phenomenological point that obligation is akin to Levinas's self-other relationship in which the alterity of the other captivates me infinitely, constantly demanding of me I acknowledge and respect the other, I hold off on that point since while I cannot make it in the manuscript here, Scheler's notion of the Holy, the value of the person is as infinitizing in its very structure. Obligation is not as infinitizing as the other, and Scheler's hierarchy of value-rankings can give us a more nuanced account of what particular calling is being given. The excessive givenness is, therefore, not its own form of givenness here as one might think of the alterity of the other in Levinas or the excessive givenness of God in Marion.

7.   Let this be an axiom to which my efforts in ethics embody. Such a synthesis of Scheler and Levinas would require that we welcome difference into our hearts and learn that we love as others do, and in that loving we could recognize the precarious vulnerability and fragility of human existence that stirs our hearts. This is my ethics of vulnerability that still awaits formulation.

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