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Title: Returning to persons and values in pragmatic phenomenology: a response to Simon Smith's uncharitable review

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Returning to persons and values in pragmatic phenomenology: a response to Simon Smith's uncharitable review

J. Edward Hackett¹

In what follows, I respond to Simon Smith's review of my book. In that piece, Smith characterizes my writing as "sloppy" without ever engaging substantively with my book. This is the charge and response I am describing in this article.

Let's take a look at each example and see. First, let's take a look at how Smith cites my page 1. He quotes me as saying "the how of values"² when the expression from my book on page 1 is not that expression at all:

Second, we can look at values itself to see which form of phenomenology can capture how values are given. The "how of givenness" (if we were to call it that) is the manner in which a phenomenon can be given (as it appears).³

The "how of givenness" is in quotation marks to emphasize that we are looking at phenomenon directly in the process of undergoing experience and describing how it is that values are given in experience. It is not as Smith says "the how of values." Is he judging me on quotations that do not exist?

Second, we get the fact that something is wrong with my reference to the color blue

as an example of essences and how essences function in experience according to Scheler. Smith says colors are phenomenal properties. Meanwhile it is well established in Scheler's *Formalismus* as well as Manfred Frings's commentary on Scheler that the talk of essences is analogous to perceiving something like blue's givenness in experience. Where Smith concludes abruptly that the examples do not work on the fourth page, these are common examples used to talk about these issues in the phenomenological literature. Values, like color for Scheler, have a functional existence.⁴ They are given in the immediacy of that experience and are not properties. In fact, one assumption of phenomenology is that the thing-like character language reifies aspects of experiencing while concealing other facts of the same experience. Phenomenologists desire a way of articulating, describing, and discerning entire experiences in phenomenological description that sustains an awareness to prevent the reification of thing-like language that might conceal how the structure of any candidate experience manifests.⁵

Given Smith's assumptions about color perception here, it does not seem that Smith is working out what phenomenology could mean

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² Simon Smith, "Review of *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology*," *Inscriptions* 4, no. 2 (July 2021), 220.

³ J. Edward Hackett, *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology: An Exploration in Moral Metaphysics* (Malaga, Spain: Vernon Press, 2018), 1.

⁴ Manfred Frings, *The Mind of Max Scheler: The First Comprehensive Guide Based on the Complete Works* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997), 24.

⁵ Hackett, *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology*, 4.

in Scheler nor is he approaching the topic of phenomenological ontology with an eye to how these terms are employed within phenomenology. What's more, if there is a problem with a technical term, I often include the German counterpart to how that term is translated, so if he wishes to look them up either in Scheler or Heidegger scholarship, then he can. If someone has trouble understanding that these are terms being rendered and explained inside phenomenology and around this passage and before it there are clear footnotes from where in the text I am explaining these terms, then perhaps a reviewer can see that exposition of technical jargon goes hand and hand with attempting to understand that term within the text being referenced. There's no mystery here. One can disagree with that methodological assumption about phenomenology. It's not mystery as to what is being done here on the fourth page or on the hundredth.

Third, he takes issue with the expression of 'mood.' Smith says, "Similarly, forgetting to do one thing while doing another does not explain the notion 'mood,' nor does it exemplify the way in which '[t]hrough mood, Dasein is always brought before itself' (74). Unless, that is, 'mood' is being used as yet another unexplained technical term."⁶ On page 71, I have a section titled "*Befindlichkeit* in Section 29 and 30 of *Being and Time*" that contains the referenced passage by Smith. This section explains what the experience of attunement is in *Being and Time*. There are clear footnotes referencing these sections of the book under discussion and also keeping in reference to the Macquarie and Robinson translation in which the neologism Heidegger invented – *Befindlichkeit* – is translated as both *attunement* and *mood*. I even reference how other Heidegger scholars have translated this as "fundamental mood" to contrast against everyday understanding of

emotions in the scholarship of Tanja Staehler. Maybe reviewers do not read the footnotes of books when clearly established scholarly conventions are followed and their passages are clearly given in the text? Maybe Smith disagrees with the scholarly conventions of Heidegger scholarship regarding phenomenology or the neologisms invented inside *Being and Time*, but I am clearly using the term 'mood' in this very explicit sense. I will cite another Heidegger scholar that appears a page later about the point of what I am doing with this term 'mood'. "As Weberman puts it, 'we are always affected because although we may not always be in the grip of some episodic emotion, we are always in some mood since we are always affectively attuned to the world.'"⁷

Smith is free to disagree with both me and Heidegger on these points, but to insist in the book review confusion about how I employed the term 'mood' is extremely dishonest. I am well versed in how Iain Thomson, Parvis Emad, Bernard Boelen, David Weberman, Tanja Staehler, and the translation conventions of *Being and Time* employ these terms. These authors are referenced in and around the pages Smith is citing. Part of the problem may be that these conventions are idiosyncratic to Heideggerian phenomenology, but for a reviewer to not see that given this section of my book is impossible.

Smith is also similarly disingenuous with respect to using the term 'person.' My repeated usage of this term and not some personal pronoun of 'he' or 'she' reflects that I spent an entire book informing the reader that the project of a moral phenomenology from Scheler is that the term person is understood phenomenologically just like Heidegger's *Dasein* or Husserl's transcendental subject. The term 'person' cannot be objectivized as it is the source of meaning for Scheler and while

⁶ Smith, "Review of *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology*," 221.

⁷ David Weberman as cited in Hackett, *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology*, 75.

cultural moments on the news we are told do objectivize persons, the book was in principle about constructing a moral metaphysics using the resources Scheler has on offer. Again, certainly Smith is free to disagree with me and Scheler, but to say that I am somehow using thing-like language with how I use the term ‘person’ is something I clearly do not do. “Each respective phenomenological thinker has had a term for human life revealed through phenomenological analysis: *Dasein* for Heidegger, transcendental subjectivity in Husserl, and for Scheler, the term is *person*.”⁸ I do not think Smith got that far into my book. His citations only go to about p. 80.

I could go on. What we have here is not that I published my book to be published rather than read, I just didn’t think someone who paid no attention to phenomenology would take entire passages out of context and not be charitable to the point of ignoring entire conventions of a philosophical tradition they clearly do not inhabit regularly. Like many commentators who extoll only one interpretive possibility for philosophical language, Smith ignores that the point of phenomenological language is to create an awareness about how the relation between acts of consciousness and their intended correlate manifest in experiencing. Along these lines, Heidegger invents the four existentials

that make up what he calls the structure of care. Scheler invents the *ordo amoris* and value-qualities and feeling acts. If analytic philosophy were adequate to thematize moral experience no ethical phenomenologist would have to invent neologisms to describe aspects of moral experience that remain hidden. Like Scheler and Levinas, I think that other philosophical traditions are inadequate to their treatment of what gets concealed in moral experience. Some neologisms and difference in method should be expected.

In conclusion, Smith misquotes me once in the review for something that doesn’t appear in the book. Next, he attacks usages of the terms ‘person’ and ‘mood’ arguing they should be understood how he regards them rather than seeing these terms are employed inside phenomenology.⁹ The fact that I present references to those same passages here¹⁰ Smith did not care to learn about these authors. When I am explaining a concept internal to a text, Smith misrepresents exposition of a concept for some unargued assumption he thinks you, dear reader, should adopt about it. He’d rather ignore the hermeneutic realities that good cross-over philosophy requires and view my work myopically from an uncharitable vantage point of what he uncritically accepts as the only way to do philosophy.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹ To review my book in 2021 three years later and to not investigate whether or not my understanding of these concepts have changed is just odd to me. I have developed the concept of person in much more exacting detail in a new piece beyond my book. See my “The becoming of the personal sphere: a proposed framework for Personalist Philosophical Anthropology” in *Appraisal* 12, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring and Autumn 2020), <https://www.britishpersonalistforum.org.uk/121-2-j-edward-hackett.html>. Usually good scholars will inquire into whether or not a scholar has changed their minds in philosophical literature if they are to review a book from three years ago.

¹⁰ The reader will have to settle for footnotes, as commentaries in this journal is subject to strict length restrictions. Readers who are interested in a very lengthy and developed response where I cite in exacting detail every mistake that Smith made can e-mail me at james.hackett@sus.edu for those references. In this shorter response, I am highlighting the most egregious mistakes. I do not have time to reference the technical term of participatory realism and Smith’s quips against that term here either.

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