

ABSTRACT

Experience and Normativity: The Phenomenological Approach

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The relation between experience and normativity is often conceived as a hierarchical relation. Norms, both in practical and theoretical contexts, are supposed to guide and assess experience, and are taken to emerge from a different source (“reason” as opposed to “experiential input”). In my paper, I aim to show that phenomenologists have a different picture. They argue that experience is not “formed” by conceptuality and therefore normatively permeated, but that it yields and carries these normative structures within itself thanks to its intrinsic feature of intentionality. I systematize and spell out three different forms of normativity that all relate to our engagement with the world and others: “operative normativity,” “imperative normativity,” and “critical normativity.” My aim is to show how each of these forms is rooted in a respectively different kind or structure of experience and how, in each case, normativity is gained from experience. This will give us a (non-exhaustive) panorama of phenomenology’s conceptions of experience with respect to questions of normativity. I start out with the normativity in perception and bodily experience. This involves a discussion of the experiential relation of mind. Then move on to another kind of normativity in experience that confronts me with an “ought.” Finally, I take a look at how the proto-normative and normative structures gained from experience become norms with a “critical” function. This means that they become norms which we actively apply to our practical lives and which we constantly have to re-examine.