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Vocational life: personal, communal and temporal structures

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Abstract

This paper offers a new philosophical account of vocations as deeply personal but at the same time also communal and generational forms of multimodal intending. It provides a reconstruction and a systematic development of Edmund Husserl's scattered discussions on vocations. On these grounds, the paper argues that vocational life is a general human possibility and not determined by any set of material values, religious, epistemic or moral. Rather, vocations are distinguished from other complexes of intentional acts and attitudes by certain structural features of their core valuations and volitions.

Keywords Vocation · Will · Volition · Personal value · Care · Habituation · Institution · Husserl

1 Introduction

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology entails a rich but textually scattered discussion of vocational life and human vocations.¹ This aspect of Husserl's analysis of practical intentionality is often neglected, either because it is assumed to merely contribute to his epistemology or theory of science or else because it is taken to concern an

¹ I am grateful to the participants of the *Phenomenology Research Seminar* (Spring 2022) for their comments on an earlier version of this paper, and especially to Risto Tiihonen, Harri Mäcklin and James Jardine for their critical feedback and constructive suggestions. I am also highly thankful to Nicola Spano for discussions on the theory of action and volition. Two notes about my practice of pagination: The pagination given first refers to the original source, and the pagination that follows this, after the slash, refers to the English translation if available; all other translations of Husserl are mine own. Both sources are given in one and the same entry in the list of references below.

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obsolete form of life, long passed or merely reserved for some privileged individuals, such as scientists, scholars and artists.²

This paper questions such notions by systematically developing Husserl's conceptualization of vocations. It demonstrates that vocational life is a general human possibility and that it is not determined by any set of material values—epistemic or moral, private or public, low or high, traditional or modern. Rather than being defined by their contents, vocations are distinguished from other complexes of intentional acts and attitudes by certain structural features of their founding valuations and volitions. This has crucial implications for the temporality and communality of vocational life.

In Husserl's account, vocations are resolutions to dedicate one's life to tasks or kinds of tasks that are established on deeply experienced personal values. This brings vocations under two sets of intentional concepts.³ For one, vocations are understood as intentional complexes that have their axiological ground in deeply personal emotions and valuations.⁴ At the same time, they are defined by the practical concept of task, by determining goals and related types of realizing activities and practices.⁵ The task-based definition brings vocations under the categories of conative or practical intentionality, that is, the intentionality of willing in the broad sense of the term. The crucial role of the will in all vocations, I will argue, makes them prospective and futural but also ties them to individual and communal histories.⁶

Husserl's dual definition renders vocations as complex systems of intentional acts and attitudes: Vocations include in their components all basic forms of intentionality, doxic, axiological and conative,⁷ but they are specific in being grounded in essentially person-specific valuations and being synthesized into comprehensive and permeating wholes by personally motivated acts of willing.⁸ This does not entail that vocations would be devoid of doxic and cognitive elements. On the contrary, certain forms of cognition and knowledge-production are essential to them, most

² Heidegger and his followers exemplify the former kind of neglect. See, e.g., Heidegger ([1927] 2010, pp. 26–32/pp. 21–23), ([1927] 1992, pp. 124–125/pp. 161–163), (1979, pp. 29–30ff./pp. 24ff.), Husserl (1997, pp. 14–18), Gadamer ([1960] 1998, p. 347). Beauvoir provides an example of the latter: her *The Coming of Age* suggest that vocational life is no longer possible in late modernity; see, Beauvoir ([1970] 1996, pp. 379–382, pp. 388–434), ([1981] 1984, p. 426).

³ As mentioned, Husserl's discourse on vocations and vocational life is textually scattered. There is not one source which would offer a systematic treatment of the subject matter, and thus several of his publications, manuscripts and lectures are crucial to my rational-historical reconstruction. The most important of these are *The Crisis of European Sciences* and related manuscripts (Husserliana volumes Hua 6, Hua 29), the Kaizo essays (Hua 27) and the later lectures and manuscripts on ethics, axiology and praxis (Husserliana volumes Hua 42, Hua 43/2–3).

⁴ E.g., Husserl (2013), (2020a).

⁵ E.g., Husserl (1993, p. 363), (1954, pp. 138–139/pp. 136–137).

⁶ Cf. Frankfurt ([1982] 1998, pp. 83–85).

⁷ Husserl distinguishes between three basic forms of intentionality: doxic, axiological and conative (or practical). Perceptual intentionality is one specific type of doxic intentionality, along with cognition.

⁸ Cf. Husserl (1989, pp. 109–110). Husserl explicitly argues that we need the three-dimensional concepts of depths, layers or strata when we start to analyze phenomenologically the structures of personhood. This is due to the dynamic character of persons and their ability to establish new intentional acts on the basis of earlier ones and do so in various orders. For Husserl's conceptualization of the person as an essentially layered formation with a depth dimension, see Heinämäa (2020).

importantly cognition of one's own capacities and one's real possibilities of acting in the world.

As such vocations differ from other complexes of intentional acts and attitudes, most importantly from professions, world views, ideologies and scientific paradigms. The main feature that distinguishes them from professions and ideologies is their deeply personal roots: unlike professions and ideologies they cannot be practiced merely conventionally or solely for utilitarian reasons but demand a dedication. A related feature is that vocations are organized around core emotions rather than core beliefs or sets of beliefs, as is the case with ideologies, world views and scientific paradigms.

Vocations, however, share with professional projects, theoretical paradigms, religious world views and political ideologies an organizing function: all these intentional systems structure our lives into comprehensive wholes and accordingly regulate our acts and actions as well as our readiness to develop and refine types of action.⁹ Yet the normativity of vocations is unique. Vocational values are deeply personal and thus engage the person *in toto*. The loyalty of the person obliged by a vocational value is not to the community that shares a value or set of values but directly to the value itself.¹⁰ This difference is illuminated by the fact that vocations allow for unconventional, reformative and “revolutionary” actions and may also require such actions, i.e., personally motivated speech acts and deeds that question established norms.¹¹ This makes vocationally motivated agents unreliable and risky from the perspective of ideologists and demagogues who work to legitimize established relations of force.¹²

The first part of the paper (Sect. 1) illuminates the axiological basis of vocations. My account is based on Husserl's conceptualization of personal values, but it also draws from Harry Frankfurt's account of personal importance, significance and care when clarifying the character of personal values and their difference from other types of values.¹³ The second part of the paper (Sects. 2 and 3) offers a phenomenological analysis of the conative structures of vocations and thereby illuminates their temporal and communal dimensions. The crucial claim here is that—notwithstanding their essentially personal nature—vocations can be communal and also generational. Thus, they are able to bring together, under common goals, not just contemporaneous subjects but also subjects who live in different historical times. In principle, vocational goals may unite open pluralities of temporarily and diachronically separate agents.

⁹ Husserl (1989, pp. 20–30), Heinämaa (2014b), cf. Frankfurt ([1982] 1998, pp. 82–85).

¹⁰ Cf. Frankfurt (2004, p. 8), ([1993] 1999b, pp. 114–115).

¹¹ Husserl (1989, pp. 66–67), (1954, p. 75/p. 73).

¹² Arendt (1963, pp. 174–176), cf. (1958, pp. 200–201, pp. 244–245).

¹³ I will offer a rational and historical reconstruction of Husserl's scattered discussions on vocations and values of love. By such reconstruction, I mean a non-psychologistic interpretation which remains sensitive to the conceptual and theoretical context and philosophical interests of the author. For the relevant notions of reconstruction; see, Kaukua and Lähteenmäki (2010, 21–30); Beaney (2013, Sect. 6.1.ff.).

2 Axiological grounds

As said, in Husserl's phenomenological analysis, all vocations are grounded in *personal values of love*.¹⁴ These values differ from other values in three related respects: First, they are given to us in emotions that emerge and drive their strength from our own egoic cores; second, despite their essentially egoic character, personal values oblige us unconditionally; and third, these values are incomparable and do not allow for subsumption under any value hierarchies, subjective or objective. I will first clarify these three axiological features purely formally. The later sections of the paper will provide examples that illuminate both the axiological and the conative character of vocations.¹⁵

The most striking feature of personal values is that they are rooted in the deepest center of the person. In other words, they stem from the deepest egoic cores of persons.¹⁶ As such they differ from all values that gain their quality, valency and/or intensity from targeted objects. This implies that personal values have a double relation to the ego-pole of experiencing: On the one hand, like all intentional experiences, experiences of these values are egoic in the sense that the valued something is given *to an ego*.¹⁷ But on the other hand, unlike any other type of feeling, the feeling essential to personal valuing also springs *from the ego* (and not from the object pole). So, in the intentional acts of personal valuation, the ego operates in a more complex manner than in other axiological acts or in cognitive and practical acts in general.

[L]ove-inspired valuation flows from the subject toward the individual object and imparts or bestows a value to the latter that does not derive from the object itself but, ultimately, from him [the ego]. From this value follows a practical

¹⁴ Husserl uses two different terms “value of love” (*Liebeswert*) and “personal value” (*personaler Wert*), but in my interpretation, his explications and definitions of these terms cohere. Persons are for him both ultimate sources of value and, at the same time, themselves also specific combinations of the values of beauty and the values of good; see Husserl (2020b, p. 255), cf. Heinämaa (2022b, pp. 34–35).

¹⁵ A more detailed account of personal values can be found in my earlier papers; see Heinämaa (2020), (2020a).

¹⁶ E.g., Husserl (2013, p. 352), cf. Frankfurt ([1982] 1998), (2004, pp. 10–12, pp. 29–30, pp. 55–56).

¹⁷ The object of vocational love and care may be an individual person or group of persons but also an activity or a practice or an ideality of some sort. Harry Frankfurt characterizes loving care as distinct from moral concern as follows: “Even people who care a great deal about morality generally care still more about their own personal projects, about certain individuals and groups, and perhaps about various ideas (...) There is nothing distinctively moral, for instance, about such ideas as being steadfastly loyal to a family tradition, or selflessly pursuing mathematical truth, or devoting oneself to some type of connoisseurship” ([1982] 1998, p. 81). In *The Reasons of Love*, he further explains that what is decisive is not qualitative feel of the emotion but its role in our emotional economy: “The object of love is often a concrete individual: for instance, a person or a country. It may also be something more abstract: for instance, a tradition, or some moral or nonmoral ideal. There will frequently be greater emotional color and urgency in love when the beloved is an individual than when it is something like social justice, or scientific truth, or the way a certain family or certain cultural group does things; but that is not always the case. In any event, it is not among the defining features of love that it must be hot rather than cold” (2004, pp. 41–42).

duty which is not determined by an objective value (that emerges from the object through affection).¹⁸

The intentional directionality of personal emotion is, of course, outward but its pre-intentional feeling component, the component that “colors” the experience and supports and feeds it, is not worldly but egoic, not centripetal but centrifugal.¹⁹ Like all intentional acts, acts of personal valuing are then ego-centered, but the role of the ego is more complicated in these experiences than in other manners of intending, axiological or non-axiological. It is not only that personal valuing differs from the cognitive acts of knowing and the practical acts of striving and desiring; personal valuation also differs from all feeling and valuing that has its affective grounds “out there.”²⁰

On closer inspection, however, Husserl’s account of the intentionality of personal emotion and valuing turns out to be even more intricate. This is because for him, all proper valuing involves two components: a feeling-component that discloses the value and a deciding egoic act that is responsible for the permanence of the relating. Husserl himself explicates this feature of personal valuing while discussing love for persons, but he argues that the same structure can be found in all types of deep emotional dedication, be it to persons or to inanimate objects or idealities, such as truth and beauty:

Genuine or true falling in love, to grasp a genuine love,—this is not just to establish a habitual pleasing [*Gefallen*] by a ‘vivid’ feeling [*Gefühl*], but means that one decides for the person on the basis of the depths.²¹

In Husserl’s account, all proper valuing is both axiological and volitional. But not all deciding for a feeling is grounded in the emotive core of the ego. Only personal valuing finds both its aspects, the emotive and the volitional, rooted in the depths of the self.²² Thus understood, personal values have a special kind of stubbornness to them; one decides for them permanently, and the permanence is secured by the egoic source of both feeling and deciding. Such an emotive commitment can, of course, be suspended for some time and ultimately also cancelled, but only by another egoic deciding of the same kind. Thus, personal values are resistant to changes in external circumstances as well as changes in their “intentional surroundings.”

This means that vocations are established in specific types of values with which we identify as feeling and willing persons. We are insightfully certain that certain values, and only they, are necessary for us and that we need to care for them, as they

¹⁸ Husserl (2013, p. 352).

¹⁹ Husserl (2013, pp. 624–625, cf. p. 358).

²⁰ E.g., Husserl ([1939] 1985, pp. 53–56/pp. 53–56, pp. 158–160/pp. 138–140), cf. Frankfurt (2004, pp. 38–39).

²¹ Husserl (2020a, p. 508).

²² Husserl (2020a, p. 508). Cf. Frankfurt: “As in other modes of caring, the heart of the matter is neither affective nor cognitive. It is volitional. Loving something has less to do with what a person believes, or with how he feels, than with a configuration of the will that consists in a practical concern for what is good for the beloved” (2004, pp. 42–43).

define who we are. Thus, we decide to dedicate our life to the realization of these values.²³

So art is a vocation for the genuine artist, and science is a vocation for the true scientist (the philosopher); it is a field or region of spiritual activities and accomplishments, for which she knows that she has a calling, so that only the pursuit of these goods can give her the most 'inner' and most 'pure' satisfaction, and each succeeding can give her the consciousness of 'happiness' [*Seligkeit*].²⁴

The second distinctive feature of personal values is that they are not quantifiable and do not allow for comparisons.²⁵ Quantifiable values can be compared with one another as greater or smaller, higher or lower, and thus contrasted and weighted against one another. They can also be assembled into hierarchical structures on the basis of their relative weights. Unlike quantifiable values, personal values do not allow any calculative considerations, and not even comparative reflections or deliberations.²⁶ We are called to care for, further and promote a value in all situations and circumstances, without exception, and not only on the condition that some other values can be set aside or suspended. Personal values thus order us unconditionally, absolutely.²⁷

A value that springs or stems from [myself], which I myself decide for as who I am, on the basis of an originary loving dedication, is a practical unconditional, an absolute ought, and binds me as the one who I am. To decide against it is to be untrue to oneself, to lose oneself, to sin against oneself, to betray one's true self, to act against one's true being ([which is] an absolute practical contradiction).²⁸

Our life may contain several personal values, and when such values conflict, endorsing one rather than the other means that we have to make sacrifices and possibly also tragic ones.²⁹ Husserl's examples range from the dilemma of deciding between two alternative professional callings to the predicament of negotiating between aesthetic and moral, epistemic and altruistic, or social and private values.³⁰

²³ E.g., Husserl (1989, pp. 27–28), (2013, p. 356), Husserl (2020a, p. 507), (2012, p. 146 n.1), cf. Frankfurt ([1971] 1998, pp. 21–22), ([1982] 1998, p. 83, pp. 87–88, pp. 15–16).

²⁴ Husserl (1988, p. 28); cf. (2020b, pp. 245–246).

²⁵ Husserl (2020a, pp. 356–537, p. 390).

²⁶ Cf. Drummond (2016).

²⁷ E.g., Husserl (2013, pp. 198–199, p. 337, pp. 356–357, pp. 376–377), cf. Frankfurt ([1982] 1998, pp. 86–88), (2004, pp. 45–49, p. 64, p. 56, pp. 87–88), ([1993] 1999a, pp. 129–130, pp. 138–141).

²⁸ Husserl (2013, p. 356).

²⁹ When Husserl talks about the sacrifice (*Opfer*) of absolute personal values (*vis-à-vis* comparisons between objective values), he does not use the words "sacrifice" and "to sacrifice" (*opfern*) in their everyday senses, which imply comparability and interest in the establishment of the highest possible total value. He relies on an older, archaic usage of "to sacrifice," which does not imply comparability but instead sacralization (*Online Etymological Dictionary*); cf. Wahrig et al. (2000, p. 943), Kluge (2002, p. 668).

³⁰ Husserl (1988, p. 420), (2012, p. 146 n1), (2013, p. 310, pp. 400–401).

Some cases of conflicting vocations can be resolved by momentary or temporary sacrifices which allows the pursuit of both vocations in periodic alternation and interplay. Iris Murdoch, for instance, was able to include two vocations in her life, a literary one and a philosophical, by organizing her working hours serially into focused periods of thinking and writing and by developing new forms of expression. Jean-Paul Sartre divided his time between three vocations: philosophical analysis and theorization, literary creation, and political activism and debating.

Comprehensive and global sacrifices are also possible. In such cases, we do not just temporarily disregard one of our personal values in order to endorse another one—perhaps one that demands a more acute care—but abandon the whole project of caring for one of the values that are crucial to us and central in our lives. Such sacrifices are *tragic* in that they entail irrecoverable loss and self-loss.³¹

The paradigmatic example of a tragically sacrificial decision between two vocational values is that of Abraham when he determines to obey the command of God and sets out to murder his son Isaac. In Husserl's analysis, Abraham is faced with an irresolvable inner conflict between his care for Isaac and his love for God.³² To choose one of the options is to neglect the other, and since both personal values oblige the agent completely and unconditionally—and deeply from within—he cannot avoid grief and, moreover, is bound to face a grief that colors his life as a whole. Husserl refers to his own predicament when the drafting of his two sons during the first world war brought his parental vocation into direct conflict with his nationalist sentiments.

Less dramatic but structurally equal cases of tragic sacrifice involve situations in which we must choose between two vocational careers and abandon one for the promotion of the other. This may be necessary because our skills and resources do not allow for the full advancement of both, or because attending wholeheartedly to one may compromise all our real possibilities of caring for the other. It is also possible that, due to the historical, cultural or social parameters of human interaction, we cannot find any practical possibilities of realizing our vocation values or that all our efforts to promote them turn out to be redundant or untimely.³³ The case of the physicist Werner Heisenberg serves as an example: Heisenberg was passionate about both music and physics, and highly gifted in both occupations, but at an early age decided to dedicate his time and energy exclusively to theoretically inquiring into the structures of the cosmos. He made this decision, since he was convinced that the historical possibilities of realizing the classical musical values that were crucial to him had already been passed.³⁴ This put music in the secondary position in his life, in the role of a hobby or leisure activity merely.³⁵

³¹ E.g., Husserl (2013, p. 356), cf. Frankfurt ([1982] 1998, pp. 90–91).

³² Husserl (2013, p. 466), cf. Drummond (2018, p. 144).

³³ Our choices, of course, also always have economic and practical material contexts.

³⁴ Heisenberg ([1969] 1975), cf. Crease and Pesic (2014).

³⁵ Heisenberg's reflections, however, also suggest that his most profound interest may not have been in physical theorization as such but rather in the articulation and development of all kinds of structures, theoretical as well as aesthetic; see Heisenberg ([1969] 1975), ([1989] 2019). On this interpretation, both physical theorization and musical performance had a merely subservient role in his vocational life, which was guided, more fundamentally, by the values of harmony and concordance.

In Husserl's account, each irrecoverable sacrifice of a vocation is "tragic" and entails that one "sins against oneself." The dramatic and religious terms are meant to emphasize the result of the philosophical analysis: vocational sacrifices are possible, but since they violate the absolute obligations of personal significance and care, they cannot be accompanied by joy, relief or comfort but entail lifelong sadness or grief for loss and self-loss.

3 Vocational time

Husserl uses two sets of concepts to clarify the temporality of vocations. On the one hand, he employs his concepts of habituation (*Habitus*, *Habitualität*) and institution (*Stiftung*) to account for the temporal structure of vocations and the temporal intertwinement of personal and communal life in them.³⁶ On the other hand, he applies his concepts of conative or practical intentionality which frame vocations as decisions about what *ought to be* and *ought to be done* and as commitments to realize such self-established obligations of being and doing. I will clarify these basic concepts separately, starting with the concepts of habituation and institution.

Each vocation establishes a certain temporal structure in a person's life. Vocations are not momentary or short-term formations but have relatively strong permanence and long timespans. Their determining goals cannot be realized by the performance of any one action, action type or set of actions but only by an open-ended series of mutually related actions, in plural, all guided by a determining goal or set of goals. The ballet dancer, for example, realizes specific artistic goals with her performances and choreographies but at the same time also contributes, by the very same creations, to the general vocational goals of dance art. Similarly, each house that a dedicated architect is able to finish realizes a set of specific values and goals, but at the same time all these particular realizations contribute to the realization of the overarching vocational goal of aesthetically ambitious housebuilding. The developer who merely works for income or profit and the amateur craftsman who merely practices an enjoyable hobby are thus distinguished from a person who has taken on the tasks of construction, not for this or that temporary end, but in order to follow her architectonic vocation and promote architectonic-aesthetic values in all her endeavors. These three individuals may perform similar acts, but their goal-directedness and horizons of acting, that is, styles of practical intending, are crucially different.³⁷

This does not mean that the vocational agent would constantly, at each moment and hour, have her vocational goals in mind and incessantly strive to realize them at each moment. Husserl argues that vocations allow interruptions and breaks, and usually organize themselves in periodic manners. Thus, the personal vocational time, that is, the time dedicated to the realization of vocational goals in a person's life, is

³⁶ "Stiftung" has also been translated as "establishment."

³⁷ In *The Reasons of Love*, Frankfurt formulates this insight as follows: "Unlike the necessities of reason (...) those of love are not impersonal. They are constituted by and embedded in structures of the will through which the specific identity of the individual is most particularly defined" (2004, p. 48).

both continuous and periodically organized and structured. The cases of Murdoch and Sartre, introduced above, exemplify the nature of this periodic organization of life.

Husserl explains the possibility of such alteration between actively engaging periods and latent phases by his concepts of habit and habituality.³⁸ This terminology must not be taken in the empirical sense of social routines and customs.³⁹ Rather, the reference is to certain immanent unities of experiencing constituted in internal lived time. By the concepts of habit and habituality, Husserl effectively argues that all acts can be invested with varying types of permanence so that only contrary acts can terminate the established intentional engagement.⁴⁰

Conceptually, institution and habituation are two related processes of constitution. Both establish *immanent unities* of egoic consciousness, that is, not empirical, worldly or real unities or transcendent unities of any sort, but unities that pertain to individual consciousnesses and their intentional relations to other consciousnesses. In a nutshell, “institution” names the act of introducing a new sense into conscious life, and “habituation” refers to the stabilization of such accomplishments.⁴¹ This implies that consciousness is not just a series of intentional acts or lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) but also entails unities of activity with various durations, some of which are overlapping and some of which build on others.

By the concepts of habituation and institution, Husserl is able to account for all types of temporally extended forms of intending: cognitive, emotional and practical.⁴² So, the same concepts account for the permanence of everyday beliefs and scientific convictions as well as the stability of emotional attitudes and practical dispositions. Husserl provides various kinds of examples: the permanence of scientific convictions and ethical reflection⁴³; that of aesthetic as well as epistemological valuations⁴⁴; the resilience of emotions⁴⁵; the persistence of acquired personality features⁴⁶; and our practical readiness for tool use.⁴⁷

³⁸ Husserl’s concepts of habituation and habituality are comprehensive and reach down to the lowest levels of egoic activity in bodily, motor and perceptual intentionality; see, e.g., Husserl ([1939] 1985, pp. 64–65/pp. 62–63, p. 138/p. 124), (1952, pp. 256–257/pp. 268–269, pp. 278–279/pp. 291, pp. 310–311/p. 324, pp. 387–388/p. 397), (2022, pp. 585–586), cf. Moran (2011, p. 56, pp. 60–61, p. 65), (2014, pp. 29–31), Lohmar (2014, p. 49). On the other hand, his concepts of habituality and habituation are not restricted to individual experiencing but also operate at the level of communal or intersubjective intentional life see, e.g., (1973b, pp. 230–232). A thorough discussion and clarification of both individual-personal and social levels of analysis is provided by Caminada (2019, esp. 339–352).

³⁹ Husserl (1952, p. 111/p. 118), (2022, p. 351), (1993, pp. 365–366).

⁴⁰ E.g., Husserl (1952, p. 117/p. 124, p. 311/p. 324), (2022, p. 351), (1973c, p. 113/p. 120).

⁴¹ Husserl (1950a, pp. 100–103/pp. 66–69, p. 129/p. 98), (1952, pp. 111–120/pp. 118–127), cf. (1954, pp. 10–12/pp. 12–13, pp. 72–75/pp. 71–73).

⁴² E.g., Husserl (1952, p. 112/p. 119).

⁴³ Husserl (1988, pp. 29–30), (1952, p. 114), (2022, pp. 341–342).

⁴⁴ Husserl (1952, p. 114/p. 121, p. 118/p. 125, p. 275/p. 228, pp. 349–353).

⁴⁵ Husserl (1952, pp. 113–115/pp. 120–122), (1954, p. 241/p. 238), cf. (2013, p. 359), (2020a, p. 508).

⁴⁶ Husserl (1952, p. 114/p. 121, pp. 275–280/pp. 288–293).

⁴⁷ Husserl (1950a, p. 114/p. 111).

Each ‘intention or opinion’ (*Meinung*) is an institution (*Stiftung*) which remains a possession (*Besitz*) of the subject as long as motivations do not arise which require the stance-taking to be ‘varied’ and the former intending/opinion [to be] abandoned.⁴⁸

What is common to all processes of habituation and institution is that they extend intentional acts across the living present given in immanent time and thus establish intentional unities with various durations. Each intentional act entails an impressional present and occurs at a certain temporal “point” in streaming consciousness.⁴⁹ But, at the same time, each intentional act also essentially entails the ideal possibility of a prolongation or temporal extension by habituation.⁵⁰ So, each act can in principle be habituated into an enduring or permanent active project (*Vorhabe*) or possession (*Besitz, Eigentum*) of the ego which then characterizes the ego and props up her further activities until refuted by a contrary act.⁵¹ This ideal possibility is not actualized in each case, so not all acts become habituated into permanent egoic possessions.⁵² The habituation of an intentional act depends on motivating reasons; and conversely, each habituated activity can be terminated, but only by contrary acts from other motivations.⁵³

Institutions and habituations thus add an elaborate temporal “stratum” onto the basic layer of lived temporality which characterizes all acts per se. Their results do not just entail references to past and future experiences, but also have durations and relative permanence in the immanent time of experiencing. They extend and continue onward from the now of the present act to subsequent lived moments and can constitute continuities in which intentional acts build on earlier acts and ultimately on the institutive act that originally established a new sense for the first time. Thus, institution and habituation can be characterized as offering “springboards” to intentional consciousness: they allow consciousness to move forward dynamically and consistently.

In *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl exemplifies the act of instituting a new sense by picturing a child who for the first time discovers the sense of scissors.⁵⁴ In phenomenological terms, we can say that the child institutes a new tool-sense, i.e., constitutes a particular practical sense for herself for the first time. From then on, the child is immediately able to identify, recognize and distinguish such cutting tools from the general category of implements simply by perceiving them and does not each time need to go through complicated processes of sense-constitution. However,

⁴⁸ Husserl (1973c, p. 113/p. 120), cf. (1952, p. 112/p. 119).

⁴⁹ Husserl (1952, p. 118/p. 125), (2022, pp. 249–250).

⁵⁰ Husserl (1952, p. 117/p. 124).

⁵¹ Husserl (1952, p. 311/p. 324).

⁵² The general gestalt and style of the thus habituated acts is distinctive to the ego and singularizes her; see, e.g., Husserl (1950a, p. 101/p. 67, p. 129/p. 98), (1952, p. 279/pp. 291–292, p. 300/p. 313, p. 311/p. 324), cf. (1973b, p. 230), (1989, p. 110). On the egoic grounds of the individuation of persons and subjects; see Heinämaa (2018).

⁵³ Husserl (1952, p. 117/p. 124), (1973c, p. 113/p. 120).

⁵⁴ Husserl (1950a, p. 141/p. 111), cf. ([1939] 1985, p. 35/p. 38).

in an intersubjective consideration, the child's accomplishment merely measures up to a reinstatement of a sense which already has been instituted by others, numerous generations before the child's reinvention.

Thus, two different dimensions of institution must be distinguished: first, the intrasubjective and personal dimension in which a particular sense is established within an individual stream of egoic consciousness and, second, the communal dimension in which a sense is first established within an intersubjective community of mutually related constitutors. Husserl uses the term "reinstitution" (*Nachstiftung*) for accomplishments that depend on the accomplishments of earlier acts, such as the child's realization of the sense of scissors, discussed above. The earlier institutive act on which the reinstatement depends can be either own or alien, intrasubjective or intersubjective.⁵⁵

The English rendering of "Nachstiftung" as "reinstitution" suggests that intersubjective reinstatement would be a merely repetitive action and that the *Nachstifter* would simply reiterate the operations that have already been performed by some forerunner(s). This is a simplification and leads to misunderstandings: The German prefix "nach" does not just mark temporal succession but also agreement and consistency.⁵⁶ So, the crucial idea here is that all sense—doxic, axiological and practical—can be instituted, not merely originally, but also *in accord* with what others have already instituted in their lives. The analysis of such intersubjective dimensions of institution illuminates the intentional relations between generations in which descendants are able to move forward by using the earlier institutions of their forerunners as a platform for new creations and productions of sense.⁵⁷

Together, the concepts of institution and habituation account for the permanence of vocational decisions through a person's life. However, the intersubjective dimensions of reinstatement point us beyond the limits of our individual lives and refer us to the lives of others. Vocational tasks can bind us not only to contemporaries but also to past and future others, that is, other practitioners who may already have departed or who may be entering the field just now or only much later, after our demise.

Some vocational values and goals may be merely shared by contemporaries while other vocations can be common to agents who belong to generations wide apart. An example of the former type would be the vocation of caring for the wellbeing and flourishing of a child; and an example of the latter kind would be the vocational task of building a city. The former task connects contemporaneous agents, from two to four generations at the most, but the latter may connect agents from generations

⁵⁵ Husserl's concepts of original institution (*Urstiftung*) and reinstatement (*Nachstiftung*) apply equally to individual and collective processes of meaning constitution. More precisely, both intrasubjective and intersubjective constitution can proceed by acts of original institution as well as by acts of reinstatement. For more systematic explications of Husserl's concept of institution, see, chapter 2 "The manifold sense of foundation (*Crisis* §15)" in Dodd (2005), cf. Meacham (2013), Miettinen (2020). For political philosophical applications of Husserl's concept of institution, see Bedorf (2020), Meacham and Tava (2020).

⁵⁶ The German preposition "nach" means *after* and *behind*, but also *in accordance with*; see, Wahrig et al. (2000, pp. 899–900), cf. Kluge (1891, p. 246).

⁵⁷ Husserl (1950a, p. 53/p. 12–13), cf. (2013, p. 307, p. 316, pp. 324–325, pp. 336–337, p. 424), (2020b, p. 511).

so widely apart that they cannot ever meet in person but can merely relate to one another by the mediation of writing, pictures or recording techniques.⁵⁸ Communal vocations without any possibility of generational sharing are also possible, if not in reality, then at least in principle. Think, for example, about persons who all dedicate their lives to caring for an ephemeral natural process in its uniqueness, such as the blooming of the Talipot Palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*) or that of the Queen of the Andes (*Puya raimondii*), or people who prepare to witness the appearance of the Comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF) which last visited the Earth 50,000 years ago and may never return.⁵⁹

The temporal structure of vocations is two-directional: It opens onto past and future. Thus, generational vocations tie us intentionally to the products and creations of previous practitioners as well as the possible achievements of the ones who follow us. This is not just an essential fact about vocationally dedicated persons but also a fact about communal vocations themselves. It is possible that their guiding values can only be realized by the common efforts of subjects who live in different centuries and belong to different generations.

Generationally shared communal vocations have the temporality of *historical* processes. They start from the original first institution (*Urstiftung*) of a certain goal-sense and the tasks that are to be realized in future.⁶⁰ From the first institution, such vocations proceed, via transmission of their determining tasks, from one generation to the next. Thus, generational vocational tasks are not only historical but also characterized by the specific temporality of *inheritance*. They are handed down to us by predecessors and, as inherited tasks, they demand from us not only realizing actions here and now but also preparation and provisions for future generations.⁶¹

Thus, generational vocations have two possible origins in our lives. They can be either received from others, from predecessors, and be adopted by us, or they can be freely instituted by us without a priorly established goal-sense.⁶² In the former case, they need to be reinstated by ourselves in order to become our own and structure

⁵⁸ Husserl (1989, pp. 112–113), (1993, p. 306/p. 328, pp. 367–374/pp. 356–363), (1973c, p. 181, pp. 224–225). For a detailed account of the generational relations in Husserl, see Heinämaa (2014a).

⁵⁹ The emphasis on permanence may itself betray a cultural bias. This is suggested by the fact that some cultures have developed special arts and practices for the celebration of the impermanence and fleeting character of beauty itself. The Japanese *ukio-e* wood prints, for example, aim at capturing “floating or feeling worlds,” and contemporary visual arts experiment with non-enduring materials.

⁶⁰ Husserl (1954, p. 378/pp. 368–369), (1993, p. 363), cf. (1973b, pp. 230–232), (1989, p. 110).

⁶¹ E.g., Husserl (1954, pp. 509–513/pp. 391–395), (1989, p. 110). Husserl’s conceptualization of institution is rich, providing tools for the analysis of the permanence of vocational goals as well as their various manners of changing. Modifying institution (*Umstiftung*), for example, operates by specifying already established (and inherited) senses; see, e.g., Husserl (1993, p. 416, p. 420). Further specificity is gained by the concepts of *novel institution* (*Neustiftung*) and *final institution* (*Endstiftung*).

⁶² E.g., Husserl (2022, pp. 354–356), cf. (1950a, p. 141/p. 111), (1952, p. 311/p. 324), (1989, p. 110). In Husserl’s conceptualization, adoption of already established senses from others can be either active, i.e., (freely) decided upon on the basis of evidence-based free deliberation, or passive, without such basis. The case of the child mentioned above provides an example of passive type of adoption. In addition to such cases, Husserl discusses cases of deliberate agreement (*Zustimmung*) with others, contemporaries as well as predecessors, e.g., Husserl (1952, pp. 268–269/pp. 281–282), ([1962] 1968, p. 214). On the passive modes and underlayers of institution, see Niel (2017), cf. Merleau-Ponty (2003).

our personal lives internally and concretely. Until they are affirmed by us in free acts of decision and accordingly incorporated into our lives as realizable goals, they remain mere intents: they are consciously entertained, but in a loose manner, and we have not committed ourselves or our actions to their realization.

One category of vocations deserves special attention. This is the category of vocations that have goals which lie in infinity. The characteristic tasks of such vocations do not just transcend the realizing capacities and powers of particular individuals and generations but also transcend the competence of all possible generations taken together. In Husserl's analysis, all scientific vocations as well as the philosophical vocation belong to this category. Philosophy and the sciences are not just established as projects with comprehensive goals that persist through our whole lives nor even as projects with transgenerational goals, transmitted from one historical era to the next. Rather, all philosophy and all science have their primary institution in the idea of *infinite goals*, such as the ideas of grasping the thing-in-itself, attaining the full truth or perfect evidence about the world and avoiding all error.⁶³

This new goal-sense was first constituted in Ancient Greece, Husserl argues, and has been handed down to us through generations of philosophical and scientific enterprises.⁶⁴ It posits very specific kinds of goals that organize specific types of practices and actions. These are not just goals that transcend the limits of our individual lives and presuppose future practitioners who can take on the tasks that we will leave unfinished. Instead, the new goal sense first instituted in Ancient Greece with the idea of a universal science also transcends the limits of all generative communities. The goals of the sciences cannot be fully realized by any individual or community and not even by the endlessly chaining unity of humanity as a whole. This does not make them deceptive chimeras but instead establishes them as regulative principles that permanently guide both individuals and generations. Husserl argues that this structural feature of determining goals shapes all sciences, independently of their subject matters and regions of operation.⁶⁵

Moreover, he also argues that the new sense of infinite goals, first instituted in the practice of philosophizing in Ancient Greece, has spread and still spreads further to other practices, radically transforming their ways of intending and their goals as well as all real possibilities of striving for goals. This semantic "contamination," so to speak, concerns all cultural practices, from religious to economic. As a result, infinity does not just characterize the ends of European sciences, but also concerns the ends that are posited and striven for in the religions, arts and ethics that are intentionally influenced by the Greek idea of science.⁶⁶

⁶³ E.g., Husserl (1954, pp. 372–373/pp. 362–364), (1950a, pp. 52–53/pp. 12–13).

⁶⁴ Husserl (1954, pp. 12–17/pp. 15–18, pp. 321–333/pp. 276–286, pp. 365–368/pp. 334–357, pp. 378–382/pp. 369–373), (1993, p. 363).

⁶⁵ Husserl (1954, pp. 323–324/pp. 277–278).

⁶⁶ Husserl (1954, p. 15/p. 17, p. 72/p. 71), cf. (1973a, pp. 207–208), (2013, pp. 315–316), Arendt (1958, pp. 248–325).

4 Commitment as habituated acts of willing

We have seen that vocations entail several different kinds of intentional acts, cognitive, emotional and conative. Moreover, many of these constituent intentions must be habituated into permanent possessions for the establishment of vocations as long-term commitments. In different vocations—scientific, artistic, professional and intimate—the cognitive, emotional and conative elements are in various relations of dependency, and their manners of entanglement may also change as a function of time. However, in all vocations, the determining intention, the one that unifies or synthesizes the rest, is conative. Vocations therefore are not just any types of habituated acts or instituted senses but, more precisely, require habituation and institution of conative acts of willing, choices, decisions, resolutions and commitments.⁶⁷ In addition to this, Husserl also argues that the will-based establishment of vocations gives them a *creative character*.⁶⁸ In order to see what is at issue here and study the implications of this argument, we need to look more closely into the structures of conative or practical intentionality of willing and its power to posit sense.

In Husserl's account, the capacity of volitional acts to establish complicated temporal structures characteristic of vocations is ultimately based on their positional powers. Whereas doxic acts of perception and judgment, and their different modalities, posit *being* and *existence* in various senses (actual, real, ideal, etc.) and thus constitute objects of different kinds (things, events, states of affairs, essences, etc.), conative volitional acts of deciding, resolving and doing posit *what ought to be*.⁶⁹ This holds for decisions, resolutions and choices of all kinds as well as for actions. They are all guided by goals, that is, nonexistent but realizable possibilities posited by the acts of the will. They are all concerned not only with being but also and more fundamentally with what ought to be or become.

Husserl calls "Seinsollen" the type of positing that is common to all volitional acts, and we can translate the term into English by the neologisms "ought to be" or "what-ought-to-be."⁷⁰ In other words, volitional acts entail an authorizing, "commanding" or "obliging" character which necessarily points beyond what is posited as existing in one way or another.

This means that the intentionality of the will is creative in a pregnant sense. Husserl explicitly argues that this is the unique character of volitional consciousness: will, and only will, is able to bring about, to bring into being, to make, produce and create. He writes: "The consciousness does not say: 'It will be, and therefore I will

⁶⁷ Husserl (1954, pp. 153–154/pp. 150–151), (2002, p. 42), cf. Jacobs (2013, p. 356, n. 24–25). Husserl (1988; 2004) argues that the practical acts of willing are founded (*fungieren*) on axiological acts of valuing. This implies that vocational life necessarily involves also valuations and emotions in which values are disclosed or manifest to us in experience.

⁶⁸ Husserl's formulations suggest that this task is crucial to all philosophy of culture and, more precisely, to the philosophical critique of cultural stagnation and the emptying of meaning; see, e.g., Husserl (1989, pp. 109–122), (1954, pp. 509–513/pp. 390–395).

⁶⁹ Husserl (1988, pp. 104–112, p. 157), (1993, p. 366), cf. (1975, pp. 53–59/pp. 33–37), cf. Mulligan (2004, p. 185).

⁷⁰ The term has also been translated as "it-shall-be" Spano (2022, p. 121), (2023, pp. 7ff.).

it,' but says: 'Since I will, it will be'. In other words, the will speaks out its creative 'Let it be!'"⁷¹

Volitional acts are able to posit what-ought-to-be and -become because they essentially transcend the lived present to which they are anchored and do so in a manner that differs from all other types of acts. The acts of the will do not just open onto a future, like all acts do, thanks to the basic form of intentional time (retention–present–protention). They are not just capable of establishing permanent intentional possessions through habituation, like all acts are, thanks to the preservative and stabilizing operations of the ego. In addition to these general forms of inner temporality, volitional acts are able to expand their constitutive or formative powers forward in time, to subsequent phases of consciousness. Thus, rather than being objectifying, the function of the will is formative.⁷²

The present, immediately deciding will does not determine future consciousness by positing ever new volitional acts in a serial fashion.⁷³ Instead of giving being to ever new decisions, resolutions or actions, the will creates by "informing" or organizing future consciousness:

[T]he present will as will, as the unique reality-positing of the form "Let it be!", does not posit the future/futural willing or even [realizing] action but rather sends through them the thesis "Let it be!"⁷⁴

Thus, we can say that, already before and independently of all forms of habituation, the will binds itself by outlining or sketching out its own future.⁷⁵ It drafts for itself a futural "field" in which it operates, and thus gives intentional form to future consciousness. This means that consciousness is not just a stream of lived experiences or intentional acts which follow one another in immanent time, nor is it merely a stock or warehouse of earlier accomplishments, instituted and habituated prior to the living present. In addition to these general temporal structures, consciousness is able to move forward by chains of decisions, resolutions and actions, and thus to open onto the future in a dynamic manner, thanks to the operations of willing.

Despite this creative freedom, conative acts of the will are bound to reality and bound in two related manners. First, volitions demand actions that are able to realize the goals that they posit⁷⁶; and, thus, they send their directive thesis to all agentive levels, right down to her perceptions and movements. In other words, willing necessarily commits us to action in Husserl's account: "Whoever wills something in the

⁷¹ Husserl (1988, p. 107), cf. Nenon (1991), (2009), Mulligan (2004). Hope and desire too have futural perspectives, but since they lack commitment to realizing actions, they are not creative in Husserl's technical sense.

⁷² Husserl (1988, p. 108), Nenon (1991, p. 304).

⁷³ The will binds the agent, but it does not bind her by positing a separate obligation, prescription or command.

⁷⁴ Husserl (1988, p. 108).

⁷⁵ Cf. Husserl (1993, p. 364, pp. 367–369), cf. Frankfurt ([1982] 1998, pp. 83–84).

⁷⁶ Husserl (1988, pp. 105–112), cf. (2020b, pp. 127ff.).

future, more precisely, something that does not have the beginning of its becoming in the present, could not want it if that person did not want the future action.”⁷⁷

We can, of course, try to cancel or annul already executed actions and operative volitions but this is possible only by separate acts of willing.⁷⁸ Only new volitions are able to undo the intentions that originally bind us as agents to the open future of willing certain goals and performing the actions that contribute to their realization.

Second, volitional acts also necessarily entail consciousness of the real practical possibilities of the agent, consciousness of her capabilities and opportunities, of what she can do and is able to achieve in the given conditions. On this basis, proper acts of the will differ—and must be kept distinct—from daydreaming and from wishes and hopes of all kinds.⁷⁹ Whereas volitions necessarily entail consciousness of realizable possibilities and a commitment to the execution of actions that contribute to the realization of the goal, wishes and hopes merely concern what could be without committing the subject.⁸⁰ A person can wish and hope to become ballet dancer, for example, but in order *to will* the same the person would consciously have to possess certain physical, mental, intellectual, aesthetic and artistic skills and abilities as well as certain situational opportunities (or else decide to develop such).

This means that the possibilities over which we deliberate and about which we decide in our volitional acts are not pure possibilities of imagination or thinking, but are our real possibilities, that is, possibilities that we consider realizable, and, more, realizable and actualizable by ourselves. Thus, they necessarily refer to general human abilities but also to our individual capacities and powers as well as our

⁷⁷ Husserl (1988, p. 108, cf. p. 225). Husserl uses the English term “the fiat” for the *onset* of the positing thesis of the will, that is, the onset of the thesis that posit *what ought to be*; see Husserl (1988, pp. 107–111, pp. 156–157), (1993, p. 364), cf. James (1890, Vol. II, Ch. XXVI). The concept of *fiat* combines three ideas in Husserl’s analyses: The fiat must be understood as *the beginning point* in which the will starts to exercise its positing power and thereby determine consciousness; see Husserl (1988, pp. 107–111, p. 115). Second, the fiat thus marks the beginning of a *goal* or a set of goals (final senses); see Husserl (1993, p. 364, p. 525), (2022, p. 306, pp. 516–517), cf. (1954, pp. 395–396, pp. 485–486), (2020b, p. 202). Third, the fiat can also be understood also as the power engine or power source from which the obliging intentional character issues and spreads further in consciousness; see Husserl (1988, p. 111). Elsewhere Husserl argues that all spontaneous egoic acts entail a “fiat-like” point of beginning; see Husserl (1950b, p. 300/p. 291). However, Husserl also uses the term “fiat” to refer, more specifically, to volitional acceptance or affirmation (*Willensbejahung*); see, e.g., Husserl (2020b, p. 119, cf. p. 114, p. 238), (2022, pp. 516–517). For systematic (and historical) accounts of Husserl’s philosophy of the will, see Melle (1992), Nenon (1991), Mulligan (2004), Lotze (2006), Nenon (2009), Staiti (2019).

⁷⁸ Husserl (1988, p. 109), (1993, p. 377), cf. Nenon (1991, p. 303).

⁷⁹ In his early lectures on ethics and axiology, Husserl argues: “The mere wishing does not contain willing, it does not contain practical modalities and it is not a practical act, that is, a willing act in the broadest sense” (Husserl 1988, p. 103). So, in Husserl’s account mere wishing is not a mode of willing but a specific form of valuing consciousness. Experientially, the main difference is that whereas willing entails consciousness of realizable possibilities (given to the ego), wishing does not entail such consciousness or, better, it neglects the possibility of realization; see, e.g., Husserl (1988, pp. 102–109, p. 375), cf. (1952, pp. 257–258/pp. 269–270), (2022, pp. 517–518), Lotze (2006). On this analysis, both the passive adoption of goals and the active incorporation of them differ from mere wishing, hoping and desiring: Willing, in all its modes, entails some consciousness of realizing activities. Active goal-intending commits to actions in light of clear evidence about one’s real possibilities, whereas passive goal-intention merely entails abstract or vague ideas about such actions.

⁸⁰ E.g., Husserl (1988, pp. 104–105, pp. 108–109, p. 218), (1993, p. 364, p. 367).

practical situation and its future and past horizons.⁸¹ The cases of Murdoch and Sartre epitomize how crucially vocational action depends on general human capacities and powers: Murdoch was forced to abandon her vocational work due to loss of memory capacities, and Sartre his due to loss of eyesight.⁸²

We can now summarize the results of our explication of Husserl's analysis of the special powers of the conative acts of willing, in distinction from the cognitive acts that posit being in its different senses. The difference is in the temporal stretch of the respective acts. Volitional theses, independently of all processes of habituation, bind us in three related ways. First, volitional theses commit their subjects to a goal or a set of goals, not given in the present, but possible in the future. Second, such theses also bind their subjects to a future of willing, and in several different modalities: decisions, resolutions and interests. Finally, the future of obliging willing necessarily entails actions and, more, specific types of actions that are capable of realizing the posited goals or that contribute to their realization.⁸³

5 Conclusion

Drawing from Husserl's discussions of vocational life and Harry Frankfurt's conceptualization of care, I have argued that vocations have a double foundation. They are established on the bases of axiological acts of valuing and conative acts of willing or, more concretely, on personal emotions, decisions and commitments. The axiological emotive basis of vocations makes them deeply personal and provides vocational agents with autonomous obligations and self-established imperatives that regulate their lives as wholes. The conative basis ties vocational agents to situational realities and outlines for them open-ended futures of practical possibilities and realizing actions, own and alien.

This basic analysis allows us to understand how vocational communities differ from other forms of human communality. Personal values and decisions that constitute human beings as vocational agents connect them in a special manner, not merely on conventional, utilitarian or affective grounds, but by personally motivating goals and shared tasks of realizing actions and interactions. Moreover, the conative grounds of vocations provide them with the structures of inheritance, creation and recreation.

Finally, I have argued that some vocations are determined by infinite goals—scientific, artistic, religious or political—and that such vocations introduce human

⁸¹ Husserl (1993, pp. 366–367 n. 1), cf. (1952, pp. 266–268/pp. 278–280), (1989, pp. 30–32), (2013, pp. 299–300, pp. 306–307, p. 317).

⁸² Husserl stresses two consequences of this analysis: The will as such cannot intentionally be directed at *past events* or happenings or at *ideal forms of being*. We are, of course, able to entertain all kinds of possibilities in our mind, and can envisage, imagine and fantasize that they would materialize either in the present or in the future. However, none of these manners of intending measure up to genuine acts of willing in Husserl's analysis: "The will is directed at reality, not ideal but rather individual actual reality" (1988, p. 109, cf. p. 225). For the Aristotelian roots of this argument by Husserl, see, Lotze (2006).

⁸³ Husserl (1993, p. 364).

beings into open-ended and endlessly opening communities of contemporaries and successors. This allows us to understand how we can experience ourselves, not just as members of particular nations and religions, but also as “citizens of the world” and “children of gods.”

In addition to these systematic results, my paper offers a rational and historical reconstruction of Husserl’s textually scattered discussions of vocational life. One of the benefits of this reconstruction is that it demonstrates that Husserl coherently developed and applied his concept of vocation and used it broadly to discuss all dimensions of our practical lives, from the sciences and arts to politics and further to the intimate relations between colleagues, partners, family members, friends and lovers. This calls into question the critiques that have been targeted against Husserl’s discourse on vocation as being preoccupied with epistemic problems and theory of science. My reconstruction shows that such charges are ill-founded and based on selective and superficial readings. Husserl’s discussion of vocational life is not focused on or preoccupied with scientific projects but concerns all possible vocations grounded in various personal values of love.

In addition, my reconstruction demonstrates that Husserl’s concept of vocation is cross-cultural and not historically specific: It applies to cultures and historical periods of all sorts and can be exemplified by agents from various historical times and communities, both real and imaginary. Despite this, it may well be, as Simone de Beauvoir argues in her *The Coming of Age*, that vocationally committed professional life has become highly difficult, if not impossible, in late modern cultures which progress by serializing, centralizing and automatizing forms of production and expand into all of forms of human action and interaction.

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