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NORMS AS A MEDIUM: PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH IN ANALYSING THE PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA*

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The concept of norms within philosophical texts is an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, it could be viewed as a certain mode of perception, but on the other hand, norms themselves are an object of thought. Viewed from the phenomenological perspective norms determine the potential appearance of the object of perception. The aim of this article is to emphasize the role of norms as a medium and from the perspective of phenomenology. To do this, the article answers three questions; firstly, the question about the application of phenomenology (more specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)) in the analysis of social media perception, secondly, the question about the separation of subjective experience from lived experience. This distinction is essential in the context of the study to understand what kind of descriptive forms can be expected from this type of study. Thirdly, the relationship between norms and normality and their presentation on social media is considered. In this context, norms appear as a medium. The article is based on the research project “Philosophical Analysis of Information Perception in Social Media.” In discussing norms as a medium, the article pays significant attention to theoretical evaluation of the method. When confronted with everyday experience it emerges as a multi-layered phenomenon that holds various contradictions, and in trying to understand them attention must be paid to the problem of thought-forming. Norms as a medium are understood in comparison with language. Language obscures itself in being there, but the moment it is studied it disappears into the abstraction of the word “language.” Norms, on the one hand, are presented as an object of reflection, but at the same time its’ form and boundaries of presentation are determined by the norms themselves. Norms are like a medium, like a screen through which what is happening is perceived.

Keywords: Husserl, Heidegger, lived experience, subjective experience, norms, normality, perception, medium.

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НОРМЫ КАК МЕДИУМ: ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ПОДХОД К АНАЛИЗУ ВОСПРИЯТИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ*

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Понятие нормы в философских текстах представляет собой двоякий феномен. С одной стороны, нормы можно рассматривать как определённый способ восприятия, с другой стороны, сами нормы оказываются предметом размышления. С феноменологической точки зрения нормы определяют потенциальное явление объекта восприятия. Цель этой статьи — подчеркнуть роль норм как медиума, и сделать это исходя из феноменологической перспективы. Для этого статья отвечает на три вопроса: во-первых, на вопрос о применении феноменологии (а точнее интерпретативного феноменологического анализа (ИФА)) при анализе восприятия социальных сетей; во-вторых, на вопрос о различении субъективного опыта и проживаемого опыта. Важно учитывать это сущностное различие, чтобы понимать, какие формы описания стоит ждать от исследования такого типа. В-третьих, рассматриваются отношения между нормой и нормальностью и их презентация в социальных сетях. В этом контексте норма проявляет себя как медиум. Статья опирается на исследовательский проект «Философский анализ восприятия информации в социальных сетях». В статье нормы как медиум обсуждаются с особенным вниманием к теоретической оценке метода. Этот медиум складывается при встрече с повседневным опытом как многоуровневый феномен, включающий в себя различные противоречия, и при попытке понять их стоит обращать внимание на проблему образования мысли. Нормы как медиум понимаются в сопоставлении с языком. Язык затемняется своим присутствием, а в ситуации исследования он растворяется в абстракции слова «язык». Нормы, с одной стороны, представлены как предмет рефлексии, но в то же время формы и границы представлений рефлексии определяются самими нормами. Нормы подобны медиуму, экрану, сквозь который воспринимается происходящее.

Ключевые слова: Гуссерль, Хайдеггер, проживаемый опыт, субъективный опыт, нормы, нормальность, восприятие, медиум.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of norms within philosophical texts is an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, it could be viewed as a certain mode of perception, but, on the other hand, norms themselves are an object of the thought. Viewed from a phenom-

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enological perspective norms determine the potential of appearance of the object of perception. However, this characterization of the determinants of the perception is extended through other additional designations, for example logical norms, noetic norms, methodical norms etc. This raises a question—how to approach norms? Are they the object of thought or are they perhaps the rules characterizing the mode of perception?

Although the focus of this article is norms as a medium, before expanding this idea it is necessary to outline a broader context—the field of problems related this topic and the circumstances of its emergence.

The interpretation of norms as a medium arose during the research project “Philosophical Analysis of Information Perception in Social Media.” The aim of this research is to provide a philosophical analysis on how the information coming from social media is being structured and assessed in consciousness. The approach of this analysis is a synthesis of three philosophical traditions: (1) phenomenology which focuses on the analysis of the subjective experience and the structures of consciousness, (2) hermeneutics which centres on an understanding that is always linguistically based and involves a tradition, (3) dialectics, which allows modelling different perspectives in a unified act of perception. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with social media users and professional information senders who use social media for commercial purposes, mainly focusing on the first (social media users).

As already mentioned, the study combines different methodological approaches. The interviews were held using the approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) developed by Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin (2009), while the interview analysis was based on the hermeneutic dialectic approach which pays special attention to the contradictions—the inconsistencies revealed by the analysis of experience are considered not as an undesirable aspect of the research but as different perspectives forming the meaning and mutually negative statements about the phenomenon of a perception point to different perspectives of the same phenomenon.

It should be noted that this approach used in the discussion of norms is problematic, so a significant part of the article will be devoted to issues related to the method (or, in other words, the validity of the use of IPA in analysing norms). Another important issue arising from the approach used is the distinction between subjective and lived experience, which will also be outlined in this article, as this distinction allows to understand what kind of descriptive forms can be expected from this type of study. Finally, the relationship between norms and normality and their presentation on social media will be considered. In this context, norms appear as a medium.

2. PHENOMENOLOGY IN THE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PERCEPTION

In the context of norms as a medium, it is important to pay some attention to the problems of IPA application in connection with the analysis of experience.

IPA has evolved as a qualitative research method, initially for psychological research. But, according to Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin, the method is also intended for a wider field of research in the human, social and health sciences (2009, 1). The method, based on a wide range of 20th century philosophy, develops its concepts and basic views mainly integrating phenomenology and hermeneutics. Authors such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Gadamer, whose theories highlight specific, lived experience, are cited as points of reference. But this methodological technique (on the basis of this philosophical sources to create a qualitative method for developing descriptions that would be applicable in psychological investigations) raises a number of objections (Tuffour, 2017; Drummond, Hendry, McLafferty & Pringle, 2011).

These objections could be divided into three groups: (1) An objection to the use of philosophical (especially phenomenological) terms and ideas in practical research aimed at achieving general applicability based on the descriptions of one's own experience provided by specific individuals. In other words it is blamed for the loss or degradation of philosophical views for practical purposes. (2) An objection of making individual statements of experience (narratives) a fact of lived experience or viewing some person's story of self-experience as the experience without sufficiently emphasizing the significance of the narrative. This type of criticism states that researchers using IPA have access to the stories rather than the experience. (3) An objection to the meaning of the results gained by this method—should these descriptions be seen as the result of scientific inquiry or only as an opinion of an individual researcher (or a group of researchers).

If the first objection is debatable because, on the one hand, it expresses confidence in a specific vocabulary (to which one might agree) and specific reflection on philosophical concepts, but on the other hand in analysing social media using the IPA approach, it is possible to maintain a philosophical, phenomenological view and a correct use of concepts (if concepts are retained as meanings rather than their meaning being demonstrated in the 'external' world). The second and third objections are in some way related and one aspect of its refutation will be addressed in the next section. However, regarding the possibility of generalizing the analysis of the experience story, it should be noted that the analysis of the stories may differ. General

conclusions can be drawn from a particular story of individual experience by asking about the necessary conditions that allow one or another way to indulging in a particular experience or experience story (that is, when one tries not only to present the particular experience but also to outline the conditions that allow the experience to appear as it is conceived). It is however important to outline how the application of IPA in the study “Philosophical Analysis of Information Perception in Social Media” is perceived and used to clarify the arguments that will be put forward when interpreting norms as media.

3. *LIVED EXPERIENCE, SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE, AND EXPERIENCE*

One of the most important tasks of phenomenology is to analyse experience—how the world and everything that happens can be experienced. However, there is a debate about the feasibility of generalizing this analysis of experience—whether this analysis can provide general results. Husserl’s philosophy plays an important role in solving the problem of intersubjectivity, which in a way serves as one of the starting points from which one can justify general significance and not fall into solipsism. But the problem of solipsism is related to only one of many aspects of the possibility of generalization. Discussions on the generalization of the descriptive approach to phenomenology began during Husserl’s life and continue to this day. The purpose of this article is not to engage in these discussions but rather to offer a distinction between the concepts that are useful for showing different aspects of experience in phenomenological analysis. This distinction is useful for a better understanding of what kind of research makes it possible to arrive at the core idea presented in this article—why the norms should be interpreted as a medium.

IPA mostly emphasizes the importance of lived experience: “...IPA researchers are especially interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people.” (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009, 1)

But at the same time, the experience stories gained using IPA are a kind of subjective experience. Although lived experience presupposes variability and concreteness, it is alienated in its presentation as belonging to a particular person with a certain view of the world and a way of presenting experience, a certain subjective perspective on the experienced. Thus, the question arises as to the type of relationship between the lived experience and the subjective experience. Both lived experience and subjective experience characterize the experience. The question is what kind of characteristics they are and why they are relevant from a phenomenological perspective.

Erfahrung, translated into English as experience, can be understood as having four meanings:

- as skills acquired, such as work experience;
- as everything experienced in a lifetime—everything seen, perceived, etc.;
- as knowledge gained through intuition, perception, sensation that serve as the basis of knowledge;
- as “*etwas in Erfahrung bringen*” in which experience is understood as clarification, testing (something is clarified through testing).

If we are looking at these different meanings of experience phenomenologically, of course, they all merge and mark one phenomenon, in which the most important description is experience as a given. In *Holzwege* Heidegger points to two kinds of experience in analysing the concept of Hegel’s experience. On the one hand experience is associated with *Erlebness*, on the other hand with knowledge, or in other words it is experienced as phenomenon (*Erscheinens*) and truth (*Wahrheit*) (Heidegger, 1977, 208). These two aspects are related in a Hegelian dialectic form, i.e., although they may be opposite to each other, they are nevertheless related in the same experience and in this relation they constantly complement and adjust each other.

Lived experience emphasizes the specific topicality of the experience—it is a concrete, changing, contextual experience in which a certain phenomenon is perceived, experienced, understood. In this view, it is in a way contrasted with an abstract, general, formal description of the experience, which tends to explain and formalize all the different specific experiences in its explanation. The specific experience in its everyday life, on the one hand, appears as a simple, directly given experience, but in the analysis it is revealed as a diverse, multi-layered, complex structure or system. In the moment of experience the present, the direct does not cause discussions or questions about its givenness in experience, but when it is questioned the experience reveals itself as the most inexplicable phenomenon. In other words, the concept of lived experience emphasizes a flow that includes a particular individual in his or her world and as a particular experience it changes freely in its flow. The opposite of the free flow of lived experience is the abstraction which expresses a static explanation that recognizes the state of affairs.

In turn, the subjective experience does not emphasize the flow of experience but rather establishes the perspective of experience in the present moment. On the one hand it is an alienated, descriptive characterization of the perspective from which one can perceive what is experienced; on the other hand, it emphasizes the diversity of experience. In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger clearly describes the subject and subjectivity both as alienation (or distancing) and as orientation in the world (spatial orientation)

Zu beachten bleibt aber, daß die Ausrichtung, die zur Ent-fernung gehört, durch das In-der-Welt-sein fundiert ist. Links und rechts sind nicht etwas „Subjektives“, dafür das Subjekt ein Gefühl hat, sondern sind Richtungen der Ausgerichtetheit in eine je schon zuhandene Welt hinein. „Durch das bloße Gefühl eines Unterschieds meiner zwei Seiten“ könnte ich mich nie in einer Welt zurechtfinden. Das Subjekt mit dem „bloßen Gefühl“ dieses Unterschieds ist ein konstruktiver Ansatz, der die wahrhafte Verfassung des Subjekts außer acht läßt, daß das Dasein mit diesem „bloßen Gefühl“ je schon in einer Welt ist und sein muß, um sich orientieren zu können. (Heidegger, 2001, 109)

Subjective experience is the perspective of the perception of experience established at a particular moment. And not just one particular experience but also the awareness that there is a possibility of different experiences that are involved in the world. By saying “subjective,” at the same time it is said that other specific, directly given world experiences are also possible. It also allows understanding the necessity of the intersubjectivity in Husserl’s *Cartesianische Meditationen*. Subjective experience always includes the aspect of intersubjectivity (1950, V). This aspect should not be perceived as present in the fluidity of lived experience, but as constituted by abstraction, based on experience.

By distinguishing between three concepts of experience—lived experience, subjective experience and experience—it is possible to better understand what kind of emphasis is placed when thinking about different types of experience. In the case of lived experience, the temporal aspect involved in the situation is essential (the flow of lived experience is necessarily temporal). In turn, subjective experience emphasizes the spatial characterization and it is established as one of many. As Heidegger writes:

Dieses Wort Subjectum müssen wir freilich als die Übersetzung des griechischen ὑποκείμενον verstehen. Das Wort nennt das Vor-Liegende, das als Grund alles auf sich sammelt. Diese metaphysische Bedeutung des Subjektbegriffes hat zunächst keinen betonten Bezug zum Menschen und vollends nicht zum Ich. (Heidegger, 1977, 88)

Finally, the third concept or the experience is given and in the course of the analysis it is alienated in one of its aspects. On the one hand, it is a lived experience; on the other hand, it is *Vor-Liegende*.

4. ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The methodological separation of lived experience and subjective experience, as mentioned above, shows a significant difference in emphasis when analysing phenomenon of experience that is not directly given to the researcher himself. Or, in other words, this distinction reveals the possibility for the analysis of experience which

is not directly available to the researcher himself. If at first it might seem that other experiences are available only as a stories or narratives that rely on analysis, then using the concept of subjective experience, it is possible to talk about both experience in a broader sense and the flow of lived experience. To explain this, I will mention theoretical considerations in the context of the study “Philosophical Analysis of Information Perception in Social Media.”

In analysing the interviews held during this research, norms emerged as one of the perceptual phenomena regarding the information within social media. Norms are understood here not only as consciously desirable activities, but also as determinants of phenomenon of perception.

The problems related to interpreting subjective experience have been discussed above, but in the case of interviews the question is: whose subjective experience is analysed, who is the bearer of that experience? In such a study what can be considered as given in experience and who is the subject of that experience? In simple terms, it would seem that the subject and the analysed experience belong to the people who are interviewed. But when thinking deeper about this situation, it is obvious that the researcher is experiencing the person who is interviewed and her story which is already structured experience while being revealed to the researcher.

Thus, it could be said that it is the subjective experience of the researcher which is analysed—the researcher is the one who is experiencing the person who is interviewed and who reveals her subjective experience. In that case, there is at least two-stage division of experience—the subjective experience of a subjective experience, which is even further alienated in the study outline, creating a condition for a new experience of those experiences. So it seems that in this way we can end up with an endless series of experiences that are experiencing other experiences. From the philosophical point of view it is not necessarily something that has to be avoided, yet for the study that also seeks the possibility to be [of being] practically applicable it is a problem that should be solved by choosing a clearer methodological point of reference. In this case, I propose that these experience stories can be viewed as which would be Heidegger *Gerede* or *the Talk*.

Der Ausdruck „Gerede“ soll hier nicht in einer herabziehenden Bedeutung gebraucht werden. Er bedeutet terminologisch ein positives Phänomen, das die Seinsart des Verstehens und Auslegens des alltäglichen Daseins konstituiert. Die Rede spricht sich zumeist aus und hat sich schon immer ausgesprochen. Sie ist Sprache. (Heidegger, 2001, 167)

The interviews can be seen like conversations (*Gerede*) which establish an everyday presence or *the being there*. They present common experiences as linguistic being

together, and thus the distinctions that try to recognize who owns the subjective experience that is being analysed lose their relevance, because in a conversation experiences do not belong to isolated actors, but the spoken experience is experienced with no primary distinction between the conversation partners as separate experiences. In this case, with the aim of analysing the subjective experience, lived experience is also obtained—it appears as a researcher’s involvement in the analysis of subjective experience. By analysing his own experience, the researcher forms a flow of lived experience from the perspective of subjective experience. This fixation of the flow of experience serves as an essential part of the study, which can be viewed as a phenomenological description.

Such an explanation might solve the problem of method, but the uncertainty about the status of the conversation itself remains. The question is: how social media experience presents media that fades before its own content? The media are at the same time identified as an instrument that ensure the presence of something. Likewise, the media is perceived as a screen presenting some sort of absence, obscuring the direct *being there*. The media are also something in which being there is constituted as being together in a common field of conversation. In other words, the media are experienced, on the one hand, as something which is presenting (in which content takes on a certain form), and on the other hand, it is self-presenting—being experienced as something that presents itself. But since the aim of the media is to show something, in the moment when the media are identified, they lose their transparency and are no longer able to show what they are. They disappear in front of that which is mediated in media.

5. NORMS AND NORMALITY

“The rest would seem to be normal, as they say, in acceptable frames” (Male, 65).

And now returning to the norms in the context of the previous thought, it can be noted that people, when describing their media experience, present the two types of norms mentioned above—norms as requirements or rules and norms as a measure of perceptual potential. In the interviews, both these aspects appeared—norms as unwritten laws and norms as a measure. In the previous study conducted in 2015–2016 several young people were interviewed about their media use habits, and some vivid examples appeared, where the two understandings of the norms were mutually inconsistent at the same time. For instance:

— Have you ever posted anything on YouTube?

— No.

— Why?

— I don't like it. It seems idiotic to me. I don't know, I guess that first of all that's because if you do something wrong, others will mock you. They really will. OK, on the one hand I guess that I would want to post something there, at least a little bit, but on the other hand, I don't want to do so because everyone would see it, and some would dislike it. OK, it's fine for people to express their views, but YouTube is a site where people mock and laugh at everyone who posts a video, and so on. At our school, for instance, there was a girl who posted videos, but she no longer has any friends. [...] Another guy from our class posted a video of him dancing and doing all kinds of things, and the things that he showed in terms of dancing led to everyone laughing at him at school.

— Did you yourself like how he was dancing?

— No, I ... I don't know, well, that's him, and if he wants to do that, if he wants to do it, then he can do anything that he wants. If he wants to post, then ... well, I just don't like the hip hop style as such. He danced well in terms of hip hop, but I don't think that we should mock someone who is doing something that he likes doing, because there's no point to that. Everybody at school calls him a gay just because he dances hip hop. That's not normal!

— Have you ever mocked someone else?

— Yes. Andreda's channel is the most idiotic one that I have ever seen. I don't understand how that girl can post such terrible things. She's sick!" (Female, 13).

(Jankovskis & Jankovska, 2016, 69)

In this context, although the purpose of these two types of description differs (what, how and why something is described), at its core, norms and normality are related phenomena that represent a particular type of world experience.

It could even be said that norms and normality are in a relationship similar to that of subjective experience and lived experience—that is, norms are descriptive and form a certain system of orientation, while normality is what is expressed in a certain topicality in which norms are made present in everyday life.

As Husserl's researcher Maren Wehrle describes in her article "Die Normativität der Erfahrung—Überlegungen zur Beziehung von Normalität und Aufmerksamkeit bei E. Husserl," Husserl has three notions of normality: (1) normality as a transcendental condition of experience in the form of certain rules of consciousness (passivity); (2) normality as a process that ensures the consistency and preservation of experience (embodiment); (3) Normality as the goal of such a process in the form of a regulatory cognitive ideal (intersubjectivity) (Wehrle, 2010, 175).

All three understandings are linked and follow from each other. Normality takes the form of a certain kind of coherence and proportionality which is manifested by its purposefulness. The requirement of coherence of experience, both at the individual level and at the intersubjective level, manifests itself as normality, from which norms may be derived, which may or may not be perceived as a requirement of regularity.

If, as a condition of experience, normality appears as a necessary, self-contained regularity, then through the generalization of experience, expectations arise that other subjects will have similar experiences in the same situation—norms present themselves as the ideal seeking to express the desired experience in a given situation. It can be said that normality (and thus norms) can be understood both as experienced fact—already given in the experience itself, and as a measure by which all experiences are mapped.

This dual nature of norms, on the one hand, resonates with the concept of language developed within the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger—language appears as an object of thought or that about which one thinks; on the other hand, language is always already present before language, meaning that language as an object of thought is always already situated within language and thus never fully succumbs to the abstraction about the “language.” The same applies to norms—phenomenologically norms are always manifesting themselves before their presentation in a mode of perception, which are afterwards saturated with the content of values.

Norms, as a necessary condition for the preservation and perception of experience, appear as the transparency of experience—norms are forming the experience, so in some way they fade away from the experience. Descriptions of norms are constructed from acts of experience. Those are not the rules that are experienced but that what they normalize. When norms appear in narratives of experience as self-presentations, they are rather deprived from their substance rather than demonstrate it which is very similar to what happens with media when they are perceived as self-presentations.

6. CONCLUSION

We can look at the media in three aspects: (1) The media as instrument; (2) The media as screen; (3) The media as environment (Jankovskis & Jankovska, 2016, 12). In the first case the medium is used, in the second case the medium is the active one—it influences a viewer (listener, reader), and in the third case the medium is the place where the person is present in its various aspects. Norms as a medium are not something that a person uses, but rather like a screen—glass through which the world is perceived in a certain order, as normal. And at the same time, the presentation of normality in social media and the demand for normality of the individuals involved is the self-presentation of norms as a medium. Norms not only limit the perspective of perception, but are also actualized by individuals who experience being in the world through the prism of established norms or normalities. As one respondent put it in the interview—norms determine the acceptable frames. Similarly to language, viewed

as the world we inhabit, norms are a certain kind of structuring or medium of this world, because they are not the world in themselves.

Therefore I am suggesting that we can look at norms as the media. On the one hand, they are like a language which defines the boundaries of perceived experience, and, on the other hand, they disappear before the presented content.

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