

RATIONAL WILL AND RATIONAL MOTIVATION. HUSSERL ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ORGANIZING A RATIONAL COMMUNITY ¹

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DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2025.01.00003

Abstract. *One can rightfully consider Edmund Husserl as a late follower of the 18th-century Enlightenment. He had a profoundly rationalistic standpoint, and he persistently attempted to represent a rational and essentially rationalistic view on every matter. This stance, however, was completed for him by an increasing emphasis on the role of emotions and will in the interpretation of human life. In his recurring lectures on ethics (1908-1914, 1920-1924, and in the 1930s), Husserl consistently represented the idea that ethically proper action must stem from a harmonious cooperation between reason (Vernunft), emotion (Gefühl), and will. Even in his ethical lecture, Husserl emphasized the special role of reason, although, in his view, without emotions, ethical attitude and behavior would not be complete. In this context, Husserl used the notion of rational emotions and motivations. What is of further particular importance in our present study is the fact that Husserl represented this conception also in the field of politics and political theory. Husserl had in mind the ideal of an ultimately open, rational, tolerant, and empathetic society that relies upon the feelings of love (Liebesgemeinschaft) as the end-telos of history. In such a society, every human being conceives other humans as, in the end, rational individuals, who could not be subjected to discrimination because of their ethnic, national, religious, etc. background, whose most important feature is that they are feeling, emotional, and rational people. In this process, to achieve an ultimately rational society with fully unfolded collective reason, Husserl attaches great importance to the capability of rational motivation and rational will, and to the fact that humans, despite their biases and unchecked but deeply loved beliefs, are, in the end, rational and convincing beings. That latter fact should give us hope that despite every hatred, hostility, ethnic, religious, nationalist, and other controversies, homophobic, xenophobic, racist feelings, etc., we, mankind, still have the capability to reach the level of an entirely rational society someday in the future.*

Keywords: *Edmund Husserl, rational will, rational motivation, society of love, phenomenology of politics.*

The article **received:** May 5, 2025; **approved:** June 29, 2025.

¹ This study was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (project: BO/00143/23/2) and by the No. 138745 project of Hungarian Scientific Research Fund.

1. Introduction

It has been a widely held view that Husserl was a rigidly rationalist thinker with an unshakable confidence in human rationality. According to this interpretation, although emotions and feelings appeared in the philosophical horizon of Edmund Husserl, he conceived them as inferior capabilities over which reason had an unquestionable, unambiguous precedence.¹ If there is a conflict between reason and feeling, at least this reading of Husserl implies, then reason must always win, otherwise man does not deserve the name of a rational being. A closer study of Husserl's writing, with a particular focus on his lecture notes and research manuscripts, however, enlightens the careful reader that this interpretation is a little simplifying and one-sided. Emotions and affections received an increasingly greater importance in Husserl's thought, with specific attention to his lectures on ethics and genetic phenomenology after 1918. In this context it is also highly relevant that in his posthumously published lengthy, systematic work, *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins* (*Studies on the Structure of Consciousness*) (Husserl 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d), whose main parts stemmed from the period between 1900 and 1914, and in which Husserl devoted detailed, very careful and accurate analyses to the problem of feelings, emotions, sensations, motivations, and the will. In his seminars on ethics between 1908 and 1914 (Husserl 1988a), Husserl articulated the opinion that the ethical act always emerges from the cooperation of the intellect, emotions, and will (Smith 2007). In the second book of *Ideas* (Husserl 1989), Husserl spoke of rational will and rational motivation. All these elements—in our opinion—play a crucial role in a phenomenological, and more particularly Husserlian theory of politics, with special regard to the question of an authentic political community.

The idea of a completely rational and rationalistic political community, which is indeed inspired by the optimism of the Enlightenment to which Husserl was greatly indebted, is all the more important and relevant today, because in contemporary political discourse and events, we witness an apparent decline of rationality and rationalism. People are discussing a “post-truth world” in which actual facts are no longer considered paramount, and instead, personal beliefs and feelings are deemed more important. What people want to believe and not what really is. Politicians are actually attacking science and scientists for not conforming to their political program (namely, that they are researching and publishing about things like climate change and its possible and actual threats). There are political campaigns and actual governmental programs that are built upon lies, ethnic hatred, discrimination, xenophobia, racism, and a harsh rejection, or at least criticism, of basic civil rights. In such programs and political communities, alleged or actual differences between man and man are in the foreground, instead of really uniting us, namely, *rationality* and the *fundamental capacity of empathy*. We are living in an age of rising and raging *irrationality*, something that, precisely as Husserl claimed (1970: 299), threatens the very existence of humanity in the physical, mental, and spiritual senses of the word. To me, it seems that there has never been a greater need for

¹ Heidegger definitely interpreted Husserl in this manner, and many Heideggerians also. It is also the opinion of Werner Marx that Husserl, at least for a very long period in his lifetime, was an absolutely committed rationalist, who believed in the superiority of reason (Marx 1970). For a critique of this view see Lee 1993.

Husserlian ideas of an authentic political community than now, in our time of globally prevailing irrationality.

In the *next* part of this current study, I am going to analyse Husserl's own considerations on the concept of rational will (*vernünftiger Wille*, *Vernunftwollen*) and rational motivation (*Vernunftmotivation*) as it is presented in the second book of *Ideas* (Husserl 1989), and in his other works and manuscripts (e.g. in *Studies on the Structure of Consciousness*, Husserl 2020c). The *third* part of our paper will treat the question how an *ethically responsible* and also *rational act* is formed according to Husserl. In it we are also going to investigate the problem of ethical attitude, namely, whether *an axiological and ethical apodicticity is possible from the Husserlian point of view?* A further crucial topic in this regard is whether people are convincing in ethical matters, in the case of ethically conflicting and problematic situations. This latter question flows logically from the investigations of the second (next) part of the study, that is to say, from questions of rational motivation and will. It is fundamental to address the questions raised in the *concluding part* of our essay, which explores the possibility of a fully rational community grounded in the feeling of love (*Liebesgemeinschaft*). This issue is evidently connected to the question of the convincibility and rationality of human beings. Husserl, as we will see in this study, was rather optimistic in this regard. We also have good reason to be optimistic concerning this question, as I attempt to demonstrate in this study, despite all our negative experiences throughout the entire, earlier process of history, and despite all the massacres and collectively committed atrocities in history that one can find. The alternative would be horrible. And we still have good examples and precedents that despite all the bad, ill, and poor decisions, all the egotistic, what is even more evil deeds, humans can behave as rational, empathetic creatures that give us hope.

2. Rational Will and Rational Motivation as Preconditions for an Authentic Ethical and Political Behavior

In the *Logical Investigations*, intellect and acts of theoretical reason (along with objectifying acts) were unambiguously superior to emotions, feelings, and non-objectifying acts (see e.g. Melle 1990; Lee 1993). This situation started to change around 1906/07, when Husserl began to place objectifying and non-objectifying acts,¹ theoretical, practical, and axiological reason on the same level, and also started to attach to more importance to feelings and emotions (Melle 1990; Lee 1993); and this picture,

¹ Husserl, in his *Logical Investigations* (2005a, 2005b), makes a distinction between objectifying and non-objectifying acts. Objectifying acts have a concrete, primary, either real (physical or mental) or ideal (categorical) object to which it can relate. Perception, thought, recalling, anticipation or imagination are examples of objectifying acts. Non-objectifying acts have objectifying ones as their foundations, but they themselves do not have a concrete, primary object. Feelings, emotions, axiological acts belong in the sphere of non-objectifying acts. So, Husserl's idea is, that when we have certain emotions, we grasp certain concrete things first, in perception for example, and then emotionally react to them. When we evaluate something through an axiological act, we have the primary, let us say, "neutral" object first—in perception, thought, imagination etc.—, and then we evaluate it later. The act of feeling, emotion, evaluation, etc.—in Husserl's view—relies upon an object grasped in perception, thought or imagination, etc. See also: Lee 1993, 2004.

lastly, fundamentally changed after 1920, when Husserl elaborated the details of his so-called “genetic phenomenology”.¹ In his late period, from the 1920s to the 1930s, Husserl explained that every higher-level act and clear, transparent rationality itself emerge from a passive, affective, and ultimately emotional sphere (see: Lee 1993; Steinbock 1995; Römer 2010; Husserl 2006). Feelings, emotions, and will have a particularly significant role in Husserl’s lectures on ethics (1988a, 2004), and ethically related manuscripts (2014, 265-527).

Ethics was a recurring topic in Husserl’s work of life (see: Melle 1990, 1991, 2002, 2007; Drummond 1995; Smith 2007: 356–401; Peucker 2008; Donohoe 2016; Loidolt 2019; Monticelli 2021; Caminada 2023, etc.). It was one of his main endeavors to formulate and articulate a philosophically and phenomenologically fully legitimate ethics that could be applied in practical life, and which has its own, entirely graspable *apodictic character*. It is Husserl’s opinion that through phenomenology we can elaborate an ethic whose judgments and considerations possess a more profound and deeper type of evidence than non-phenomenological ethics. In this way, Husserl also believed that he had at least opened the way to a *truly scientific ethics*, which centuries earlier René Descartes had in mind. In this conception of phenomenologically grounded ethics, Husserl also expressed the opinion that an ethically proper decision and act must embrace a cooperation between emotion, will, and reason. Husserl, in this context, was particularly critical of Kant for failing to recognize the fundamental role of emotions in his ethics, with special attention to *the feeling of love* (Husserl 1988a; Melle 2002; Smith 2007).

Will and volition, according to Husserl, are capacities of decision, position-taking, and initiating an action or a sequence of connected actions. In such a conception, the idea of an embodied subject is already involved, as Andrea Staiti rightfully observed (Staiti 2019). “The ‘I will’ entails the ‘I can’”—as Husserl says (2020c: 1). The “I can”, in this context, refers to the bodily capacities of a corporeal ego. In this way, Husserl’s concept of will and volition is deeply embedded in his broader conception of a concrete person, who lives in a world, has a body, and is a socio-historical and cultural being. Will, on the other hand, also refers in Husserl to a broader capacity or a wider phenomenal sphere—I can, and often I should, make decisions in my head, concerning intellectual, theoretical, and practical, moral issues; I have to make plans, and commitments regarding near and distant future. Will and volition are implied in all these processes.

Will could also be conceived as a form of *striving* in the subject (Lee 1993), whose *direction* is decided by her. Nam-In Lee emphasizes the central role of will in the philosophy of Husserl in this meaning, and therefore he ventures the opinion that Husserl’s position could also be characterized as a form of “transcendental voluntarism” (Lee 1993: 245; in Husserl: Husserl 1959: 25, 194). Will, as a constant striving, is a

¹ “Genetic phenomenology” in Husserl is a specific discipline of phenomenology that he started to elaborate systematically in the 1920s and 1930s, whose main objective is to unfold the apriori laws and principles of genesis (e.g., Husserl 2001). It is Husserl’s opinion that every apparently fixed and already formed entity and object that appear to us presuppose a process of formation or emergence, in other words, some sort of genesis. “Genetic phenomenology” attempts to explore and describe the apriori aspect of this genetic process.

manifestation of the *instinctual aspect* of the subject. The willful or volitional striving, according to Husserl, is always an instinctual striving. On the lower level, it is directed to the preservation and sustenance of our physical, bodily, vital being, in the form of vital, biological instincts (Husserl 2014: 83–136; Lee 1993). On the higher levels, Husserl also speaks about cultural, intellectual self-preservation (Selbsterhaltung) and about the instinctual striving to preserve our cultural being. Husserl, in this context, also speaks about rational instincts and instinctual rationality (Vernunfttrieb) (Husserl 2014: 225–226). Husserl holds that humans are ultimately rational beings (Husserl 2014, 225), a view that is also reflected in their instinctual structures.¹ Humans are *motivated* to act rationally, or, in other words, besides vital and biological motivations, humans also constantly have *rational motivations* (Husserl 1989: 231–233).²

Concerning Husserl, we should speak of a *two-level model of instincts* from a phenomenological perspective, namely, one that makes an emphatic distinction between biological and intellectual or cultural instincts. First of all, we should note that Husserl does not discuss instincts in the naturalistic, objectivistic, or psychologistic sense of the word, but rather attempts to outline a *transcendental theory of instincts*. That means that under the phenomenological reduction, instincts and instinctiveness refer to a *passive, teleologically directedness of intentionality*. From a transcendental and phenomenological viewpoint, purely biological instincts could be conceived as instinctual tendencies pertaining to a more passive level of the ego, which are directed to preserve the prevailing physical and bodily self-constitution of the transcendental ego, while the more active and more egological instinctual strivings of the transcendental subject are related to realize the more *rational aspects* of the ego. There could be conflicts between the two levels, but in Husserl's opinion, if one wants to act authentically, then one should act *as an independent, self-conscious, and rational being*, and one should follow one's higher-level instincts and motivations, which belong in the sphere of rationality. According to Husserl, this means being a *human being, a rational ego* in the strict sense of the word, and thus behaving *authentically* (see Husserl 1989, 281–282).

According to Husserl, alongside the blind, purely instinctual tendencies aimed at the maintenance of physical existence, there are also functioning in the human being intellectual, rational instincts, as well as motivational drives that point toward such action. In this context, rational will means allowing reasonable motivations to prevail, and committing ourselves to reasonable insights, recognitions, and thoughts—thus making reasonable decisions and behaving as rational beings. Husserl is convinced that only the will, understood as rational will, can lead to ethically justifiable decisions and a *moral and authentic way of life*.

¹ This Husserlian claim will be especially important concerning our final conclusions and in the last part of this present study.

² In the German original: Vernunftmotivation; in the English translation: *motivation of reason*.

3. Emergence of ethical rationality and ethically rational actions in Husserl

Husserl's ethics is essentially *an ethics of values and responsibility*. According to him, we are confronted with values, that is to say, the axiological, and in certain cases morally, ethically relevant aspect of things,¹ situations, persons, etc., to which we could either be blind and evasive, or open and affirming. If we are open to values, they raise a particular sort of *responsibility* within us, motivating us to behave in a certain way. Values make us feel certain ways, provoke feelings of sympathy and antipathy in us, depending on whether they are positive or negative. They function like sources of motivation. Values, furthermore, as pertaining to a peculiar sort of object, namely belonging in the realm of ideal and categorial entities, in Husserl's view, are constituted² through combined acts of rationality,³ feelings, and emotions. What is particularly important for Husserl in this regard is the idea that values are partly rational entities, they are the constitutive product of *axiological rationality*.

According to Husserl, already the world of natural attitude, outside the realm of phenomenological reduction, is a world full of colors, qualities, and values (Husserl 1983: 53).⁴ In the phenomenological attitude, under the phenomenological reduction, we can perform a methodologically and scientifically accurate analysis of ethical attitude and behavior, outside the phenomenological stance. Of course, before the emergence of phenomenological philosophy, since the appearance of mankind on Earth, people, in the optimal case, have behaved in an ethically correct and justifiable manner. On the one hand, initially, Husserl aimed to provide a phenomenological and philosophical analysis of different ethical positions, furthermore, to clarify the conditions under which it could be said that people are truly acting in an ethically responsible and commendable way. Just as Kant (1998) did, Husserl also believed that we did not invent morality and ethics, but rather offered a detailed description of ethical behavior from a phenomenological perspective.⁵ On the other hand, which will be analyzed later in this section, Husserl

¹ Axiology and ethics are not synonyms in Husserl. The former is a broader concept, that is to say, in his opinion, there are values that do not belong in ethics and morality, such as instrumental values. For example, when a knife is sharp, and it is a *good* knife to cut things properly.

² There is no room in this article to go into the details of Husserl's theory of constitution. Here, I believe, it is enough to say that to "constitute" something for Husserl briefly means that something (or consciousness itself) appears to consciousness according to apriori necessary laws. "Constitution" in Husserl refers to the apriori necessary laws of emergence and appearance. See e.g. Sokolowski 1970, 2000; Moran 2000: 164–166; Zahavi 2003: 72–78.

³ In the case of humans. Husserl also considered animals (in some manuscripts even plants and unicellular organisms, so every living being, see Lee 1993, 225–230) transcendental subjects, constituting (see in the next footnote) a world around them, and this world has qualitative and axiological features for them also. In the case of animals, values and axiological features of their surroundings (good or bad, tasty or disgusting, attractive or threatening etc.) are constituted in their acts of affections, feelings, and emotions.

⁴ Ibid.: "Immediately, physical things stand there as Objects of use, the 'table' with its 'books,' the 'drinking glass,' the 'vase' the 'piano,' etc. These value-characteristics and practical characteristics also belong constitutively to the Objects 'on hand' as Objects, regardless of whether or not I turn to such characteristics and the Objects. Naturally this applies not only in the case of the 'mere physical things,' but also in the case of humans and brute animals belonging to my surroundings. They are my 'friends' or 'enemies,' my 'servants' or 'superiors,' 'strangers' or 'relatives,' etc."

⁵ In the case of Kant, from the standpoint of critical philosophy.

represented the view that phenomenology could also enhance the moral responsibility and rationality in individuals and communities (Husserl 1970: 340–341).

Humans can behave in an individualistic, hedonistic, egotistic manner—many of them, most of the time, actually live that way. There is a certain sort of rationality behind such behavior. Actually, many ethical thinkers of modernity (as well as those of antiquity) believed that egoism is the only justifiable, ethically righteous way of action and life (e.g., Hobbes, Bernard de Mandeville, Helvétius, etc.). Husserl thought that in the background of such an egoistic, individualistic, hedonistic ethical conception, we can find the narrow, shallow, one-sided rationality of modernity, which Husserl believed to be the main source of our contemporary social and ecological crisis. Rationalism of the modern era, Husserl assumed, abstracted everywhere the richness of the world, from its qualitative, non-instrumental features, and strived for an atomistic, mechanistic account of society and individuals. Modern rationalism almost consciously rooted out the *sense of the qualitative* in individuals. We need a new rationality open to the non-instrumental, axiological aspects of reality (see also: Kohák 2003). Husserl, however, is also of the opinion that rationality itself, even before the emergence of phenomenology, should function in such a way that it is open to the entire richness of the world. This openness pertains to the very essence of reason (Vernunft). Only during modernity did things go astray. Even in the modern era, to this day, at least in Husserl's view, when one followed correct and authentic ethical principles, one acted under the guidance of this universally open, so to speak, 'multilateral' rationality.

When one could follow the voice of this universal reason, Husserl thought, one could already *feel* that it is not right to abstract from the wider context, from the interest of other people, of society, to relate to other people as mere instruments, and to live a completely egoistic, hedonistic, and individualistic life. One could have—in Husserl's view—the *rationaly motivated feeling* or affection that such a behavior is wrong, and *it is not even rational in the proper, more rigorous sense of the word*. This is the point where rational will and rational motivation are especially important for Husserl. Rational will, as indicated earlier, is the capacity to make rational decision and to act rationally. Rational motivations and rational instincts, as clarified in the previous section, are instinctual tendencies that point the way to think, decide, and act rationally, facilitating rational behavior in humans. *Ethical rationality* in Husserl, in this regard, means that one acts as *an empathetic person*, who does not relate to other people as mere instruments of her objectives, but as person, possessing an absolute value, and someone who respects their autonomy, their own intentions and objectives, as far as they do not want to harm other people.¹ In ethical rationality, feelings of compassion, sympathy, respect, care, and love take place. But, in Husserl's view, rational feelings (which means in this context, universally open and unbiased), reason (Vernunft), and will have to cooperate with each other equally, in order to implement ethically rational and correct behavior.

In Husserl's opinion, a mentally healthy, rational individual relates to others in an empathic and open way. According to him, the modern, individualistic, egotistical stance

¹ In this regard Scheler's (1973) and Husserl's ethic are very similar to each other; namely, in the regard that the person has an absolute value in both of them.

does not correspond to the true nature of the human being, nor does it capture how man should really relate to himself and to other human beings if he is to behave as a truly rational being (see e.g., Husserl 1988a, 2004). The modern conception of rationality does not accurately reflect the true nature of rationality (1970), not even from an ethical perspective. In Husserl's view, there is such a thing as ethical rationality, but it must also incorporate empathy and the *feelings of love* (see: Melle 2002: 241–243; Smith 2007: 370, 378). Husserl asserts that phenomenology—and ethical phenomenology in particular—does not supplant this original and authentic form of ethical rationality; it merely attempts to clarify it, highlight its essential features, in order to help it realize itself more effectively in individuals and in society. Ethical phenomenology merely aims to enhance the effectiveness of ethical rationality by reinforcing rational ethical motivation in individuals. It seeks to achieve this by facilitating more effective access to rational insight through the method and attitude it promotes. According to Husserl, phenomenology in this way can contribute to the emergence of a genuinely rational and morally responsible society. This will also be the main topic of the next and concluding part of our paper.

4. Conclusion. Husserl's Ideal of a Fully Rational Community based on Rational Will and the Feeling of Love

If we have a closer look at Husserl's conception of rational will and authentic behavior, as presented in the second book of *Ideas* (1989: 231–233, 281–282) and in the *Studies on the Structure of Consciousness* (2020c: 70, 139, 426–427), we see that these notions are primarily related to the individual person and her autonomy. In the second book of *Ideas*, Husserl defines the autonomy and freedom of a singular subject that she can separate herself from the influence of others, and can make decisions on her own, exclusively relying on her own intuitions and rational insights, in complete independence from every other being. Relying solely upon one's own intellect and reason, this is the definition of a rational agent according to Husserl. Just like Kant's phrase (borrowed from Horace) in his article on *Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?*—"sapere aude!", "have the courage to use your own reason!" At this point, the question rightfully arises: how do we get to a fully rational society from individually thinking and rational persons, whose rationality is defined in complete intellectual, critical, and *motivational*¹ independence from the entire society and every other single person?

Concerning theoretical, and also pretheoretical, practical, and normative matters, in Husserl's opinion, *the ideal* would be the process of intersubjective, rational discussion, and the effort to persuade the other in a rational way (see Sokolowski 2008, Marosan 2020). We need to find the proper arguments to persuade the other person to see the real state of affairs, the actual truth, concerning both theoretical and practical issues. In the end, however, it is always the individual, concrete person who must see the truth and recognize it from his or her own first-person, subjective perspective. Individual insight is very important to Husserl, who throughout his life maintained a certain degree of *egological* emphasis in his philosophy as a methodological point of departure and

¹ That is to say, in Husserl's opinion, a rational person cannot let herself influenced *and motivated* by other people in making her own final rational decisions and considerations.

orientation. According to Husserl, however, the ideal correlate of all cognition and knowledge is a single, unified reality, whose unity guarantees that a fully rational community, capable of critique and self-critique, can never be completely divided and fragmented, since they are all investigating the same world, and their rational debate and discourse is based on the very same shared, collective horizon. The unity of this community is grounded and secured by the *openness of its members*, namely, by the fact that they are *open* to each other and the reality as such, in theoretical as well as practical regard (see also: Buckley 1996: 120–123).

In Husserl's view, the protection of individual personal freedom and dignity, as well as the guarantee of the conditions for rational, public debate, are the fundamental preconditions for speaking of a truly rational community. According to him, as we mentioned in the previous section, the person is an absolute value, and a morally responsible, rational society cannot be imagined in a community where this is not recognized as an absolute value and put into practice. In contrast, Husserl argues that a society cannot be considered free if it is unified by an "imperialistic organisation of the will" (eine imperialistische Willensorganisation)—that is, if the cohesion of the community is achieved through the suppression of individual autonomy (see Husserl 1988b: 53). As an example of such an "imperialistic unity of will," Husserl refers to the Catholic Church, particularly in its mediaeval form (Husserl 1988b: 70–72, 89–90). Conversely, a truly rational society, according to Husserl, provides space for the unfolding of personality; it does not impose itself upon the individual, and, as long as the person poses no threat to themselves or their social environment, it allows them to act freely, without restriction. At the same time, such a society, through its institutional structures, seeks to orient both discourse and thought as embedded in communal life, as well as individual and collective practice, in the direction of rational dialogue, theory, and praxis.

As our reader might already assume, Husserl's related remarks and considerations concerning the desirable structure and organization of society are highly relevant in *political regard*. Although Husserl had no systematic political theory, everything he said about the problem of politics clearly pointed toward the outlines of a phenomenologically based political theory (see, e.g., Drummond 2000; Miettinen 2015, 2023; Lee 2018; Suuronen 2023; Hickman 2023, among others). Husserl definitely had views on politics. Those considerations we referred to in the previous paragraph might make some readers think that Husserl represented a certain version of *liberalism*, which is not the case. Husserl was specifically critical of liberalism. In his opinion, liberalism was merely an expression of the inadequate, egotistic, and atomistic conception of modern rationalism, as seen in its philosophy of society, ethics, and politics (Miettinen 2023). According to Husserl, liberalism implies "a sociality of pure egoists" (Husserl 2004: 59; see also: Miettinen 2023). He was of the opinion that liberalism cannot create a truly harmonic, coherent, and empathetic society. If anything, Husserl's view was closer to Spinoza's notion of the ideal society,¹ than to a conception of classical liberalism.

¹ We should think of Spinoza's account offered in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, which is a rather activist conception of the state: "It very clearly follows from the fundamental principles of the state which I explained above that its ultimate purpose is not to dominate or control people by fear or subject them to

This means that Husserl preferred *a slightly holistic* conception of society to liberalism; however, he clearly articulated such a notion in which society, government, and the state *unconditionally* respected the freedom, independence, and civil rights of its citizens. It is, however, an idea of society which, in Husserl's notion, should be kept together by feelings of *rational love*. This *rational love* does not mean an unquestioning acceptance, where we tolerate everything the other person does, regardless of the harm they may cause to themselves and others around them; that love would not be rational at all (see Buckley 1996). Rational love refers to a universally open and empathetic attitude toward other humans (as we have already stated in the previous section). Rational will and motivation in a societal and political context indicate that the corresponding intersubjective and communicative relations, decisions, and acts *incorporate as their intrinsic features the just-mentioned feelings of rational love* (that is to say, love conceived in terms of open, unbiased, but benevolent and empathetic emotions). Furthermore, in such a political framework, rational will and motivation imply that members of society are willing to participate in rational, critical debates, have ears to hear the voice of reason, and are ready to follow it.

A society based on collectively shared rational insights, will, motivation, and feelings (love in particular) could be called a rational society. The possibility of such a society, according to Husserl, is given in the essential structure of human being as a rational subject and in the *teleological character of history*. Humans, as we have seen in section 2, possess an *instinctual tendency* toward rationality, even if they behave irrationally from time to time. In Husserl's view, this instinctual rational tendency prevails at least at the level of community, at the collective level of humans, in the long run. This is also reflected in the *teleological directedness of history*, which, according to Husserl, is ultimately related to the complete realization of reason on Earth and in the global human society.¹ There might be fallbacks in the rationalizing process of history.² Husserl evidently saw that, but in the end, he was also rather optimistic that the rational aspect of mankind should win. *The night of unreason*, he thought, cannot last forever.

At this point, one may rightfully ask what exactly this fully rational society would look like, the outlines of which Husserl sketches in various writings. With which political orientation would it be aligned, or most closely aligned? As for Husserl's own political views, we know that he was a moderately conservative monarchist and, for a long time,

the authority of another. On the contrary, its aim is to free everyone from fear so that they may live in security so far as possible, that is, so that they may retain, to the highest possible degree, their natural right to live and to act without harm to themselves or to others. It is not, I contend, the purpose of the state to turn people from rational beings into beasts or automata, but rather to allow their minds and bodies to develop in their own ways in security and enjoy the free use of reason, and not to participate in conflicts based on hatred, anger or deceit or in malicious disputes with each other. Therefore, the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom" (Spinoza 2007: 252).

¹ This is an apparently very Hegelian view, and we have to remark that Husserl indeed read the works of Hegel from time to time; and especially in the 1930s, due to the encouraging provided by his assistant, Eugen Fink, Husserl studied with a particular intensity the works of Hegel, especially his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. To this see: Stähler 2003.

² Husserl obviously saw the victory and activity of the National Socialist German Workers' Party in Germany in his time as an example of such a fallback.

a proud nationalist (see also: Husserl 1994: 222–226). During the First World War, as is well known, he gave speeches in support of Germany's involvement, presenting it as a kind of cultural mission (see: Husserl 1986: 267–292). Later, however, his views took on an increasingly cosmopolitan character (see: Suuronen 2023); his earlier nationalism, though not entirely disappearing, gradually gave way to statements and extended reflections expressing a belief in the world-historical role of *European humanity*—or rather, his nationalist sentiments became more and more deeply embedded within such reflections. Husserl was a moderate conservative, in whom, however, cosmopolitan overtones grew markedly stronger during the final phase of his career in the 1930s (Suuronen 2023).¹

What is particularly interesting—at least in my opinion—in this context are Husserl's partially and cautiously supportive remarks on *social democracy* and *democratic socialism* (Husserl 1994: 222–223, see also: Miettinen 2023); which enable us to interpret Husserl's related sporadic thoughts and words concerning politics and the idea of an authentic political community also as elements of a moderately leftist political theory, which indicates that an authentic and rational community would be one based on general solidarity, mutual understanding, collectively and institutionally organized and realized feelings of empathy and compassion; or briefly, an essentially socialistic or social democratic society. This interpretation, in my view, fits nicely with Husserl's other, frequent, and recurrent statements on history as a *universal*, permanent, and in the end unstoppable *progression*. The world around us, Husserl believes, is full of axiological potentialities and realities; and the teleological structure of this world and its history is directed to realize all these axiological potentialities in our world; and to create always new, always higher, more complex and sophisticated axiological possibilities, which could later be realized at a higher level of the development (see: Marosan 2024). The world is in a state of constant development or evolution, and a completely rational, self-conscious, and morally responsible society, in Husserl's opinion, could accelerate this process greatly.

The reality of a fully rational society, in the Husserlian sense, still lies ahead. For the time being, we are still living in an age of crisis. Ethno-nationalist, religious fundamentalist, and isolationist ideologies dominate the political horizon in many countries, posing fundamental obstacles to the process of rationalization. Ideologies that based upon particularity and feelings of hatred, such as xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, racism, patriarchal ideas, and misogyny (just think of the so-called “manosphere”).² The primary task now, in a Husserlian spirit, is to gradually win back the members of those communities where, from Husserl's perspective, irrationalist ideologies have taken hold—or even subjugated the entire political body in question or its vast majority—to the cause of universal, all-encompassing rationality. As we have seen in earlier parts of this article, this would mean nothing other than nurturing greater insight,

¹ In my opinion, Husserl's philosophy of politics and sociality is the closest—within the context of contemporary philosophy—to the representatives of communitarianism, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer.

² The expression “Manosphere” refers to a various collection of websites, blogs, and online forums dominated by contents of toxic masculinity, radically and aggressively antifeminist views.

empathy, openness, and receptivity to the voice and word of reason among individuals; and thereby, step by step, sowing the seeds of rational love within the social fabric, in the hope that these seeds will eventually come into bloom.

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