

**JULIA V. IRIBARNE**  
**THE ETHICAL MEANING OF LIFE**  
*Julia V. Iribarne: El Significado Ético de la Vida*

Irene Breuner  
*Bergische Universität Wuppertal*  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6913-5240

**Abstract:** The Argentinean philosopher Julia Valentina Iribarne claimed that the common feature of human beings is their transcendental constitutive capacity, which enables them both to organise experience through their senses and to construct worlds. Within this function, the teleological nature of ethics plays a central role, insofar as it aims at the constitution of a universal community bound by love and respect. In addition to proposing the foundation of a transcendental ethics based on equality, freedom and mutual responsibility in the wake of Husserl, she sought a phenomenological reading of literature and applied this ethics to the mundane realm in an effort to recognize and resolve the conflictive relationships within society; an ethics that manifests itself in the transformation of life itself and gives it meaning. The leading thread of her thought is the ethical meaning of life, which she takes up in her original conception of the paradox of ‘decentred centering’. Only by assuming responsibility for ourselves and for Others in a community bound by love can our whole life gain dignity and thus, ethical meaning. This paper begins with a brief introduction to the early reception of German phenomenology in Argentina, while the central part highlights Iribarne's original contribution to phenomenology.

**Keywords:** freedom, intersubjectivity, life, love, responsibility.

**Resumen:** La filósofa argentina Julia V. Iribarne afirmaba que el rasgo común del ser humano es su capacidad constitutiva trascendental, que le permite tanto organizar la experiencia a través de los sentidos como construir mundos. Dentro de esta función, el carácter teleológico de la ética desempeña un papel central, en la medida en que apunta a la constitución de una comunidad universal vinculada por el amor y el respeto. Además de proponer la fundación de una ética trascendental basada en la igualdad, la libertad y la responsabilidad mutua en la estela de Husserl, realizó una lectura fenomenológica de la literatura y aplicó esta ética al ámbito mundano en un esfuerzo por reconocer y

resolver las relaciones conflictivas dentro de la sociedad; una ética que se manifiesta en es el sentido ético de la vida, que retoma en su original concepción de la paradoja del “centramiento descentrado”: Sólo asumiendo la responsabilidad por nosotros mismos y por los demás en una comunidad unida por el amor, toda nuestra vida puede adquirir dignidad y, por tanto, sentido ético. Este trabajo comienza con una breve introducción a la recepción temprana de la fenomenología alemana en Argentina, mientras que la parte central destaca la contribución original de Iribarne a la fenomenología.

**Palabras clave:** amor, ética, fenomenología, intersubjetividad, libertad, literatura, responsabilidad, vida.

## 1. Introduction: the reception of German phenomenology in Argentina

The introduction and development of phenomenology in Argentina is closely linked to three key facts. Firstly, Argentina’s intellectual background at the beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by the need to overcome positivism. Secondly, the influence of José Ortega y Gasset, who paid three visits to the country in 1916, 1928, and 1939, founded the *Revista de Occidente* in 1924 and edited a collection of books under the title of *Biblioteca de ideas del siglo XX*, which contributed to the reception and translation of German philosophy. Thirdly, thanks to the early translation into Spanish of the *Logical Investigations* (1929) by José Gaos and Manuel García-Morente, Husserl’s phenomenology was widely read and discussed (Walton, 1997, p. 675; Rabanaque & Walton, 2022, p. 54). This early period in the development of phenomenological thinking in Argentina<sup>1</sup> is marked by the reception of Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler by mainly Coriolano Alberini (1886-1960), Luis Juan Guerrero (1899-1957), Carlos Astrada (1894-1970), Francisco Romero (1891-1962), while the reception of Kant was mainly due to the pioneering work of Alejandro Korn (1860-1936). In his *La libertad creadora* (*The creative freedom*) of 1930, Korn emphasizes the concepts of freedom, which is not absolute, and will, which teleologically strives for the realization of higher spiritual values. Hence, he does not conceive of an “ethics without duty, without responsibility, without sanctions, and above all else, without freedom”, which, by liberating us from “mechanical automatism”, grants us “the dignity of our conscious personality, free and owner of its destiny” (Korn 1948 [1930], p. 46).

Romero, under the influence of Husserl, Scheler and Hartmann, developed a “theory of man”, published as *Teoría del Hombre* in 1952 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1965) and translated into English in 1964 as *Theory of Man*. The main thesis of Romero’s philosophy is that experience confronts us with a movement of “transcendence”, which, as a “drive or impulse” stemming from a “will of consciousness” (Romero 1965 [1952], p. 46), runs through reality. In agreement with Korn, Romero asserts the “parallelism between freedom and transcendence”, insofar the “absolute transcendence” of spiritual and cultural acts is correlative to the “suppression of coercion”. In short, Romero develops a general theory of reality and sketches a “metaphysics of transcendence” as the framework for the examination of reality and values (Romero, 1964, 163f.). Romero emphasized particularly the “feeling of freedom” (Romero, 1952, p. 17) that underlies Korn’s theory of values, which “humanistic roots” express “human personality” and thus incarnate “the fight against coercion, the aspiration to freedom” (Romero, 1952, p. 67).

These humanistic concerns are shared by Engenio Pucciarelli (1907-1995). Pucciarelli embodied the humanist ideal, which he defined in “La controversia de los humanismos” (*The Controversies of Humanism*) (1987), in the wake of Korn and Romero, as “that philosophical position which, by emphasizing the value of man and exalting the feeling of his dignity, stresses the importance of free activity and stimulates his original creations” (1987, p. 32). Since the human being is “the architect of his world and of himself”, constructing a world of meanings and making decisions based on which he shapes his own personality, the notion of humanism is linked to the freedom of the human being. It is free insofar as it emancipates itself from all external subjection, recognizing, however, the validity of the prevailing values in the various historical contexts in which it is inserted. For Pucciarelli, humanism continues to be present, though it is dominated by the critical attitude; without it, the sense of freedom in the human world would disappear (see Breuer, 2023a). What Julia Iribarne (1929-2014) shares with her predecessors, is this deeply rooted humanistic stance, that, departing from enquiries into the connection between reason and freedom, leads to an original ethical conception of the meaning of life.

### 1.0. Julia Iribarne: freedom and intersubjectivity

Let us now take a closer look at her original contribution to phenomenological research: Julia Iribarne claimed that the common trait of human beings is their transcendental constitutive capacity that enables them to both organize experience by means of their senses and build up worlds. Within this function, the teleological nature of ethics plays a central role, insofar as it aims at the constitution of a universal community from which no subjectivity might be excluded. As Roberto Walton and Javier San Martín explain in the editorial note to the common issue of *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas* and *Escritos de Filosofía* dedicated to her memory (2015), apart from proposing a foundation of a transcendental ethics on the basis of equality and mutual responsibility in the wake of Husserl's, Iribarne endeavoured to apply this ethics to the mundane realm, in an effort to recognize and solve the conflictive relationships within society; an ethics that manifests itself in the transformation of life itself (Walton & San Martín, 2015, p. 11). Her enquires revolve around two main topics: freedom and intersubjectivity.

Iribarne takes up the first issue in her first work *La Libertad en Kant (Freedom in Kant)* (1981). Here, Iribarne shows how an innovative gnoseology opens the way to a no less innovative metaphysics that seeks and explores the unconditioned in the practical use of reason. By pointing out reason as naturing or constitutive, she begins to indicate its positive content and to show its identification with freedom. This path leads to the demonstration of the reality of freedom through the exercise of a will identifiable with the rational will, a topic she returns to in her article titled "Kant y Husserl acerca de 'lo debido' (Kant and Husserl on what 'is due')" (2009). The question of freedom links Husserl to Kant, insofar as freedom can only be instantiated in a being capable of reflecting on his actions and suspending automatic obedience to inclinations. In order to circumscribe the meaning of 'what is due', it is necessary to frame it in the teleological orientation that human reason entails as objectifying, valuative and volitional, whether it is a question of personal or community performance. Iribarne follows Husserl's critique to Kant when she claims that "it is not possible to conceive of ethics without valuation" (Iribarne, 2009, p. 35). This difference between the two ethics, Kant's and Husserl's, permeates the conception of 'what is due'. On her view, it is a matter of orienting action in the sense of the humanizing telos and towards the (ideal) relation of the 'whole of monads' (*ibid.*). Iribarne further pursues the question of freedom in connection with her second main topic, that is, intersubjectivity.

It is to this issue that she devotes her doctoral studies: As Pucciarelli emphasizes in the prologue to *La intersubjetividad en Husserl* (1997/1998) the itinerary Iribarne

invites us to follow is the right one: after questioning the existence of a theory of intersubjectivity in the philosopher's texts and the need to respond to the objection of solipsism, she analyzes the content of the *V. Cartesian Mediation* and shows that the unity of the theory of intersubjectivity goes hand in hand with transcendental phenomenology understood as monadology (1987, p. III). In order to demonstrate her thesis that “transcendental phenomenology is coherently conducive to a monadology” (*ibid.*, p. 22), Iribarne departs from the problem posed by intersubjectivity and the subsequent difficulties which Husserl faces to explain the universally valid objectivity of the world in the perspective of the phenomenological theory of constitution: We need a universal subject, but according to transcendental phenomenology, this ‘universal’ subject must also be a concrete subject. But a concrete universal subject can refer only to a concrete multiplicity of subjects.

So even after making manifest, as Husserl did, transcendental subjectivity as an instance of the *eidos ego*, it is necessary to show, by means of constitutional analysis, that 1) each subject must be self-constituted, because otherwise it would have no meaning in a phenomenological context, 2) each subject must be constituted as such in every other subject, because otherwise a monadological universe would result, in which universal communication would be impossible, 3) the constitution of the Other must correspond to the self-constitution of the Other, otherwise it would have no validity, 4) each subject must constitute a world of objectivity that is in some way identical to the world constituted by the other subjects, otherwise there would be no common sphere for communication, 5) the world that each one constitutes must be a world that comprises each one himself and the Others, otherwise the unity of the world would be destroyed. Finally, it is necessary to bear in mind that all these assertions would have no real foundation if they could not be tested from the point of view of my transcendental ego.

The Husserlian analysis of intersubjectivity is effectively the search for adequate justification for each of these claims. Iribarne emphasizes Husserl’s struggle against solipsism, “the prison of the ‘I think’”, while remaining within the transcendental context. In this respect, Iribarne states in the introduction that “ethics is the ruin of solipsism, the rehabilitation of an essential being-with” (1987, p. 11). The reason for this proceeding lies in the recognition that “it is intrinsically impossible for the unveiled *solus ipse* to account for objectivity”. Husserl namely realizes that “all validity must proceed from the dynamics immanent to the subject, but all constituted subjectivity must, in order to be such, be endorsed by the Other, be co-validated” (*ibid.*, p. 13). It is transcendental

consciousness that constitutes objectivity, which is essentially universal and intersubjective.

Her analysis is articulated as follows: Firstly, she considers static phenomenology and offers a first sense of what Husserl calls a reduction to the sphere of property. In this case we find among the experiences of my transcendental ego my experiences of the Other. Secondly, through phenomenological reduction and genetic analysis, we find in this sphere the living present, consciousness in the pre-reflexive realm and the series of remissions that will reveal the absolute factum: the historicity of the ego and its intersubjective temporality. Within the pre-reflexive area that she terms “second” (*ibid.* p. 27), Iribarne analyses intentionality as carrier of the Other. She does not fail to stress, however, that if transcendental consciousness – the pure ‘I’ – laid bare in successive reductions is the only zone of radical grounding of cognition, then the locus of the givenness of the Other must be found within the limits of this ‘I’ (1994, p. 17). Iribarne concludes, therefore, that the unity that characterizes Husserlian analyses of intersubjectivity is based on the belonging of all levels to the transcendental field. This field is evident in intersubjective time, based on which “I and we are mutually intertwined”: “I carry the Others in me” (cf. *Hua Mat.* VIII, p. 57), this is for Iribarne the key universal validity claims of Husserlian phenomenology (Iribarne, 1988, p. 195) that justifies her conception of transcendental phenomenology as monadology.

However, as Javier San Martín points out, this experience of the Other is equivalent to the “appearance or discovery of transcendental intersubjectivity”. For this, he continues, one must extend the “transcendental phenomenological reduction to an intersubjective phenomenological reduction” (cf. *Hua I*, 181/1960, p. 155), thanks to which the Other reveals itself “as a transcendental Other”. Although Iribarne does not speak of ‘intersubjective reduction’, she does elaborate on the double reduction (Iribarne, 1987, p. 45, 47, 51, 53-57, etc.). By characterizing the transcendental of the Other based on the Other's own experiences – we take the Other into ourselves – Iribarne shows that the intersubjective reduction places the Other as a transcendental Other (San Martín, 2015, p. 298). In this respect, in the prologue to Iribarne's book *Edmund Husserl. La fenomenología como monadología* (2002), Roberto Walton clarifies this issue:

Thus, the legitimation of the transcendental condition of the Other does not lie in his own transcendental reduction, which may well not be performed by him, but in that reduction of mine ‘in’ the Other which is possible because empathy also admits the procedure of double reduction. In Other words, the explication

of the intentional implications of the ego's own life takes us beyond it and reveals the greater scope of the transcendental life by turning the egological reduction into an intersubjective reduction (Walton, 2002, p. 13).

That is why the second reduction, the intersubjective reduction, does not imply a livingness of my own course, but one inherent in another course, in another self that is a self of the transcendental Other given in the same way as my past self: Both are laid bare by means of a reflection 'in' empathy (*ibid.*). On our view, insofar as Iribarne understands the *epoché* as a reduction to the ego's own sphere of evidence, she fails to fully recognize the transcendental Other, that is, her constitutive priority not only at the pre-objective level of bodily comportment but also at the level of objectified spiritual life. As Husserl claims, "the Other is the first human being, not me" (Hua XIV, p. 418, 402). We are originally conjoined in a community of drives in the manner of an "intentional intermingling" (Hua XV, p. 366). Husserl understands this sphere as "radically pre-egoical," it belongs to the lower strata of the stream "devoid of ego (*ichlosen Passivität*)" (*ibid.*, p. 595), i.e. to the sphere of the I but before the I is constituted as self. Hence, a unification of the self and the Other takes place in a realm that is prior to reciprocal empathy:

The Other is for itself as well, but his for-itself is at the same time my for-me, in the form of a potentiality of presence. But her herself is present in me and I in her. I carry all Others in me as myself present and to be present and as carrying myself in myself as well. [...] The co-presence of Others is inseparable from me in my living self-presence, and this co-presence of Others is the foundation of worldly presence [...] (Hua Mat. VIII, 56s.).

This "interiority of being for the Other (*Innerlichkeit des Füreinanderseins*)" as an "intentional intertwining (*intentionalen Ineinanderseins*)" is the "metaphysical primal fact, it is a being together of the absolute" (Hua XV, p. 366). In the "communalization of intertwining (*Vergemeinschaftung des Ineinander*)," Husserl adds, each finds the Other as another distinct I with its own capacities, but "intentionally in itself and 'related' to the same world" (*ibid.*). The acknowledgment of this pre-egoical sphere, where each one is for itself while carrying the Other, implies that "I cannot be who I am without the Others who exist for me, these Others not without me. Intentional being-in-one-another (*intentionale Beschlossenheit*) is the necessity of transcendental coexistence" (*ibid.*). Husserl's reflections on this coexistence of distinct beings, each carrying the Other, shows, against Iribarne's conclusion, that the own ego has no constitutive priority, such

that the egological reduction justifying her conception of transcendental phenomenology as monadology proves to be only the first step towards the intersubjective reduction, which actually breaks with monadology understood as centered on the own ego, instituting thus a plurality of egos which are in communion with one another. In conclusion, despite this shortcoming, the merit of *La intersubjetividad en Husserl* is to have highlighted the “great turn” effected by Husserl's thought, “the elucidation of intersubjectivity”, and to have located it in the transcendental sphere (2002, p. 196, cf. Walton, 2015, p. 381).

## 2.0. Phenomenology as monadology – transcendental equality

The recognition of an original intersubjectivity that breaks with the monadological dimension of subjectivity reduced to the sphere of the own ego, takes place mainly in her reflections on ethics: In her article “La fenomenología como monadología (Phenomenology as monadology)” (1985) Iribarne develops a “genetic approach”, in which she distinguishes between an “idealistic monadology”, where the apprehension of a monadic community composed by I-poles is oriented towards one and the same world, a “social monadology”, where the concrete I-men with their habitualities, reciprocally unveil in communication, and a “pre-reflexive monadology”, which concerns the protohistory of the reflexive ego. And, in “Intersubjectivity as the starting point” (1991), she quotes Husserl in a letter to P. Welch to emphasize that, within the transcendental realm, with the upward unfolding of the different layers of intersubjective constitution, we actually “reach the level of the questions of ethics and of the meaning of historical human existence”. In this connection, Iribarne adds that “in the intimacy of the transcendental ego, the radical intertwining one-with-the-Other and one-in-the-Other of concrete human beings”, aims to the “human telos”, which “attracts us to the perfection of personal and communal existence, in a universal sense” (1991, p. 11). These “reciprocal alteri” are intertwined in a “reciprocity and community of will” and “radical equality” through “Cristian love”, a privileged form of love (*ibid.*, p. 7–10). This equality in love is built on an ethical priority of the Other, with whom we are intertwined: “If I ever live in a community of aspiration (*Gemeinschaft des Strebens*) with an Other, then I live as I in her and her in me” (Hua XIV, p. 172).

The core of Iribarne's ethical reflections clearly emerges from the aim pursued, which is to bring about the realization of a “whole of the many” as a universal and harmonious coexistence of all human beings (*ibid.*, p. 10). This intersubjective ethics which requires an intertwining of distinct monads in harmonious coexistence is based on the recognition of a “radical equality” between monads, the key-concept around which the treatment of other problems revolves, developed in her *La fenomenología como monadología (Phenomenology as monadology)* (2002). As R. Walton remarks, Iribarne’s original contribution is his proposal for the foundation of a transcendental ethics based on equality as the proper meaning of the transcendental operations that make the experience of the Other possible (Walton, 2015, p. 381). In this connection, Iribarne argues that the meaning of the structure of the world-configuring consciousness, that is, of constitutive transcendental operations, is “the affirmation of reciprocal equality” (2002, p. 427). This “transcendental equality” (*ibid.*) is evident in the singularizing experience of the other human being, since “originally, radically, I know him to be equal to me” (*ibid.*, p. 429). “Radical equality” is the “condition of possibility of the constitution of the Other”, it provides us with the certainty that “the Other is my peer”: this is the basis of the understanding of our neighbor.

This “radical equality” has its origin in the realm of transcendental constitution, where I discover “my equal interweaving with the Others”, without whom neither the world nor objectivity could be conceived. Human beings constitute each other reciprocally as fellow human beings “because the very structure of the operations that allow us to grasp the meaning of what we are for each other is that of equality” (*ibid.*, 430). This “transcendental equality” is evident in the existential traits that we share, such as being ‘thrown’ in certain circumstances, being responsible for the being that we are becoming, and fundamentally, “our possibility of growth in the dimension of freedom” (*ibid.*, p. 430f.). The human being is not born free, it is her task to free herself, that is, to be able to decide freely the rules to which she submit her freedom, whose expression is “our reciprocal differentiation”: “The right to become different” is another radical form derived from transcendental equality (*ibid.*, p. 431). Once the “first solipsistic immersion” of each one in relation to her consciousness, to access his personal experiences in relation to her own being, has been carried out, solipsism “is broken” thanks to the irruption of the “radical phenomenon of intertwining with the Others, the peers” (*ibid.*, p. 432). Through the “force of the position of equality”, without which we would not be able to conceive of one another, we know that we are in solidarity with our life and,

fundamentally, with respect to human beings, “subjects of hope”, projected into our future (*ibid.*).

When the original equality that underlies solidarity is forced and contradiction is installed in the constitutive and world-shaping consciousness, violence is “instituted”: “She is equal to me, but only I have rights, which means that *she, who is equal to me, is not equal to me at the same time*” (*ibid.*). My understanding of the world no longer compromises my solidarity with my neighbor. Consequently, violence not only “contradicts the sense and functioning of intersubjectivity, but also de-realizes its symbolization mediated by the pronoun ‘we’ [...]. The other human being, my fellow human being, is not my fellow human being” (*ibid.*, p. 433). Iribarne stresses that “the most radical form of violence”, is “the violence done to the coherence of my consciousness”, which originates in “the conviction that the Other, is not equal to me”: this rupture of the unity and coherence of consciousness with itself is the “keystone” of all forms of violence, it breaks with “the radical factum that the Other is ‘my peer’” (*ibid.*, p. 434). As Iribarne stresses, the birth of our world-shaping capacity coincides neither with the birth of solidarity nor with the birth of the spirit, but with the moment when human beings accept that “equality, which is the condition of their understanding of the Other, governs the organization of the world they shape” (*ibid.*). In her conclusion, Iribarne emphasizes that

as transcendental subjects we have the developed capacity to meaningfully configure the world on the basis of what is given. Part of that ‘given’ is the solidarity that each one experiences with respect to himself, his equality with respect to Others and its reverse: the right of each neighbor to be in solidarity with himself (*ibid.*, p. 435).

Consequently, the fracture of transcendental equality, which is equivalent to “the establishment of inequality among men” is for Iribarne “the most original act of violence and the most elementary act of immorality” (*ibid.*). This lucid analysis reveals that the recognition of transcendental equality between human beings is the first act that establishes transcendental ethics.

The teleological nature of ethics therefore occupies a prominent place in Iribarne's analyses. On the one hand, ethics is oriented towards the constitution of a universal community; on the other hand, teleology provides the frame of reference for the problems of value, the moral person and their intersubjective interweaving, where, on the basis of

the interpretation of *areté* as excellence, Iribarne once again addresses the topic that runs through her entire work, that of the meaning of life: the search for an ever more perfect coherence of reason does not exhaust the meaning of Husserl's conception of *areté*, but encompasses the responsibility for oneself which is inseparable from the responsibility for the Other, “ethical or universal love” being a “universal intention” (Iribarne, 2002, p. 257), which guides the actualization of the whole of monads. Communalization in mutual love and mutual responsibility is directed to the idea of God “as the absolute limit” of a “divine entelechy”. Transcendental phenomenology, Iribarne claims, aims at “the creation of a *Gotteswelt*, the world of a divine person of a higher order through universal ethical love”, a process that leads to the fulfilment of ends subject to “what is absolutely due” (*ibid.*, p. 258). The divine entelechy that is realized in the community of love and responsibility is the telos of the moral person, a process in which the meaning of life is summed up. Iribarne underlines the great importance for Husserl of a second or metaphysical philosophy concerned with facticity and access to the divine.

In this connection, Iribarne refers to Husserl's later writings of around 1930, where he postulates a Metaphysics of primordial facticity based on the experience of apodictically given *Urtatsachen* or primal facts. Already in a supplement to his *First Philosophy* of 1923/24, the problematic in the field of the “irrationality of the transcendental fact” is defined as the content of a “Metaphysics in a new sense” (Husserl, 2019, p. 194 fn.), a phenomenological Metaphysics (cf. Breuer 2023b), which provides transcendental eidetics with a factual ground of experience. These “primal necessities” (Kern, 1975, p. 340) encompass the apodictic existence of the world (Hua XV, p. 386), bodily existence (*ibid.*, p. 385), intersubjectivity (*ibid.*, p. 366), and historical teleology (*ibid.*, 381). These “primordial facts” cannot be traced back to first causes and therefore cannot be fathomed speculatively”, as László Tengelyi (2014, p. 186) remarks. This doctrine grounds, contrary to the Kantian Metaphysics, on a transcendental sphere of facts, which has an a-posteriori and apodictic character, and is characterized by a fundamental “irrationality”, which concerns the “metaphysical” interpretation of the “universe” (Husserl, 2019, p. 194fn.), “accidental factualness”, the “*meaning of history*” and even “*ethical-religious problems*” (Husserl, 1960, p. 156). As Husserl claims, in human development there must be a “governing reason and an ideal goal of strivings guiding it” (Hua XLII, p. 387). For if “an Ego is to be able to live in unanimity [that is, in harmony, *Einstimmig*], God must have created it” (*ibid.*, p. 75). In this “striving or

unification and unanimity” (*ibid.*, p. 387) lies the motivation for the constitution of the divine.

The book closes with the original proposal detailed above: The *raison d'être* of a solidary consciousness is that which configures the Others and the world in accordance with the transcendental sense of constitutive operations, whose ‘existential expression’ is the ‘transcendental equality’ between human beings (*ibid.*, p. 33). The revelation of the Other manifests itself as equality between one's own being and that of Others, a radical equality, lived and recognized as the foundation of a transcendental ethics.

### 3.0. Metaphysics and literature – towards a transcendental anthropology

An ethics that is aware of its implications must lead to another major theme: metaphysics. In *De la ética a la metafísica (From ethics to metaphysics)* (2007) the effort is directed towards developing a transcendental anthropology aimed at showing how, from an elementary, instinctive and non-objective experiencing, estimating and willing, the human being rises to a critical conception of knowledge, value and action. From self-reflection, the subject is understood in the most radical capacity for self-responsibility, culminating in love for one's neighbour as an absolute value comparable with objective values. The path of the work leads from the performance of self-reflection, thanks to which the subject recognises itself in its radical capacity for self-responsibility, to the culmination of this ascension of values in the love for the neighbour as an absolute value comparable to objective values. This descent, which begins with the retrospective questioning of the origin of constitutive actions, reveals the history of consciousness and thus the history of life, life which is synonymous, for Husserl, with the anonymous flow of the stream of experiences (2007, p. 11, 17). This teleology, which is the “form of the foundation of ethics, reason and its vocation of supreme good and infinity” (*ibid.*, p. 17), is oriented towards the “whole of monads” and its subject matter leads to theological-metaphysical questions concerning late ethics as the “ethics of love” (cf. Breuer, 2020) and metaphysics “as the doctrine of the factum” (Iribarne, 2007, p. 17), says Iribarne, resuming her previous analysis. Iribarne develops these themes early on: Husserl, Iribarne emphasises, “unveils love as the modality of human interpellation”, and concludes “in a higher form, that of universal love whose model is the love of Christ” (*ibid.*, p. 234).

Paraphrasing Heidegger in his reflections on Hölderlin, Iribarne argues that Husserl's position can be titled as “ethically inhabiting the world” (*ibid.*, 18), which is equivalent to “being in the practical horizon”, that is, living ethically in community. This expression urges us to work so that this expression becomes a reality: “The human being is the ideal product that we should be building together, creating the conditions of possibility for her emergence” (*ibid.*, p. 235). To “inhabit ethically” means, in Husserlian terms, to commit oneself “responsibly to the development of the germinal soul of the Other, creating the responsibility for it to respond to its call, and promoting the higher forms of community” (*ibid.*, p. 237). This community is actualised in love: “The whole of the monads is precisely the universalisation of love in its most perfect, ideal form”; although “unattainable” (*ibid.*, p. 249), this teleology of love “is a call to achieve always the unification, totalisation, coherence and consistency that reason demands” (*ibid.*, p. 248). It is therefore a “growth in consciousness”, which is nothing other than a “growth in knowledge and love” (*ibid.*, p. 150). Reason and love are thus combined in the aspiration to build up a community of spiritual values.

The author shows, and this represents her original contribution to the subject, how in Husserl's thought a renewing intention becomes manifest, which does not only unfold in science but in the transformation of life itself. Transcendental subjectivity, with its roots in the real human being, its historical character, its teleological foundation and its infinite projection, has a metaphysical character that gives a totalising sense to human finitude. Because of its infinite projection, the intersubjective universe is teleologically oriented towards and by God as the principle of perfection.

Iribarne connects this exploration on the metaphysical question of the meaning of life with literature in her *Fenomenología y literatura (Phenomenology and literature)* (2005). Her anthropological and metaphysical analyses lead her to conclude that the meaning of our lives lies in taking responsibility for Others. We will dwell further on this work because in it we are witness to major reflections on the themes of freedom, responsibility and the meaning of life. It deals with freedom and the characteristics with which it has been understood by J.P. Sartre, A. Camus and M. Merleau-Ponty. The first sense in which we “naively” conceive of freedom is related to that “freedom-from, to being free of restrictions”, while a second moment refers to freedom “in its binding character”, that is, to its “radical intersubjective interweaving and collective responsibility” – a key theme of Iribarne's reflections – which she understands as “freedom-for”. This second mode involves the possibility of a conscious choice, thanks

to which we can revise a mere “ontological freedom” – an unconscious choice or one imposed by Others – and assume “a higher form of freedom, responsible freedom or freedom-value”: “the exercise of freedom is linked to responsibility” (*ibid.*, p. 170). Although Sartre upholds absolute freedom, it implies responsibility for the inhabited world, while the “for what” of freedom is “the universal man” according to his best possibility, thus, it is a freedom committed to “the humanisation of man” (*ibid.*, p. 180) and to the world. In Camus, the question of what freedom is for, its meaning, is central. It is impregnated with the “dis-functionality of human life”, so that freedom is conditioned by the absurdity of existence, in the face of which there is only one action that is not absurd, rebellion (*ibid.*, p. 182). In Merleau-Ponty Iribarne highlights a phrase that expresses that the choice is free only if it is accompanied by the decision to place the situation that is chosen “as a situation of freedom” (*ibid.*), that is, it is a granting of meaning that grounds intersubjectivity and the very existence embodied in the world. As for the meaning of lived history, Iribarne stresses that the meaning of events is “the concrete project of a future that is elaborated in social coexistence”, which is why freedom is not absolute: we are intertwined in the world and with Others, our respective situation conditions it (*ibid.*, p. 183f.).

Iribarne elaborates at greater length on those literary expressions capable of describing more clearly and precisely the phenomena of freedom, the person, love, themes central to both ethics and anthropology, in *De la ética a la metafísica* (2007, p. 161-187) and in “Ética y antropología” (Ethics and anthropology) (2008), where she takes up the question of responsibility. After an examination of the changes in the Husserlian conception of ethics – from being considered as one science among Others to occupying a privileged place as a universal science or theory of rules (*Kunstlehre*) in *Kaizo's* articles (2008, p. 67-71, cf. Breuer 2019) – Iribarne dwells on its relation to anthropology. In this connection, she recalls the 1931 lecture “Phenomenology and Anthropology” (cf. Hua XXVII, p. 165-181), where Husserl strictly differentiates phenomenology from psychology and anthropology insofar as they do not break with the natural attitude. However, she concludes that intentional psychology and anthropology “in a purely spiritual sense” (*ibid.*, p. 181; Iribarne, 2008, p. 105) can be understood as transcendental philosophy.

Like ethics, which once it has overcome its conception as rational ontology becomes universal science, anthropology, once it has abandoned the natural attitude, ends up coinciding with phenomenology, insofar as anthropology “recognises its

transcendental intentional character” (2008, p. 106). Anthropology and ethics are essentially connected: As she stresses in *La fenomenología como monadología* that “the ultimate intention of Husserlian thought is ethical”: The ethical question is the culmination of the systematic totality of his work, since, in it, “the radical discovery of the meaning of being is made, in which a concordant universal coexistence appears which it is the task of the phenomenologist to point out” and the ethical-metaphysical problems are addressed. For Husserl, phenomenology is “science”, it “shows the steps along which humanity can advance in search of a unity in which pluralities are articulated”. The latter is the “truly human possibility”, even if it may fail, as Husserl acknowledges (2002, p. 271). Thus, under the question of the meaning of being, ethics joins anthropology, a theme with which Iribarne concludes her *Fenomenología y Literatura*: Because phenomenology as the “transcendental science of rational humanity” is, in that sense, “transcendental anthropology”, ethics as the “teleological tendency of reason” concerns the realm of the former. The question of their mutual relationship arises, to which Iribarne responds by reference to Kant, who points out that the questions of what is possible to know, what is to be done, what is to be hoped for and what is man, to which metaphysics, morality, religion and anthropology respectively respond, can in fact be answered by anthropology, insofar as the former are linked to the latter (2008, p. 106f; cf. Kant, *Logik*, A 26–27, ed. Weischedel Vol. III, 1998, p. 448). Thus, under the question of the meaning of being, ethics is united with anthropology, since both strive for the unity of humanity as a convergence of pluralities.

#### 4.0. The ethical meaning of life – the paradox of ‘decentred centring’.

Finally, these subjects, that is, hope, finitude and death are further developed in *En torno del sentido de la vida. Ensayos fenomenológico-existenciales* (2012). Through this meditation on the meaning of life we witness a beautiful and enlightening analysis of human existence. It is a book about our life, and each one of us can feel involved in the clear description of its pulsations, its uncertainties, and risks, of the opportunities to give it or to find its meaning, and therefore, to live without certainty, as R. Walton remarks (2015, p. 383). Iribarne recurs to Husserl to emphasise the imaginary and the present lived in the wakefulness of *kairós* in view of a self-renewal of unrepeatable quality, the

aspiration for happiness and the struggle against destiny to highlight the uniqueness of the life we live, in the belief that it is the whole of life itself that allows us to give meaning to one's own life (Iribarne, 2012, p. 71–82). Within this context, Borges is valued for his pious understanding of human beings, his obsession with destiny, his conjectural way of approaching things and his treatment of God in the form of conjecture or suspicion. It is hope that imposes the recognition of our limits in the sense that we can neither master destiny nor deny our finitude. The human being can reconcile himself with the idea of his death provided he realizes that all ages have their own key and learns to seek in each age the key proper to it, such that he might live each moment of life intensely and with full confidence.

Iribarne returns to Husserl to address the meaning of life, taking as a reference his texts for the Japanese magazine *Kaizo*. In them, she considers the features of the world and of the person for whom the world is such, the problem of conformity with oneself, the question of values and their relation to ends and the circumstances that oppose the predominance of meaning. The question of meaning is linked to certain concepts: finality, insofar as we understand meaning as a realisation that aims at a development that precedes it; telos, as an ideal dimension that orients the realisation of meaning; value, since the meaning that is being asked about is a finality, and therefore valuable; history and its signifying potentiality that the march of humanity has decanted over time (*ibid.*, p. 234). These questions cluster around the question of the right attitude of the human being who aspires to happiness in a world whose rational sense is interfered with by the forms of negativity that Husserl brings together under the term 'fate' (*ibid.*, p. 236). Fate interferes with the realisation of projects and works in which people sum up the meaning of life: physical and psychological vulnerability threatens the completion of projects and the search for meaning; chance, the contingent, the accidental, entail the same danger; error, since the future repercussions of actions are unpredictable, which leads to meaninglessness, the unpredictability of nature and of the future: all these factors lead to the annihilation of values and lead to the affirmation of the meaninglessness of life (*ibid.*, p. 241-244).

Despite chance and adverse circumstances, the full human being aspires towards higher values and rises towards an evaluation of life from the point of view of the best, so that life provides the fullest possible satisfaction. Bliss, Iribarne stresses, is not the form of the fullness of life, but the joy of the triumph of the best for all beloved ones, in the end, for all human beings:

love is a dispositional capacity proper to human beings; if it is actualised in the sense of ethical universalisation, the human being finds his way to the superior in the option for the best possible, as it results from his rational critique, for himself, for his fellow human beings and for humanity (*ibid.*, p. 249).

The person whose actions are always oriented towards the best possible opens the way to an ethical life (*ibid.*, p. 240f.). Even in the face of the calamities that fate may bring us, “love and the consequent compassion and solidarity towards oneself and the Other lead us to opt for ethical behaviour” (*ibid.*, p. 249). Or, in other words: Husserl has pointed out the transcendental and existential equality of human beings. The greatness of the human being is evident in the disposition to love and to create the good; although human beings are aware of their own miseries that may prevent them from choosing the path towards the best, this does not invalidate the fact that the meaning of life is the search for the good. Even accepting the hypothesis of the meaninglessness of the cosmic and of history, “the human being realises his meaning in the assumption of his responsibility” (2012, p. 249), a sense of responsibility for her fellow Others, which is combined with “the demand” put forward by Husserl to “believe in the meaning of the whole”, for without this belief, we would not have the strength to lead our own lives (*ibid.*). It is a self-imposed demand, which, in our opinion, is a last resort to affirm life in the face of the force of adversity.

Iribarne's appeal to assuming responsibility grounds her conception of the paradox of ‘decentred centring’, which constitutes the original and central contribution crowning her work:

Centring manifests itself in the fact that the most primordial motivation underlying the renewal of the person's stances and habitualities is his or her concern for life as my life, the life that is in my charge. It is the search for a ‘life satisfaction’ that leads me to wonder about my authentic existence, the one that would bring me a certain well-being (*ibid.*, p. 223).

Not only the radical experience of “I think” or “I can” implies a maximum degree of centring, but also the experience of feelings and emotions which are proper to the human being, for in each case they are my own experiences (*ibid.*, p. 225). The identity to be preserved refers to the responsibility for oneself. This responsibility requires the person to assume his teleological essence and to orient himself voluntarily according to the telos, a “universal life referred to a unitary ‘life task’”, which is nothing other than the

preservation of himself (*ibid.*, p. 224f.). Insofar as this responsibility involves one's own freedom and one's own decision, it is, in principle, strictly centred on one's own identity (*ibid.*, p. 226). This affirmation of a fundamentally centred, centripetal personal identity is complemented by the function of decentring, a centrifugal force, which alludes to the intersubjective character of subjectivity (*ibid.*). This paradox is not only connected to Husserl's emphasis on the depth and even the inevitability of the pre-existence of the Other, who is indispensable for the recognition of the own self (Hua XV, p. 366, 371), but also alludes to the love relationship of lovers who renounce their own will for the sake of the will of the Other (Iribarne, 2012, p. 228). Hence, to remain true to oneself implies both centring and decentring:

The experience in which the decentred centring of identity culminates, which self-preservation aspires to preserve, is that of the ethical person. The ethical person, to be such, must be self-centred, self-aware, self-regulating and self-responsible, but this self-referentiality essentially includes decentring (*ibid.*, 230).

This ethical reflection, which masterfully articulates the need for self-sufficiency and self-preservation with the recognition of moral obligations towards Others, shows us that the Other necessarily participates in the constitution of my own identity. This appeal to ethical values and aims proves to be a condition of possibility for an authentically human life. The aspiration for the preservation of a self that has assumed responsibility for Others is not suppressed by external constraints such as wars or the ultimate degradation of the world, which affect philosophical reflection on the possible meaninglessness of the world and of life (*ibid.*, p. 231). The culminating experience of the decentred centring of identity is the “ethical person”: It must “be self-conscious, self-regulating and self-responsible”, but it achieves “conformity with itself” only to the extent that it aspires to the highest ethical values, which are only those that are “for the neighbour, de jure, for the whole of humanity” (*ibid.*, p. 230). It is about a “radical solidarity that responds to the fact of universal human vulnerability”, which is not suppressed by limitations, nor by the possible “lack of meaning in the cosmic” and in “history”, but on the contrary, it is the only propitious basis for coexistence: “The human being realises his meaning in responsibility” and “is humanised by the ethical response. The vulnerability of the Other summons us and the meaning of our own life is to respond to his call” (*ibid.*, p. 259). This is why “the meaning of our being human beings is to be

centred-decentred in favour of respect and responsibility for the human dignity of the Other” (*ibid.*)

as well as for our own.

In conclusion, only by assuming our condition of being ‘decentred centring’ can the whole of our lives gain dignity, and thus, be endowed with ethical meaning: This is Iribarne’s central message. It is an undeniably topical one.

## REFERENCES

Breuer, I. (2019). “The Ego as Moral Person. Husserl’s Concept of Personhood in the Context of his Later Ethics”. In: W. Plotka (ed.), *Phenomenology, Practice and Action: Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe, Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica* 20(1), 15–35. <https://doi.org/10.26881/maes.2019.1.01>

\_\_\_\_\_. (2020), “Aristotle and Husserl on Feelings in Moral Sense: Philia and Love”. In: R. Guccinelli & G. Iocco (eds.), *Positive feelings on the border between phenomenology, psychology and virtue ethics, Metodo* Vol. 8, n.2, 31–67 <https://doi.org/10.19079/metodo.8.2.31>

\_\_\_\_\_. (2023a). “The reception of phenomenology in Argentina by Eugenio Pucciarelli. His ideal of a militant and humanist philosophy underpinned by a pluralistic conception of reason and time”. In: *Horizon*, Vol.12/2, 398–432. <https://doi.org/10.21638/2226-5260-2023-12-2-398-432>

\_\_\_\_\_. (2023b), “Phenomenological Metaphysics and the problems of facticity and genesis. The twofold unity of primal hyle and God as the limits of the world-spanning teleology”. In: A. Altobrando & A. Pugliese (eds.), *Discipline Filosofiche XXXIII, 2: Beyond Consciousness, Paths of Phenomenological Research*, 269–290.

Husserl, E. Hua I. (1960). *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, S. Strasser (ed.). Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1950. Eng. trans. *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, D. Cairns (trans.). Den Haag: Nijhoff.

\_\_\_\_\_. Hua VII. (1959). *Erste Philosophie (1923/1924). Erster Teil. Kritische Ideengeschichte*, R. Böhm (ed.). Den Haag: Nijhoff. Eng. trans. (2019). *First Philosophy. Lectures 1923/24 and related Texts from the Manuscripts (1920–1925)*, S. Luft, Th.M. Naberhaus (trans.). Dordrecht: Springer.

\_\_\_\_\_. Hua XIV. (1973). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Zweiter Teil: 1921-1928*, I. Kern (ed.). The Hague: Nijhoff.

\_\_\_\_\_. Hua XV. (1973). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, I. Kern (ed.). The Hague: Nijhoff.

\_\_\_\_\_. Hua XXVII. (1989) *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922-1937)*, Th. Nenon, H. R. Sepp(eds.). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

\_\_\_\_\_. Hua Mat. (2006). VIII, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934). Die C-Manuskripte*. D. Lohmar (ed.). Dordrecht: Springer.

Iribarne, J.V. (1981). *La libertad en Kant: alcances éticos y connotaciones metafísicas*. Buenos Aires: Lohlé.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1985). “La fenomenología como monadología”. In: *Escritos de Filosofía* N° 15-16, 71–82.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1987/1988). *La Intersubjetividad en Husserl. Bosquejo de una teoría* (I: 1987, II: 1988), Buenos Aires: Lohlé. Revised German translation: (1994). *Husserls Theorie der Intersubjektivität*, M.A. Herlyn (Üb.), H.R. Sepp (Mitw.). Freiburg i.Br.: Karl Alber.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1991). „Intersubjectivity as a starting point”. In: A.T. Tymieniecka (ed.), *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XXXV, *Husserlian Phenomenology in a New Key*, 3–12.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2002). *Edmund Husserl. La fenomenología como monadología*. Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de Ciencias de Buenos Aires.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2005). *Fenomenología y literatura*. Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2007). *De la ética a la metafísica. En la perspectiva del pensamiento de Edmund Husserl*. Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional/San Pablo.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2009). “Kant y Husserl acerca de ‘lo debido’”. In: *Tábano* 5 (23–36).

\_\_\_\_\_. (2012). *En torno al sentido de la vida. Ensayos fenomenológicos sobre la existencia*. Morelia: Jitanjáfora.

Kern, I. (1975). *Idee und Methode der Philosophie. Leitgedanken für eine Theorie der Vernunft*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

- Korn, A. (1948) [1930]. *La libertad creadora*. Buenos Aires: Claridad.
- Pucciarelli, E. (1987a). “La controversia de los Humanismos”. In: E. Pucciarelli (1987), *Los rostros del humanismo*. Buenos Aires: Fundación Banco de Boston (31–54).
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1987b), “Presentación”, en J. Iribarne, *La Intersubjetividad en Husserl. Bosquejo de una teoría*, I, Buenos Aires: Lohlé 1987, pp. I–V.
- Rabanaque, L. R., with the collaboration of Walton, R. J. (2022). “Phenomenology in Argentina”. In: B.C. Hopkins, D. De Santis (Eds.), *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy XX*. Special Issue, *Phenomenology and the Hispanic World*. London/New York: Routledge, 54–70.
- Rizo-Patrón Lerner, R. (2021). “Latin America”. In: D. De Santis, B. C. Hopkins, C. Majolino (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*. London/New York: Routledge, 776–788.
- Romero, F. (1965) [1952]. *Teoría del hombre*. Buenos Aires: Losada.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1964). *Theory of Man* (W.F. Cooper, Trans., W.J. Kilgore, Introd.). Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- San Martín, J. (2015), “El camino hacia una antropología trascendental”, en R.J. Walton, J. San Martín (eds.), “Julia V. Iribarne. Intersubjetividad, ética y antropología”, *Escritos de Filosofía* N°3, en asociación con *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas*, Serie Monográfica 6, pp. 289–312.
- Tengelyi, L. (2014). *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*. Freiburg: Alber.
- Walton, R.J. & San Martín, J. (2015). “Nota Editorial”. In: Walton & San Martín (ed.), “Julia V. Iribarne. Intersubjetividad, ética y antropología”. *Escritos de Filosofía* N°3, en asociación con *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas*, Serie Monográfica 6, 11–12.
- Walton, R.J. (1997). “Spain and Latin America”. In: L. Embree, D. Carr et al. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 675–679.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2002). “Prólogo”. In: J.V. Iribarne, Julia V. (2002). *Edmund Husserl. La fenomenología como monadología*. Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de Ciencias de Buenos Aires, 9–22.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2015), “El núcleo ético de los temas filosóficos capitales”. In: R.J. Walton, J. San Martín (eds.), “Julia V. Iribarne. Intersubjetividad, ética y antropología”, *Escritos de Filosofía* N°3, en asociación con *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas*, Serie Monográfica 6, 379–396.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2022). “Culture and Person in Francisco Romero’s Phenomenology”. In: B. C. Hopkins, D. De Santis (eds.), *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy XX*. Special Issue, *Phenomenology and the Hispanic World*. London/New York: Routledge, 97–114.

Zirión Quijano, Al. (2021). “Historia de la recepción del pensamiento de Husserl en el mundo hispánico”. In: A. Serrano de Haro (ed.), *Guía Comares de Husserl* (305–340). Granada: Comares.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2022). “Phenomenology in Latin America”. In: B. C. Hopkins, D. De Santis (eds.), *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy XX*. Special Issue, *Phenomenology and the Hispanic World*. London/New York: Routledge, 39–53.

---

<sup>i</sup> On the later reception of phenomenology in Argentina as well as in Latin America, see: Zirión Quijano (2021, 2022), Walton (1997, 2022), Rabanaque & Walton (2022) and R.P. Lerner (2021).