

COMMUNITY ENDING PHENOMENOLOGICALLY EXPLAINED

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Abstract

When it comes to the concept of community in phenomenology, possibility holds a higher value than reality. The author emphasizes that a community becomes more attractive to its participants the broader the range of possibilities, which can be realized within it. On the other hand, the dynamic of a community is determined by the degree of alignment or misalignment between the changes of individuals and of their habitual patterns, and the habitualness of the community. When the two

habitual patterns—the one of the community and the one of its participants—reach an irreconcilable antagonism, the end of the community is inevitable. Paradoxically, the ideal community is precisely the one whose members can relatively easily accept its dissolution. Unlike totalitarian forms of sociality, in which only the possibilities of the community are realized, but not those of the individuals, members of the ideal community manage to maintain awareness of their own possibilities, recognizing that no community is in the position to completely exhaust an individual's potential. In the second part of the paper, the author presents three types of potential community dissolution, which arise from varying degrees of attachment to the possibilities that the community is capable of realizing.

Keywords: phenomenology, community, possibility, dissolution, habituality.

Konec skupnosti, fenomenološko razjasnjen

Povzetek

102 Ko gre za pojmovanje skupnosti znotraj fenomenologije, ima možnost višjo vrednost kakor resničnost. Avtor poudari, da skupnost za njene udeležence postaja privlačnejša, kolikor širši nabor možnosti je mogoče uresničiti znotraj nje. Na drugi strani dinamiko skupnosti določa stopnja ujemanja ali neujemanja med spremembami posameznikov ter njihovih habitualnih vzorcev in habitualnostjo skupnosti same. Ko habitualna vzorca – vzorec skupnosti in vzorec njenih udeležencev – dosežeta nepomirljiv antagonizem, je konec skupnosti neogiben. Paradoksalno je idealna skupnost natanko tista, člani katere lahko relativno zlahka sprejmejo njen razkroj. V nasprotju s totalitarnimi oblikami socialnosti, v katerih se uresničujejo samo možnosti skupnosti, ne njenih posameznikov, člani idealne skupnosti zmorejo ohranjati zavedanje o lastnih možnostih, s tem ko pripoznavajo, da nobena skupnost ne more popolnoma izčrpati posameznikovega potenciala. V drugem delu prispevka avtor predstavi tri tipe potencialnega razkroja skupnosti, kakršni izhajajo iz različnih stopenj navezave na možnosti, ki jih je skupnost sposobna uresničiti.

Ključne besede: fenomenologija, skupnost, možnost, razkroj, habitualnost.

In the present article, we begin from the thesis that the advantages of the phenomenological approach to community, in comparison with philosophical anthropology or social psychology, lie in the ontological claim that possibility takes precedence over actuality, as well as in the specific phenomenological concept of habituality. The first insight of the Husserlian phenomenology of intersubjectivity is that we become who we are thanks to the communities, in which we participate. This means that our personal boundaries are also the boundaries of our interactions with others. If that is the case, transcendence can only be achieved in the realm of human relationships, *entre nous*. It is as if the field, usually understood as fixed by mutual power relations and constrained by adopted routines, turns out to be the greatest promise for subjectivity. For only in this area can we change; only through communal relationships can we shift our own boundaries.

Husserl recognizes the constitutive element of subjectivity not only in the real, but also in the possible, proposing for this purpose the neologism “All-community” (*Allgemeinschaft*). This concept is conceived by him as the foundation of the lifeworld, which includes both existing customary institutions and traditions, as well as takes into account possible institutions and traditions. A possible community is inseparable from the actual community. Moreover, even in the phenomenological encounters with the phenomenon of togetherness—it still holds true that possibility is higher than reality. Its higher ontological status lies in the fact that a community should be understood as a horizon of the realization of possibilities. Therefore, the range of the realization of possibilities represents the key criterion, upon which a community is evaluated and assessed.

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For a phenomenologist, to think about the community means to step out of the concrete experience of community, that is, to include in it all the variations of the potential forms of community. In other words, this means that in the constitution of individual thinking and action, not only the forms of community known to my language, my people, and my cultural heritage participate. This circumstance does not concern mere traditionalism, because to discover a community, my gaze does not need to be directed towards the past. Likewise, it is not hidden neither in external reality nor in the people or institutions surrounding me. Self-inspection is quite sufficient. Reflection

upon ourselves reveals the sources of our personality in social acts or in relations with others: "What man is and means beyond his animal existence is determined solely by the social *Milieu*." (Litt 1926, 204.)

We will define the concept of community in the broader sense of the word based on the Husserlian concept of the state as *a conscious organization of will* (cf. Husserl 2006, 52). When it comes to the individuals who make up a community, a sense of mutual belonging is necessary among them, along with a certain degree of agreement and harmony, which is important to achieve through free will of the participants, rather than being dictated externally or from the top of a hierarchy.

Furthermore, it is essential to distinguish between egoistic desires and achievements, aimed solely at fulfilling personal demands and satisfactions of community members, and the common purposes and achievements. Husserl emphasizes that common purposes have a different spiritual meaning from any individual act as well as from the actions of individual subjects as parts of the community.

104 It should also be noted that the demands of an ideal community in reality encounter their limits due to the imbalance between the realities of the participants in the community and their possibilities. We may agree with Edith Stein when she claims:

[...] we know that the lifepower of a community doesn't exist independently and alongside of its components, but rather coalesces from the power of the single [members]. However the individuals don't contribute their full, undivided power into the community, but [contribute] only insofar as they are living as members of the community. (Stein 2000, 233.)

An ideal community would thus be one that leads its members to the fulfillment of all their possibilities. However, such an outcome is not possible, because the range of possibilities we possess is neither fully determined and defined, nor is it precisely limited in advance. Consequently, there is a potential for a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the community when its participants, despite everything they have achieved within it, become aware of some possibilities that remain unrealized. The birth of discomfort is expected

as soon as one has realized that some possibilities cannot be achieved within the given community. The dynamic and unpredictable gap between the realized and the possible represents a permanent source of crisis within a community that cannot be fully overcome or eliminated. Thus, it is necessary to agree with the thesis regarding the limitations of every form of community:

No natural, spiritual, or psychological [seelische] connection to a community is so strong that it is able to break free from the region of possibility. All life with others carries the germ of the capacity of dissolution because souls are more than what they factually are. (Plessner 1999, 105.)

On the other hand, every desire and action of an individual member of the community can be reflected in relation to the supra-individual desires of the community. These leave their mark on the community's interest by either strengthening the community, contributing to its maintenance, or weakening its connective tissue. Besides the communal perspective, it is necessary to pay attention to the internal view, that is, the way, in which the relationship to the community constitutes its participants. Despite the Husserlian emphasis on *the particular importance of common purposes*, it seems that phenomenological approach is more productive through reflecting *the mutual interactions of individual participants within the community*, and that its methodology is more suitable for illuminating the “internal constitution’ for the member, which means for the conscious subject who feels connected with other subjects in a social community, who feels like a member of that community” (Walter 1923, 17).

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The dissolution of community: The conflict of habitualities

Phenomenology does not consider individual subjects within a community as completed, once-and-for-all determined agents. Rather, an individual is understood as a person undergoing constant change. The changes experienced by individual participants in a community are never completely aligned, nor do they occur in the same way or direction. Hence, the community is not a mere fusion, in the same way as love is not simply a merging. Among community

members, no matter how successful the community is, the presence of otherness is necessary—an irreducible otherness that is always accompanied to some extent by “tensions and ambiguities” (Guibal 2009, 17).

Where all community members are the same, where they have somehow become indistinguishable from one another, there is a caricature of community. The fundamental test of community must affirmatively respond to the question about difference and otherness among its members. To the objection that differences introduce divisions into the community, which follows the model of St. Paul and his famous call for being “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,” it must be countered that *the absence of difference points to forms of community where individuals are deprived of realizing their own possibilities*. The unanimity of a community convincingly testifies that only the possibilities of the community are being realized, not personal possibilities. Establishing a total agreement is inconceivable without the colonization of necessity where space was once reserved for possibilities. Finally, it is perverse to have a relationship with other human beings that tend to eliminate their otherness: “A perverse world is a world without the other, hence a world without the possible. The other is the one who enables. A perverse world in which the category of necessity has completely replaced the category of possibility.” (Deleuze 1969, 372.)

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This inherent variability of the actors inevitably reflects within the community. We cannot assume the whole to be stable and permanent where its constituent parts are subject to constant change. Therefore, a community is fundamentally unfinished: “the community is essentially unfinished, that its incompleteness is its essence; the essence, which is precisely and necessarily defective, of its existence, of its being simple existence” (Esposito 2010, 95). Additionally, every intersubjective community is characterized by a common surrounding world, or “common habitualities” (Husserl 1973, 230), as well as by “common effects.” From this perspective, the dynamics of a community are determined by the degree of alignment or misalignment between the changes of individuals and of their habitualities, and the habitualities of the community. A consciously organized collective will enters into crisis primarily due to the changes in its actors or the changed circumstances, in which they function together. Viewed from the perspective of its participants, the horizon

of possibilities that the community is able to fulfill plays a special role in the crisis of the community.

When a community provides no opportunity for the fulfillment or realization of its participants' possibilities, it is perceived as static and overly passive. Inevitably, the motivations for participating in such a community gradually weaken. Moreover, a community that leaves its participants' possibilities unfulfilled irresistibly closely resembles a prison cell with its rules and authorities. The awareness of unrealized possibilities that can only be achieved within a community, but certainly not within the current one, naturally fosters a negative attitude towards the community. This negativity can only be overcome, if the community itself changes. On the other hand, those communities that present a boundless and inexhaustible field of possibilities, no matter how difficult their realization might be in reality, appear promising and attractive. Hence, the key to increasing the attractiveness of a community lies in offering possibilities that once seemed unachievable, but are now within reach. Communities also appear attractive when they significantly expand possibilities that previously existed only in much more modest forms.

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From the community's perspective, a crisis appears as an expression of disloyalty, selfish indifference to communal matters. This is especially evident in those types of communities, which are not taken for granted and for which one must fight. When indifference towards the community is demonstrated, instead of readiness to fight for its maintenance, the question of its dissolution becomes merely a matter of time. One thing is certain—when the habituality of the community and of its constituents reach an irreconcilable antagonism, the end of the community is inevitable.

We observe two extremes, in which the dissolution of a community reveals its character. Namely, where the community is understood as constitutive for its members and decisively shapes their self-awareness, reactions against the mere possibility of the community ceasing to exist are inevitably intense and violent. In such contexts, the dissolution of the community is simply not accepted. Individuals who largely identify with the community will react to the very possibility of its end with maximum discomfort and will do everything to prevent it. Those who do not hesitate to resort to violence, in order to preserve a community, typically do so, because their identity is so intertwined with

the idea of the community that for them, it becomes impossible to consider themselves as being outside of it.

Moreover, the phenomenon of violently preserving a community indicates the abolition of difference, where the personal, the individual, is virtually lost in the communal. It is important to note that the merging of the personal and the communal is not only a desire of totalitarian systems or merely the result of various forms of collective subjugation of the individual. This merging might also occur thanks to free will of the community's participants. Simply put, such a will could be characterized by the identification of the personal with the communal. Drastic examples of this can be found in diverse communities. In many manifestations of love, the personal is lost in the idea of the loving community; numerous communities function as based on the voluntary or calculated subjugation of the individual will to the collective will embodied in the figure of a leader, chief, commander, abbot, and so on. In such cases, a crisis in the community is experienced as a radical questioning or existential threat to those participants who find it extremely uncomfortable to envision themselves outside the community.

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The phenomenon of war represents the pinnacle of community domination. A state of war is the ideal medium for establishing the primacy of the collective and of the communal over the personal and the individual. The paradoxical dialectic of war speaks to a time of destruction and devastation, annihilation of life that promotes itself as a fantastic opportunity for the ultimate liberation and for the establishment of an authentic community. What manifests in reality as desolation, devastation, and collapse is presented in the realm of possibilities, which imply freedom, purification, and authenticity:

[...] the most important concept that determines the meaning of such war events, namely the concept of "liberation" (often conjuring in the popular mind images of shackles breaking, removing the yoke of foreign occupation, escaping from a "dungeon of peoples," and the like), creates the illusion of returning to an original and perennial ethnic form. (Vlaisavljević 2022, 42.)

Therefore, the polarization in a state of war takes on the most drastic forms—examples of sacrifice for the community and the willingness to give

up one's life for the common good are highlighted as models. The figure of the hero represents the archetype, providing a source of self-confidence and enhancing the combat readiness of the community. The next level of positive exemplars is found in the traditional virtue of courage. War events require not just a sense of belonging to a common cause, but also courage, an active readiness to confront those who threaten the community.

Conversely, negative patterns are primarily seen in traitors of the community, those who place their personal well-being or the preservation of their lives above the interests of the community. The figure of the traitor inevitably faces symbolic ostracism from the community. Once it distances itself from the traitor, the community reconstitutes and mobilizes itself in a renewed form—demonstrating that the figures of traitors also possess an integrative power for a community, similar to the power mediated by the figures of heroes who have sacrificed themselves for the community. The figure of the coward represents the next level of negative exemplars, since the community of cowards is inconceivable as a fighting community. Due to the critical nature of courage in a community, reactions to instances of cowardice are almost as severe and rigorous as those directed at treason. Both cowardice as well as betrayal threaten the integrity and survival of the community, warranting strict measures to address them.

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Three possibilities for community dissolution

1. Independence and Detachment. In scenarios where a sense of independence prevails, regardless of whether it is justified or false, the dissolution of the community will not provoke many negative reactions. Members who do not feel a strong connection to the community may perceive their association with it as a burden they are eager to shed. Emphasizing their distinctness from the community can serve as a justification for leaving it. The modern crisis of community is characterized by the increasingly accepted possibility that one can leave a community altogether, a civilizational development that was unimaginable for many centuries and millennia. Today, where the common denominator between a community and its members are lost for any reason, there is little effort made to maintain it.

2. *Attachment and Resistance to Dissolution.* In contrast, where the community is seen as constitutive of its members' identities and decisively shapes their self-awareness, reactions to the possibility of its end are intense and violent. Members who cannot imagine themselves outside of the community will resist its dissolution with great discomfort, even resorting to violence, in order to preserve it. This reaction stems from the intertwining of personal identity with the idea of the community, where the personal is almost lost within the communal. This merging can result from the totalitarian systems or from the voluntary will of the community's participants, leading to the identification of the personal with the communal.

3. *Conflict and Divergent Valuations.* The third possibility lies somewhere in between the two extremes. Conflicts over the community's dissolution or survival arise when participants significantly differ in how they assess and value its importance and its role in their self-understanding. It is difficult to avoid conflict when one side cannot imagine themselves outside of the community, while the other associates a more fulfilling future with life beyond the existing community. An idealized form of community would imply consensus with regard to its dissolution. In such cases, all interested parties independently recognize the realm of possibilities outside the community. Paradoxically, the ideal community would be the one whose members can easily handle its dissolution.

These scenarios illustrate the complex dynamics and potential outcomes related to the dissolution of communities, reflecting both the individual as well as collective dimensions of such transitions. This does not concern neither a frivolous disregard for the community nor an ease of leaving the community, which would inevitably suggest that there was never a serious sense of belonging to it. Rather, it concerns the maintaining of an awareness of possibilities, the fact that no community can fully exhaust the possibilities of an individual.

The first and third options for ending a community imply some form of conflict, while in the case of the independence of members from the community, one can expect a quiet and peaceful separation. Does conflict say anything about the quality of the community? Specifically, is it expected that a high-quality community that provides certain benefits to all its participants, making life within it far better than without it, can also have a dignified breakup,

during which the former participants treat each other with great respect? These general problems are going to be solved by means of the attitudes of individual actors regarding the end of their shared life.

There is an impression that does not corroborate the equation, according to which a bad community would necessarily mean a turbulent, unpleasant breakup, while the highest forms of community would necessarily result in an unselfish and noble end to the community. We record examples of bad communities where relations among the actors drastically improved after the community ended, with the breakup itself proceeding as good as possible. Simply put, when participants in a community become aware that their community is not good for them, change seems promising. When the community no longer supports the realization of the possibilities of its members, but instead suppresses and prevents them, separation seems beneficial and potentially allows relations to become better than they were during the community's existence. Additionally, there are examples of excellent communities that had a beneficial effect on their members, but ended in the worst imaginable way. The reason lies in the attitude towards the end of the community, specifically in the immeasurably different significance the community had in the self-awareness of its actors. When harsh differences emerge among the actors of a community, especially where some actors do not want to see themselves deprived of the community, while others primarily want to leave the community, some form of violence ensues, the extent of which was unimaginable at the time when all actors expressed similar interest in remaining in the community.

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A phenomenological view of modernity would not fail to point out the genealogy of contemporary subjectivity responsible for the weakening of community and communal bonds. However, the impression is that modernity is not characterized by conflicts or desires to confront the community, but rather by disinterest or a dispirited attitude towards it. The former power of the community, which members could not even think of leaving, has today been replaced by impotence, the other extreme, which is widely reflected in indifference towards forming communities. This is not solely due to the democratization of community in terms of the possibility of leaving it and the consequent awareness of the limitations and finiteness of every community. The forms of personal fulfillment or interaction with others that could once

be found only in a community are now offered by the simulacra of the virtual worlds and various forms of interaction via social networks. The causes of the twilight of contemporary forms of community, such as friendship, joint political action, or spontaneous forms of association, are recognized in the absence of a need for them. Today, community is lacking, because substitutes are massively found elsewhere. There are countless substitute versions of immediate interaction. These usually take place in the comfortable security of the virtual community, where the risks of various forms of conflict and misunderstandings that occur during direct encounters are almost nonexistent.

The phenomenon of degenerated nationalism

112 Phenomenology does not wish to expand and internationalize the community as much as possible, but attempts to include in our concept of the communal everything that encompasses not only the real and former, but also potential intersubjectivity. To put it more precisely, such a community would necessarily be pluralistic, because it would include idealized forms, patterns, and symbols of exceptionally successful types of community, as well as those forms of imbalance between the interests of the community and the organization of will that lead the community to disintegration. Husserl's personal and philosophical experience with the community, unfortunately, in his later years, was primarily confronted with a community in disintegration:

That skeptical pessimism and shamelessness, which have prevailed in the political sophistry of our time, which uses socio-ethical argumentation only as a cover for the political purposes of completely degenerate nationalism, would hardly be possible if the naturally formed concepts of community, despite their naturalness, were not burdened with dark horizons, intricate and hidden mediations, whose elucidation far exceeds the capacities of uneducated thought. (Husserl 1989, 5.)

According to Husserl, contemporary sophists are politicians who work to achieve the aims of degenerate nationalism. Written in the early 1920s for the Japanese readers, the "Five Articles on Renewal" mention a sort of fiasco of the community that is, on one hand, natural, but on the other, blurred by

dark horizons, that is, intricate and hidden mediations. Husserl refers to the “naturalness” of a national community of one culture, language, and tradition. Such a community becomes “unnatural” when it sees itself as higher, more valuable, and more significant than other communities.

The horizon of self-awareness thus becomes dark; since it is filled with awareness of what the nation is not, it is composed of fictions about itself. A community that has projected itself into what it is not appears powerful to its members, because it promises the realization of possibilities that are not self-evident and whose realization is very difficult to expect. Moreover, we interpret hidden mediation as false mediation, as mediation, in which the current moment of the community is projected into a future moment of achieved dominance over other communities:

A different idea is formed, a national idea, but not as a general idea of culture, but as a ruling idea that has spread within every nation: the national idea as an egotistical idea of power and as an egotistical idea of elevated self-valuation. This idea acts contagiously [...]. (Ibid., 121.)

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The next prerequisite for the phenomenological thinking of community lies in implementing a neutralization in the sense of suspending the validity of the existing community. Only when the awareness of the existence of relations with a community is relativized by adopting the possibility of their radically altered validity, do we approach the threshold of neutralization. The work of neutralization, however, is not reducible to creating apathetic subjectivity. It does not involve severing everyday emotional and existential connections with the community. A neutralized view is simply not neutral in the usual sense of the word. It does not signify impartiality, nor does it aim for a lack of personal interest in the community. On the contrary, it involves examining the present from the perspective of its absence:

[...] when I practice on the ground of nothingness, I simultaneously subject the real to the epoché. [...] If I remain in the same attitude, I always repeatedly go through nothingness, always repeatedly through annulled being... (Husserl 2008, 416.)

It seems that the experience of community is particularly illuminated thanks to the shift, in which nothingness seizes us. Beside the many possibilities of communal existence, its ultimate possibility points to negation, to the cessation of communal life. This is not to say that the end of communal life represents its essence, but rather that the essence of the community cannot be phenomenologically comprehended if this ultimate possibility is omitted. The manner and character of a community's dissolution, in any case, represent an experience that more eloquently testifies to the specific form of communal life than mere natural existence within it. While the natural attitude, on the one hand, implies the existence of some form of community and takes it for granted, the phenomenological assessment of lost or interrupted communal life yields multiple results. Above all, the experience of a negated community potentially creates in us a devastating sense of temporariness. Since individuation is conceivable only as an intersubjective process that occurs within and thanks to the community, its loss causes a disruption, a loss of the links that weave temporal threads into a unified whole. Structurally akin to the experience of shock, the loss of community cannot simply be integrated with the previous experience, during which the community existed. As we become who we are through interactions within a community, its cessation results in a break in experiential continuity, creating a radical gap between being-in-community and being outside of it. Individuals deprived of community are unable to reconcile with the idea that this is now a permanent state, nor can they give up the expectation that they might achieve something better. The traumatic effect of losing a community is reflected in confronting nihilism, the nothingness of broken interpersonal bonds. The experience of that kind of nihilism is contrary to the idea of the subjects as the masters of their possibilities.

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The disintegration of a community takes away possibilities and therefore always entails a certain form of desubjection. The subject loses themselves to some extent; hence, the rhetoric of losing and disappearance of some form of communal life is associated with impoverishment, with the mute experience. In other words, it involves the impossibility of a linguistic articulation of the experience. Losing community is structurally akin to the loss of freedom, as it introduces powerlessness where a sense of power once appeared. Hence, the different degrees of attachment to the community that is no longer are

directly reflected in incomparable intensities of the need to compensate for its disappearance. Where communal life represented a source of personal identity, where it was intimately appropriated, the loss takes on the form of a trauma, a dramatic experience that demands to be replaced by some alternative form of community.

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