4 *The Phenomenology of Cognitive Evolution*

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International Relations (IRs), as a discipline, have had little to say about phenomenology. While a small set of IR scholars have averred the value of phenomenology,[1] most in the field rarely provide an account of the basic processes and kinds of perception and sensation that condition the human *experience* of politics, perhaps on the grounds that it does not matter. A growing and productive body of IR scholarship does address emotions, and branching off from the "emotional" turn are also projects that focus more specifically on sensations, affect and embodiment.[2] Yet this work does not, for the most part, elaborate a systematic account of experience and action,[3] instead studying the situational dynamics of feelings and bodily or somatic[4] states, often through psychoanalytic and psychological frameworks of analysis. The process of cognitive evolution as Adler theorizes it is also silent on the experience of that evolution from the perspective of those undergoing it, immersed in it and engaged in it. This is no criticism; to quote Kenneth Waltz, "Any theory covers some matters and leaves other matters aside."[5] However, I think Adler's approach is highly suggestive of particular understandings of experience and sensation, and cognitive evolution as a framework has phenomenological implications worth exploring. Elaborating this phenomenology would not only add to Adler's own account, but clarify themes that link cognitive evolution to current work on emotions in IR. In this chapter I will try to do this, and provide an account

[1] See, for example, Higate 2012; Weinert 2018; Drieschova 2019.
[2] For some excellent overviews of this literature, see Åhäll and Gregory 2015; Sucharov and Van Rythoven 2019. See also Mercer 2006; Ross 2006; Reus-Smit 2014; Koschut 2017.
[3] With the odd notable exception, such as Ross's (2019) discussion of emotion and experience through the pragmatist phenomenologies of John Dewey and William James.
[4] McDermott 2014.
[5] See, for instance, Solomon 2014; Hutchison 2016; Dittmer 2017; Åhäll 2019.

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of what it means to experience "becoming" in the relational settings that characterize international politics.

The phenomenology of cognitive evolution extends from the pragmatist social theory undergirding the approach. By pragmatism I mean an action-centric, relational, and processual view of the social world. It is action centric because the ontological focus is on practice rather than on practitioners, agents or actors – a move that, as Haas also discusses in this volume, allows for agency to vary, be discovered or generated and emerge. It is relational because practices emerge out of configurations of interactions between people and their environments, such that any account of them must include both. It is processual because the social world is defined as an unfolding "becoming" rather than a stable arrangement of things. Adler's book builds on these philosophical commitments in ways that have phenomenological implications, suggesting definitions and roles for experience and sensation as part of action. By following these implications, I hope to expand the explicit scope of cognitive evolution in ways that will appeal to a broader section of the discipline.

Specifically, I begin with the insights of John Dewey to argue that cognitive evolution is phenomenologically driven by the frustration and anxiety of action inhibited, and by the satisfaction of action made effective. I then introduce the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Dewey's perspective, to better trace how the process of cognitive evolution is experienced as the expansion of mind across its environment. Together these two philosophers are especially helpful for understanding how the cognitive differentiation of mind and world is episodically (and perhaps only partially) interrupted to expose, emotionally and representationally, how they are ontologically continuous. Merleau-Ponty, more so than his German phenomenologist forbearers and his French existentialist cousins, is heavily preoccupied with the body, environment and habit, and thus already may be understood as a kind of pragmatist in the same vein as Dewey.[6] Both advance a view of the mind as embodied within a moving tapestry of habits, pressures and sensations, as the constituents of the world. If read as theorists of cognitive evolution, they show our place within a co-evolving *ecology of all*.

[6] I recognize that labeling Merleau-Ponty a pragmatist runs the risk of antagonizing some of those reading him. I am not categorically positioning him within the pragmatist project, nor ignoring that other elements or preoccupations of his work differ from those of the American pragmatists.

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The philosophical reexamination I conduct here has several implications. It shows that collective intentionality, like everything affective, is embodied and nonrepresentational, consisting in joint and entangled collective projection toward shared ends. This implication goes beyond the claims of IR literature on embodiment, which focuses on the bodily, carnal or physiological as a site and instrument of politics. It is a thesis on the fundamental nature of being: that it has direction, or at least directionality. In other words, I advance a view of embodiment that focuses on the experience of growth and change as a physical and social process. It also shows that ontological security – or more accurately, ontological insecurity – is a core meta-mechanism, or causal condition of possibility, underlying all other mechanisms of cognitive evolution, even if it need not be explicitly referenced in many explanations for actual events. Finally, it shows that cognitive evolution is ontologically flat, which implies that any differentiation of structural and agentic mechanisms is merely heuristic, and clarifies when or how they might be helpful as such.

These implications in turn help cognitive evolution speak to three ongoing discussions in the field. First, phenomenology gives an account of both the *triggers* and *ends* of the mechanisms of cognitive evolution. It explains how experience and sensation provide the impetus for action and the point where satisfaction is realized, resulting in the termination of a process of change or the stabilization of a practice undergoing revision. Second, phenomenology links cognitive evolution to ontological security – the latter being a burgeoning research program – by providing a meta-theoretical basis for sociologizing anxiety and emotion, and by providing novel mechanisms by which these things have institutional effects. Third, phenomenology adds momentum to the ways cognitive evolution can advance constructivism, first by giving it a clear material basis – the body and its projection within its environment[7] – and second, by connecting it to some existing conversations not typically preoccupied with institutional transformation.

I make my argument in three sections. First, I briefly outline where in Adler's approach to cognitive evolution the role of experience and sensation should lie, and what its links are to his causal mechanisms. Second, I connect his ontological premises to the phenomenology of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, approaching them as two pragmatist

[7] Drieschova, in this volume and in 2017, further elaborates the processual and experiential ways new materialism approaches cognitive evolution.

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philosophers – explicitly in the case of Dewey and implicitly in the case of Merleau-Ponty – whose perspectives are consistent with Adler's own. I explain how these insights inform discussions on causal mechanisms and microfoundations,[8] ontological security[9] and materiality.[10] Third, I offer some remarks on how phenomenology facilitates and complements Adler's normative project by grounding the possibility of humanist progress in shared human experience. I then conclude with some speculative remarks on how the phenomenology of cognitive evolution can help clarify "post truth" as a moment of epistemic crisis in political discourse, as an illustrative example.

The Absence of, and Place for, Phenomenology in *Cognitive Evolution*

Adler's book offers a seminal approach to cognitive evolution as a process of significance in international politics, focusing on relational and structural evolution in communities of practice. While Adler devotes significant time to process ontology and evolutionary epistemology, the actual mechanisms of his theories refer to things the agent can do within the world, and the processes the agent can undergo while doing them. The closest this comes to an account of the experience of undergoing cognitive evolution is in his first mechanism, of practice-driven changes in disposition and expectations.[11] Yet dispositions and expectations, while they imply orientations toward and away from things, are not themselves feelings or experiences. Explaining the evolution of order and practice at the institutional or collective level may not need a phenomenological account, but the possibility of providing one opens up greater scope for empirical input and theoretical synthesis.

One area where phenomenology clearly contributes to cognitive evolution theory would be to explore the triggers of Adler's seven mechanisms.[12] Fundamentally, cognitive evolution is a theory of situated, collective learning. Once learning starts, we can use agential mechanisms to trace how individuals revise their practices, and how broader social forces condition individuals as they do so, but it is in perceptions and emotions of human beings that the learning process is

[8] Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Bennett 2013; see also Kurki 2008; Guzzini 2011.
[9] Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008; see also Pratt 2017.
[10] Dittmer 2017; Drieschova 2017; Mac Ginty 2017. [11] Adler 2019, 198.
[12] These mechanisms are covered at length in chapters 6 and 7 of his book.

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initiated, and where its outcomes are found – are *felt* – to be adequate or wanting. In phenomenology we can find clues as to what kinds of situations generate cognitive evolution, and thus, in theoretical and empirical terms, what would impel it. Put differently, phenomenology offers us a way to grapple with the causal foundations of human action without being individualistically micro-foundational.

The other significant contribution phenomenology may offer here is to clarify the ontological status of individuals and collectives when approached through cognitive evolution theory, both in terms of the nature of intersubjectivity and in the knitting together of "agential" and "socio-cultural" mechanisms, rendering both into a single field of action. Regardless of the level of aggregation or locus of causal action, these mechanisms all impose themselves upon human experience, unfolding for us in felt, bodily ways. Phenomenology, in other words, is not only the beginning of cognitive evolution but its end: the point-space whereby it crystalizes into transactions of organism and environment, and where the subjective and objective meet.

For both contributions, I draw on the phenomenology of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, whom I group together on the basis of their complementary accounts of action and experience. Adler himself draws heavily on Dewey's writings in his book, both directly and through his a contemporary interlocutor, Hans Joas, while a number of other IR scholars have also found Dewey's work to be especially helpful for conceptualizing institutional change.[13] Merleau-Ponty, however, is an unknown figure in IR scholarship, though this is perhaps unsurprising given that the similarities of his views to pragmatism are underappreciated in general.[14] In the next section, I survey these two philosophers as they pertain to the experience of learning.

Dewey and Merleau-Ponty as Phenomenologists of Learning

Learning processes are of interest to many scholars of IR, and not only those interested in cognitive evolution.[15] While Dewey is primarily

[13] Schmidt 2014; Pratt 2020.

[14] One acquaintance of mine described this as a similarity that many have remarked upon but not yet done the labor of elaborating. This is not strictly true, however, as some scholars have done some of the work (Kestenbaum 1977; see also Standal and Aggerholm 2016).

[15] Levy 1994; Stein 1994; Knopf 2003; Harnisch 2012.

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read in IR as a theorist of habit and practice,[16] learning is a central preoccupation throughout his life's work. His model of the learning process, very generally, is connected to his more general theory of action. Actors encounter problematic situations – those in which our streams of habituated, situated ways of interacting with the world around us are interrupted. When habit is interrupted or inhibited, the organism must select and synthesize from a wide range of mutually exclusive responses. The way by which it does so is through reflective self-awareness, from the consideration and selection of alternatives[17]. Thus, people's minds are extended throughout the various activities they engage in, and those minds transform, or learn, when ongoing activities become impeded. Learning consists in finding ways to overcome such impediments. This model appears in basic form, and then receives further articulation, across most of Dewey's most prominent works – *Democracy and Education,*[18] *Experience and Nature,*[19] *Logic,*[20] *Art as Experience*.[21]

As important as the concept of situated habit is to Dewey, equally key to his understanding of learning is the concept of experience, where perception is ordered by action, into an "organized context of meanings and activities."[22] For Dewey, experience is a sort of existential unity in which action, emotion and being are knit together, and wherein judgments about objects and events are formed in a "contextual whole."[23] Habit and inquiry unfold in a "universe of experience,"[24] in which problems must be "felt, before [they] can be stated," and are "unique and inexpressible in words," at least in their first and primary sense.[25] While he employs multiple, not entirely consistent definitions of the term, the mature articulation of his thought on experience is clearest in the chapter of *Art and Experience* titled "Having an Experience."[26] To quote from its opening paragraphs:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under

[16] Hopf 2010; Pratt 2016. [17] Hildebrand 2008, 28–30. [18] Dewey 1916.
[19] Dewey 1929. [20] Dewey 1939b. [21] Dewey 1939a.
[22] Alexander 1987, 133. Yet Dewey establishes communicative meanings as a second-order manipulation of experience: "Where communication exists, things in acquiring meaning, thereby acquire representatives, surrogates, signs and implicates, which are infinitely more amenable to management, more permanent and more accommodating, than events in their first estate" (1929, 167).
[23] Dewey 1939b, 66. [24] Ibid., 68. [25] Ibid., 70. [26] Dewey 1939a.

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conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into an experience. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other . . . In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience [emphasis original] when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences.

Later in the chapter, Dewey is more explicit about the perceptual quality of experience, and on what delimits and establishes, cognitively and emotionally, *an* experience as a discrete thing: "The action and its consequence must be joined in perception . . . .No one ever arrives at such maturity that he perceives all the connections that are involved."[27] Experience is thus where actors confront problematic situations, in which their activities are inhibited, and is where "reflective thinking transforms confusion, ambiguity, and discrepancy into illumination, definiteness, and consistency."[28] In short, experience is sensate, directed, holistic and the locus of learning and reflection.

A phenomenological reading of the foregoing should revolve around three things, as it applies to the issue of learning and cognitive evolution. First, experience is not merely temporally prior to learning, it is *ontologically* prior, and indeed transcendental – that is, a condition of possibility. The formation of concepts, the apprehension, exchange and transmission of ideas through social intercourse, the rendering of action as an object of reflection, all happen because learners exist in a field of feelings and perceived pressures, apprehended in ambiguous ways. For Dewey, life and the mind do not merely start and end in experience, but are *of it*.

Second, cognition is oriented around situations, as concrete arrangements of not-always-clear entities and events, into which we are always already thrust, and an already ongoing stream of situation-navigation. That is, situated habits undergoing revision might be made objects of reflection, but they are not initiated by conscious decisions. Rather, they are ongoing, and consciousness rides atop them, occasionally steers them, and is ultimately itself a situated habit. Put differently,

[27] Ibid. [28] Dewey 1929, 67.

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the action process in its entirety is existential – it is *in the world*. This view of action is, in IR, a central precept for many scholars in the practice turn, and Dewey can broadly be categorized as a practice theorist.[29]

Third and finally, the character of *an* experience is the product of second-order apportioning of experience into discrete units, with apprehensible temporal, teleological and symbolic properties. It is conditioned by our unique individual (and social) perceptual trajectories, and to ascribe meaning to an experience, to revise our actions as a conscious result of it, and to render it as part of our personal histories, is a cognitive maneuver intervening on experience in its first-order character.

This directly speaks to a number of the mechanisms Adler describes in his theory of cognitive evolution. Not only does it shed light on practice-driven changes in dispositions and expectations, but also socially generated reflection and judgment – albeit on a particular view of those two things. More broadly, it should speak to all of his mechanisms, as Dewey's views of action and experience comprise a holistic theory of learning. It does not, however, offer an especially operationalizable set of categories, meaning that while it may provide a sense of what kinds of things in principle trigger cognitive evolution, it does not make it easy to specify them in actual cases. To develop a more concrete set of definitions, Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenology is helpful.

Merleau-Ponty is not primarily a philosopher of learning, but his phenomenology – developed as a response to empiricist and idealist views of judgment and the mind – develops a corporealized view of perception and judgment sympathetic to Dewey's own perspective.[30] This is most clearly articulated in his earlier work *Phenomenology of Perception*.[31] He too positions us in a holistic tapestry of experience: "Consciousness is no less intimately linked with objects of which it is unheeding than with those which interest it, and the additional clearness brought by the act of attention does not herald any new relationship."[32] Then later: "experience is [that to which] the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness. It is the

[29] Büger and Gadinger 2014.
[30] Both, for example, offered more or less identical criticisms of the reflex-arc model of psychology (Carmen 2008, 86–87).
[31] Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]. [32] Ibid., 32.

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intentional tissue which the effort to know will try to take apart."[33] He is more explicit than Dewey in presenting experience as a condition of possibility:

> [P]henomenology, alone of all philosophies, talks about a transcendental field. This word indicates that reflection never holds, arrayed and objectified before its gaze, the whole world and the plurality of monads, and that its view is never other than partial and of limited power. It is also why phenomenology is phenomenology, that is, a study of the advent of being to consciousness, instead of presuming its possibility as given in advance.[34]

He and Dewey are of a kind, however, in describing habit and action as the subjects of learning and as having an embodied, world-distributed nature:

> It is quite true that what brings together, in habit, component actions, reactions and "stimuli" is not some external process of association . . . the learning process is systematic; the subject does not weld together individual movements and individual stimuli but acquires the power to respond with a certain type of solution to situations of a certain general form.[35]

Or, more succinctly: "habit is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action . . . It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort."[36]

Finally, Merleau-Ponty shares with Dewey the premise that understanding is a matter of effectuality in the world rather than the systematic representation of information: "[I]t is the body which 'understands' in the acquisition of habit . . . .To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance – and the body is our anchorage in a world."[37] Having established that understanding has an embodied basis, Merleau-Ponty clarifies how intentionality is not about how we project the world to ourselves, but how we project ourselves *to the world*:

> The body's motion can play a part in the perception of the world only if it is itself an original intentionality, a manner of relating itself to the distinct object of knowledge. The world around us must be, not a system of objects

[33] Ibid., 62. [34] Ibid., 71. [35] Ibid., 164. [36] Ibid., 166. [37] Ibid., 167.

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which we synthesize, but a totality of things, open to us, towards which we project ourselves.[38]

This culminates in assigning intentionality the role of orienting us in relation to the ends of our actions, and in relation to the processes through which those ends are realized:

> [M]y world is carried forward by lines of intentionality which trace out in advance at least the style of what is to come (although we are always on the watch, perhaps to the day of our death, for the appearance of something else). The present itself, in the narrow sense, is not posited. [Its objects] are there for me, but I do not explicitly perceive them. I do not so much perceive objects as reckon with an environment; I seek support in my tools, and am at my task rather than confronting it.[39]

Merleau-Ponty is to a large degree responding to a different philosophical context than is Dewey, but the above summary of his views establishes numerous points of intersection and elaboration.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology extends Dewey's own insights in two key ways. First, he more clearly states the ways in which life – in the "transcendental field" – comprises a holistic range of potential connections between the sensing subject and its objects of perception. More so than Dewey, he thus establishes experience not just as formation of transactions between organism and environment, but a horizon of intentional possibilities. As such, we can conceive of perception as a space of action, and define learning not just as the revision of habit but the (re)direction of the body – something that can be concretely mapped.[40]

Second, he develops intentionality, typically understood in representational terms,[41] in an explicitly nonrepresentational, bodily and enacted direction. While Dewey argues that mind lies in action, Merleau-Ponty elaborates how it does, in finer-grained philosophical terms. By connecting the ends and means of action and habit to intentionality, and by defining the latter as movement toward the objects of the world, he offers a conception of mind *as practice*. For this reason, it

[38] Ibid., 450. [39] Ibid., 483.

[40] In other words, Merleau-Ponty shares Dewey's essential insights into habit and experience, but offers some conceptual levers for field-mapping as a methodological move for studying specific cases of learning.

[41] Perhaps most famously by Searle, on whose social ontology Adler draws.

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is surprising that his work has not made a significant appearance in the practice turn in the field, as nonrepresentationalist and embodied view of intentionality offers a way for practices to be traced, placed within context and interpreted without needing to make assumptions about actors' beliefs. In other words, Merleau-Ponty's intentionality is methodologically well-suited for operationalizing the mechanisms of cognitive evolution.

The Phenomenology of Cognitive Evolution and IR Theory

The phenomenology of cognitive evolution, if it follows Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, can be summarized into several basic properties. First, it is experiential, meaning it is embedded in the sensory and perceptual process of subject engagement with the world; it cannot refer to change in logical relations empty of content. Second, it is bodily, meaning that it happens in the way the body works on, with, and through the world; it cannot be some kind of purely internal or intellectual process of rethinking ideal categories. Third, it is habitual, meaning it consists in the evolution or revision of acquired modes of bodily action and reaction; it cannot be the outcome of a process that begins in the will of the subject absent both existing habit and will already being and being conditioned. Fourth, it is motile, meaning that it involves the processual movement of the body through space; it cannot involve a change without movement because all change involves a movement of the body into a new place, with concurrent changes in the particular conditions and impositions of the world at hand.

This yields a number of critical insights into cognitive evolution. Perhaps the most significant concerns intentionality. Adler frequently references and draws upon Searle's[42] representationalist approach to collective intentionality, assigning it to communities of practice as a property.[43] Nor is he the only constructivist in IR to rely heavily on Searle in this way.[44] Yet – and as Adler himself seems to acknowledge at points – this approach coexists uneasily with the "exosomatic"[45] and practical components of intentionality emphasized by cognitive evolution. By approaching the issue of collective intentionality through a phenomenological perspective, Searle's approach is shown to be

[42] Searle 1995. [43] Adler 2019, 20, 73, 132, 210.
[44] See, for example, Evers 2020. [45] Adler 2019, 71 (note 19) and 111.

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incompatible with cognitive evolution. That is, Searle cannot be correct in defining intersubjectivity and collective intentionality as "we" representations of the relationship between mind and world, because this understanding of intentionality is at odds with an embodied, motile view of mind.

However, if we understand intentionality in embodied and motile terms, in line with Merleau-Ponty's explicit definition and Dewey's implicit one, it is easier to grant it to collectives like communities of practice. Simply put, a group of people bound together by participation in collectively implicating habits share "lines of intentionality" as they move together through a shared perceptual space and project themselves toward shared ends. On this view, "background" cannot be pre-intentional because nothing is pre-intentional, and the philosophical difficulties of parsing group minds is sidelined, because mind is, per Dewey, a verb – mind lies in practice, and a practice (and therefore a mind) is a social and collective endeavor.

This is not merely commentary on Adler's pathbreaking book; a phenomenology of cognitive evolution also offers a number of insights relevant to the work of others in the field. Namely, it contributes to work on micro-foundations, ontological security and materialism. In the next section I discuss each in turn.

Microfoundations and the Phenomenology of Cognitive Evolution

The search for microfoundations preoccupies many corners of the social sciences, and the field of international relations is no exception. Predominant suggestions include rational choice theory[46], psychology[47], emotions and habit or practice[48]. However, to sidestep the ontological debates that separate and place into conflict these options, a number of prominent scholars have instead suggested a methodological alternative: microfoundations are just causal mechanisms.[49] Their argument is that regardless of the ontological basis on which the social world rests, the epistemic basis on which

[46] See, for example, Levy 1997.
[47] See, for example, McDermott 2004; Hopf 2010. Note that I include Hopf (2010) in this category as despite claiming "habit" as an alternative, Hopf explicitly reduces habit to "cognitive neuropsychology."
[48] See Adler and Pouliot 2011. [49] Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Bennett 2013.

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theories rest is some specification of a causal link or process by which the object of investigation is generated. Rather than take a position on this debate, I instead suggest that there is value in making clear the relationship between ontological microfoundations and the definition of a mechanism, because this clarifies just what, conceptually, a mechanism is and does.

The microfoundations of cognitive evolution lie in practice and habit, and the discussion of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty I provide here contributes to this position. However, I also argue that phenomenology clarifies two things: what triggers a mechanism and what the relationship is between structural and agentic mechanisms.

Emotion – as discussed in the introduction to this chapter – is a trigger for mechanisms of cognitive evolution.[50] For Dewey, emotion is a key response to inhibited habit; it is not just part of *an* experience, as previously discussed, but a form of anxiety that indicates and induces a revision in habit.[51] For Merleau-Ponty, emotion is another kind of embodied sensory awareness, akin to memory or proprioception,[52] and thus part of the apparatus of intentionality. Emotion, in other words, is not just an outcome of habits, actions, practices and the like, but a driving force for them. An implication of this view is that cognitive evolution can be a process of re-feeling emotions, of changes in the way emotion is experienced and expressed.

Emotion thus performs two roles for theorizing a causal mechanism of cognitive evolution. First, why a mechanism begins to operate – meaning how a particular case of cognitive evolution begins – is a function of the anxieties and affective perturbations experienced by human begins in a given situation. This carries a methodological implication: the start of a case study, at least as an account of cause and effect, is the point at which key actors involved feel dissatisfied enough to start doing things differently. It is an emotional threshold, beyond which actors take novel risks and expend greater creative efforts to find new avenues of action. Second, the time and place at which a mechanism ceases to operate, or at least a helpful endpoint in an

[50] A role that deviates from many more conventional assumptions of constructivist theories of international relations, which are ontologically ill-suited to accounting for emotion as a causal force (Ross 2006).

[51] For this reason, emotion is assigned a roll as causal trigger in Gross's (2009) pragmatist view of social mechanisms.

[52] Carmen 2008, 102.

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account of its operation, is the point at which anxiety settles, and a situation of "adequacy" has been reached, where the risks and efforts of creative revision of habit appeal less than the *status quo*, and where the "lines of projection" of intentionality seem clear and unimpeded. This too carries the implication of an empirical investigation of what people perceive and feel, as a way to know when a process of change stabilizes.

Another micro-foundational insight offered by phenomenology concerns the distinction between "agentic" and "socio-structural" mechanisms, which Adler draws and which, arguably, track with long-standing ontological commitments within the field of IR to the differentiation of structure and agency.[53] For Adler, cognitive evolution is ontologically flat, meaning it does not propose a stratified world of layered and supervening structures. In his approach this distinction is a valuable device for clarifying and organizing the relationship between processes occurring at different scales of time or community involvement. Phenomenology can disclose the shape of the flat ontological space these two categories of mechanisms share, describing how all mechanisms of cognitive evolution proceed through organisms and their environments. If we understand intentionality, whether individual or collective, as embodied and motile, then we can also understand the intentional trajectories of large groups of people as an arrangement of physical conditions with effects upon the potentialities and contents of our perceptual fields.

In other words, if socio-structural mechanisms involve the movement of intentional organisms through the world, their impact upon practice resolves in the same basic encounters as those produced by agentic mechanisms. It is not that phenomenology *solves* the "problem" of structure and agency; rather, this problem is not a first-order ontological problem *for* phenomenology. Beginning with phenomenology makes it easier to see that the language of description and explanation can focus on individual agency or on larger-scale structural dynamics, but this is a matter of methodological convenience in mapping out what happens in the same kind of environment – much as the language of ecology and zoology both refer to the study of animals (albeit not exclusively, for the former).

[53] Wendt 1987; Wight 2006.

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Ontological Security and the Phenomenology of Cognitive Evolution

As noted earlier, the phenomenology of cognitive evolution also bears on the problems, themes and theoretical commitments associated with IR research into ontological security. In particular, it offers a key link between ontological security research as it currently stands, and the practice turn. The concept of ontological security – meaning security of the self – originally derives from psychoanalytic accounts of self, with IR scholars[54] importing the concept over from psychiatry[55] and sociology,[56] but it has since expanded to include a range of emotion-management investigations.[57] Attempts to reformulate ontological security away from psychological and into practice-theoretical terms have proceeded largely by diminishing the role of emotion in an account of how actors pursue ontological security or respond to ontological insecurity.[58] Yet the phenomenology of cognitive evolution shows that this is not necessary; or, at least, it clarifies the connection between the psychical/affective and the practical or institutional.

As I have argued, ontological insecurity – the feelings of existential anxiety brought on by experiences of alienation from sources of self-stability – plays a key causal role in all mechanisms of cognitive evolution. Ontological insecurity, when understood broadly, may encompass a wide range of experienced interruptions in the projection of one's body through the world – that is, in intentionality – and cognitive evolution, whether at the level of personal dispositions or socio-structural arrangements, is the process by which practice is revised until the anxiety of ontological insecurity wanes. This links the causal mechanisms of cognitive evolution to ontological security by way of the anxiety as a trigger for action. As a result, the theory of cognitive evolution has built *via media* between ontological and epistemological approaches that otherwise have a gulf between them – this being the first of Adler's two *vias medias* Reus-Smit refers to elsewhere in this volume (the second being normative). Because of their different commitments, scholars studying institutions, even from a constructivist standpoint, have little to say to scholars in the psychoanalytic or psychological tradition prevalent in most ontological security scholarship. The phenomenology of cognitive evolution locates a point at

[54] Kinnval 2004; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008. [55] Laing 1969.
[56] Giddens 1979. [57] See, for example, Solomon 2014. [58] Pratt 2017.

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which these approaches meet – where the genesis of institutional change arises out of the impetus to resolve anxiety and maintain composure of the self.

Materiality and the Phenomenology of Cognitive Evolution

The final contribution of the phenomenology of cognitive evolution lies in how it speaks to debates in the field on materiality.[59] These debates actually range several distinct questions. One concerns the relationship between "social" and "material" reality, with one position holding that these are distinct things,[60] and another holding that the social is also material.[61] Another concerns the nature of power, which Guzzini explores in greater detail elsewhere in this volume; namely, whether something exists that can be called "material power" and whether it is distinct from other kinds of power. On the one hand, material power is a distinct concept in extensive use in the field, but on the other hand, it does not seem to coherently fit within the constellation of social meta-theories of power underlying more specific conceptions[62]. Finally, there is a debate on the role of cognitive and emotional factors on institutional outcomes – these things being physiological, and therefore material, but also manifestly influential in socially meaningful behavior. Arguments for foregrounding these factors range from psychology[63] to affect,[64] while skeptical positions may be found especially in either rationalist[65] or relational[66] theorizing – and for that matter in practice theory, where cognition is not defined in psycho-affective terms.

The phenomenology of cognitive evolution can resolve some of these debates. First and foremost, it clarifies that the social is thoroughly material, as Drieschova also points out in this volume, and that meaning arises out of bodily engagements between organism and environment. This does not imply crude biological determinism, but it does suggest that the distinction some scholars have drawn between a social world and a material one is ontologically incoherent. Phenomenology offers a well-developed critical alternative to the Cartesian dualism that underlies the social/material dichotomy. It does so without closely binding

[59] Dittmer 2017; Drieschova 2017; Mac Ginty 2017. [60] Wendt 1999.
[61] Deudney 2000; Acuto and Curtis 2014. [62] Barnett and Duvall 2005.
[63] Stein 2002; McDermott 2004; Hopf 2010.
[64] Hall and Ross 2015; Hutchison 2016. [65] Kahler 1998. [66] Jackson 2004.

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social formations to environmental constraints, however; rather, it projects the social into the environment by way of intentionality.

The second is that psychology is a legitimate part of social explanation, at least insofar as it considers the conditions of embodied perception and interaction, while models of action that leave it out are lacking. Yet there is also an implied limit to psychology here, as while the physiology of sensation matters, action nevertheless has a broader horizon of possibility than is captured by investigations of cognitive biases or behavioral tendencies.

Third and finally, phenomenology shows "material power" to be no different from any other kind of power, and in its simplest terms is a misleading Cartesian formulation. This goes some of the way toward acknowledging the roles of domination and coercion – roles which, as Guzzini argues elsewhere in this volume, are underplayed in Adler's book. However, an interest the *materiality* of power is especially significant to the phenomenology of cognitive evolution, because it foregrounds bodily responses to external impositions. This may be a helpful corrective for sociological accounts of power that ignore the ways some means of coercion acutely and overwhelmingly manipulate the senses, especially or primarily by inducing pain and terror.

Cognitive Evolution, Phenomenology, and Normative Theory

Can cognitive evolution offer a basis for normative political theorizing? For Adler, cognitive evolution implies a horizon of bounded progress, in which practices might evolve to become universally held as an empirical fact, constituting advancement without requiring an *a priori* definition of the good against which progress must be measured. He begins with a communitarian moral ontology, but advances the emergence and growth of "common humanity" as an idea with universalizable potential, as an empathetic acknowledgment (open-ended in form, *contra* recognition as a more determined good) that can proliferate across and throughout distinct communities of practice.

Phenomenology adds to this project in two ways. First, it offers depth to the establishment of a humanist "middle ground" between descriptive and normative theory, which Reus-Smit identifies elsewhere in this volume as a major, though perhaps implied, project underpinning Adler's *oeuvre*. While Reus-Smit is skeptical that a theory of practice (and of its cognitive evolution) can underwrite cosmopolitan values,

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the phenomenology of cognitive evolution can ground the moral character of social orders in bodily and sensory space, where freedom and constraint, pleasure and pain and satisfaction and frustration all dwell. These experiential states are ethically compelling terms for normative theory, and clarify the relationship between cognitive evolution and the attainment of the good – at least on some conceptions.[67] In particular, it is a space in which empathy and acknowledgment gain perceptual and affective qualities, and resolve as more basic emotions. These are definable and help operationalize Adler's conception of bounded progress. They offer a *fourth* route to a middle ground, distinct from three approaches Reus-Smit suggests in this volume – not order, not right and not the transcendental conditions of practice, but a language of considerable normative and descriptive flexibility. Phenomenology lets us talk about people and the world in ways that are acutely and vividly of ethical meaning, invoking common experiences that admit of empathy and demand engagement in ways that languages of rights and orders do not.

Second, phenomenology may present a substantive *demonstration* of common humanity, by emphasizing the dynamics of experience shared by all, and by rendering human sensation, emotion and perception as a common condition of possibility for more culturally specific practices. One of the more ethically meaningful dimensions of cognitive evolution is the shared experience of learning as part of the process of effective action and human flourishing. For Dewey, it is clear that cognitive evolution will be part of any process of progress, however bounded or humble in conception. Through the phenomenology of cognitive evolution, we arrive at universal or cosmopolitan definitions of confronting resistance in the world, of experimentation, and of collective inquiry in practice. By meeting others with the statement "we all struggle," we may cross different communities of practice with the basic material of acknowledgment – to use Adler's language – needed to develop broader or deeper shared political trajectories.

This implication of the phenomenology of cognitive evolution sheds light on sympathetic projects in political and ethical theory. Simone Weil argued for a common humanity based on the recognition even strangers have of one-another's suffering, using the example of our apparent

[67] It may also be suggestive of some meta-ethical theories over others; the phenomenological basis for cognitive evolution I outline here may make it harder to do deontological ethics than one of virtue or consequence. That discussion, however, lies outside the remit of this chapter.

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obligation to render basic aid should we come across a person in abject distress and should we possess the ready means to assist.[68] This primitive ethical obligation, which in Weil's view precedes determinations of membership within particular moral communities, has been taken up by Linklater as a potential basis for a sociology of global morals.[69] Taking Weil's argument to refer to "certain emotional and expressive capacities which revolve around mutually intelligible concerns about the vulnerabilities of the body,"[70] and reading it alongside Frankfurt School interests in giving voice to those suffering, Linklater uncovers the possibility of a learned, corporeal solidarity across communities.[71] Emmanuel Levinas is another sympathetic thinker, whose phenomenology begins not with the self but with the other, meaning that experience begins not with being but with duty.[72] As with Weil, the basis for ethics here lies in recognizing human vulnerability – what Levinas sees as the human face's implicit injunction of "Thou shall not kill"[73] – and feeling obliged to care at a primitive, affective level. Applied to cognitive evolution, it suggests the possibility of communities of practice capable of recognizing and navigating the "*mauvaise conscience*" that Levinas proposes, with some communities established to resist it, override it, so as to commit violence, and others to institutionalize it.

I do not claim that the addition of phenomenology resolves the problem of how to ground even a modest conception of progress, nor any kind of cosmopolitanism, but I think it clarifies how a theory of cognitive evolution might go some of the way toward doing so. I have thus tried to flesh out (so to speak) Adler's normative project, which I consider to be one of the most important and also one of the most elusive of the tasks he takes up in his book.

Conclusion: Phenomenology in an Age of "Post-Truth"

In this chapter I have discussed what phenomenology can offer to the project of theorizing cognitive evolution in IR. I began by surveying the positions of two pragmatist phenomenologists, Dewey and

[68] Weil 1952. [69] Linklater 2007. [70] Ibid., 192.
[71] Linklater (2011) also cites Norbert Elias on the development of increased public aversion to violence, and would later develop this empirical analysis of a cosmopolitan emotional instinct in his history of the cosmopolitan harm principle.
[72] Levinas 1989; see also Bergo 2017. [73] Levinas 1985, 89.

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Merleau-Ponty, and connected their arguments to those Adler makes in his seminal book. Both philosophers approach emotion and sensation in ways that seem to account for the start and end – the trigger and *telos* – of the causal mechanisms of cognitive evolution. Beyond this, I have also argued that phenomenology accounts for the micro-foundations and materiality of cognitive evolution, while also connecting conceptions of it to ongoing IR research on ontological security. Finally, I have argued that phenomenology provides an important link between the descriptive and normative aspects of theorizing cognitive evolution, making it possible to talk about common humanity through the shared and universal aspects of experience. While there remains much to be said about phenomenology, both on this subject and in IR more generally, I hope to have established the meta-theoretical and normative value of including it within the project of theorizing cognitive evolution.

Yet I thus want to offer some more concrete concluding remarks about what this means for the practical task of going out and making sense of international politics. There are some clear implications to introducing phenomenology to the theory of cognitive evolution: greater attention to sensation, emotion and corporeality through psychological, psychoanalytic and affect-oriented approaches to conceptualizing, measuring and explaining outcomes of interest.[74]

One concrete example of this is the recent epistemic fracturing of political discourse into a state of "post-truth" – the epistemological condition Crawford, in this volume, identifies with growing normlessness and tribalistic anti-immigrant xenophobia. "Post-truth" was *Oxford Dictionary*'s 2016 "word of the year,"[75] and arises out of high-profile abandonment of facts by the Trump (2016) presidential and pro-Brexit campaigns, which together dominated news cycles in the United States and the United Kingdom[76]. It refers to a moment where politicians and some media outlets claiming demonstrable falsehoods that nonetheless penetrate public opinion (particularly in communities on the political far-right) because of their emotional resonance rather

[74] This is perhaps best exemplified in Elias's (1994) melding of psychogenetic and sociogenetic forces in accounting for the role of disgust and bodily regulation in *The Civilizing Process*.

[75] Their definition for post-truth is "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

[76] McIntyre 2018, 2.

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than their evidentiary soundness. Yet while lying or "bullshitting"[77] is not a new phenomenon in political rhetoric, there is something deeper at work here: partisans for reactionary conservatism and nationalism seem not just unconcerned when their claims are undermined by evidence; they genuinely seem to believe their claims even when starkly disconfirming evidence is right in front of them.[78]

Post-truth is the outcome of several mechanisms of cognitive evolution. It arises from competition between communities of practice, but it also appears to be the *genesis* of a new community of practice as well, since it is not just a function of the rise of new populist insurgents but of the fracturing of a previously more unified discursive sphere. In addition to these "socio-cultural" mechanisms, there is at least one "agentic" process at work as well – evolution in socially generated reflection and judgment.[79] Post-truth is thus the cognitive evolution of a community of inquiry that increasingly has learned to find facts and evaluate claims in ways at odds with normal journalism and scholarship. Yet while these mechanisms offer a sociological account of how it is that political knowledge and discourse have become so fractured, they do not account for a critical link between institutional change and the perceptual, affective forces that could explain post-truth not just as a change in discourse, but a change in embodied cognition. A definitive quality of post-truth is that epistemic confidence is determined not by methodological procedures of investigation but by immediate emotional and political resonance.

While commentators lament post-truth as the demise of a practical correspondence view of facts, as statements that either do or do not describe the real state of things, its affective dimensions imply something more than lies or "bullshit" is behind the phenomenon. While some American pundits have suggested that "facts have a Well-Known liberal bias,"[80] this is only partially correct; rather it is that liberal

[77] On bullshit, defined as instrumental speech unconcerned with the truth rather than designed to deliberately dissemble, see Frankfurt's eponymous book (2005) on the subject.

[78] A recent monograph by McIntyre (2018) reviews and discusses post-truth, including some of the cognitive biases and media history responsible for this outcome. For the sake of brevity, and also in order to focus on deeper evolutionary processes, I will not reproduce this here.

[79] All of these mechanisms are drawn from Adler (2019).

[80] See, for example, Paul Krugman's December 8, 2017 editorial in *The New York Times*, available online at www.nytimes.com/2017/12/08/opinion/facts-have-a-well-known-liberal-bias.html. Accessed October 10, 2018.

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politics are advantaged by a way of evaluating the world embedded in many institutions of governance and, indeed, in scientific research. Rather, truth is determined based on what *is experienced* as most apt, consistent and agency-enhancing. Through a focus on feelings of anxiety and satisfaction, and on perceptions and projections of bodily engagement, phenomenology sheds light on what forms of agency are at play. The structural bases for post-truth are easier to diagnose than the ways agency propel (or resist) it, and the remedy is a theory of cognitive evolution that includes the ways truth is experienced – and how that experience does or does not differ from the experience of expedient or empowering fantasy. This sort of understanding of post-truth, or simply of epistemic judgment more generally, emerges most clearly through a phenomenology of cognitive evolution.

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