Generational Phenomenology

by **Dr Lester Embree**

Information from a book (by Lancaster and Stillman, 2002 – see later) about generational gaps and conflicts in American companies is used to show that there is a generational dimension to the socio-cultural lifeworld. In relation to that, some indications are offered about how attitudes toward one's own as well as other generations can be reflectively analyzed. Other societies probably have similar differences between generations.

Introduction

This is an essay in a series devoted to under-explored dimensions of the lifeworld and it is based on the belief that a fifth period of the phenomenological tradition has begun that it is focused on cultural things.[1] Other essays in this series have been devoted to interculturality,[2] ethnicity,[3] gender,[4] ecology,[5] and social class.[6]

In the United States currently it is not unusual for academics who can remember World War II to find younger faculty, graduate students, and especially beginning undergraduate students difficult to understand and no doubt the contrary is equally the case. The start of a clarification of the terms, differences, and relations between the current American generations and how they can be approached phenomenologically can be made through study of Lynn C. Lancaster and David Stillman, *When Generations Collide: Who They Are, Why They Clash, How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work* (New York: Harper Business, 2002; hereafter cited parenthetically).

Lancaster and Stillman are management consultants and chiefly address leaders of companies. Much is said about how worsening

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[1] Lester Embree, "The Continuation of Phenomenology: A Fifth Stage?"*Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* (www.ipjp.org), Vol. I, No. 1 (2001).

[2] Lester Embree, "The Constitution of Polite Fictions," In *Phenomenology of Interculturality and Life-World*, ed. Ernst Wolfgang Orth and Chan-Fai Cheung, München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1998, pp. 209-228.

[3] Lester Embree, "American Ethnophobia, e.g., Irish American, in Phenomenological Perspective." *Human Studies* 20 (1997): 271-286.

[4] Lester Embree, "Reflection in and on Deborah Tannen's Genderlectics." In *Feminist Phenomenology*, ed. Linda Fisher and Lester Embree. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, pp. 153-171.

[5] Lester Embree, "The Possibility of a Constitutive Phenomenology of the Environment." In Eco-Phenomenology: Back to

the Earth Itself, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine. Albany, N.Y.: S.U.N.Y. Press, 2003, pp. 37-50.

[6] Lester Embree, "Encountering Status and Stratification." In Person, Community, and Identity: Phenomenological Perspectives, ed. Delia Popa, Madalina Diaconu, and Ion Copoeru. Cluj:Napoca: CCS Publishing House, 2003, pp. 191-201.

generational differences are adversely affecting major business issues of recruiting, training, motivating, retraining, and otherwise managing employees and thus profits. Generation gaps are wider today than ever and are "one of the fundamental reasons American companies are experiencing hiring challenges, skyrocketing turnover rates, increasing communication conundrums, and plummeting morale," because "what most people overlook is that each generation brings its own set of values, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to the workplace" (4). Managers can be blinded by generational biases that lead them to hire employees just like them (200). To study such a book and read about such things as "career pathing" can seem like foreign travel for an academic. It must be recognized, however, that most people devote about half of their waking lives to working and would answer about what they are, which is a question of identity, by naming their occupation.

A Factual Basis

The division of the ca. 270,000,000 people now in the United States into four generations is questionable. It seems not yet "politically incorrect" to express generational stereotypes publicly and so one can hear of "the annoyingly precocious Millenial kid, or the tattooed Generation X slacker, or the guilt-ridden, workaholic Boomer, or the lifeless retired Traditionalist leaning back on the porch swing" (17). But Lancaster and Stillman have attempted to transcend stereotypes:

> First, of course, we are a Boomer and an Xer who own a company together and know about what it's like to collide. But rather than depend just on our own experiences, we have enlisted a lot of help. We've read numerous books and articles by sociologists and demographers who are among some of the most brilliant people we ever hope to meet. We have fielded dozens of surveys both via our Web site and through our work with large and small companies in all sorts of industries. Specifically for this book, we conducted the Bridge-Works Generations Survey, which involved asking a multigenerational sample of several hundred people from all regions of the country and a variety of ethnic backgrounds about their workplace attitudes. The result of the survey has been to help us quantify a topic that can seem very anecdotal and personal. – But for taking the pulse of the generations, nothing beats talking to people. We have consulted with all sorts of companies, from huge Fortune 500 manufacturers to small service organizations. We've worked with for-profits as well as not-for-profits, and though our conversations with top executives, midlevel managers, and frontline employees, we've learned a lot about how people think and feel on the topic of the generations at work. (34)

This makes for an impressive observational basis even though the exposition in this book is somewhat popular, presumably so that a maximum of business people can read it. But there are still problems. The numbers of people are said to be as follows (the numbers in the second lines are adjustments explained presently). Incidentally, almost only Americans are discussed in this book and thus there is a question of how far the analysis holds for other rich countries, where conditions have been different, not to speak of the relatively poor nations.[7])

75 million "Traditionalists" born in 1900-1945,

[21,000,000]   <10.5 million>

80 million "Baby Boomers" born in 1946-1964,

[23,000,000]   <11.5 million>

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[7] One passage relates to this issue: "'I couldn't believe how brutally honest the British participants were with each other. They were perfectly willing to say, "Positively awful!" when a colleague screwed up. It's the style they were used to.' – Ken's example made us realize how culturally determined feedback styles can be. If styles can be dictated by nationality, then they can certainly be dictated by corporate culture." (268)

46 million "Generation Xers" born in 1965-1980

[13,000,000]   <6.5 million>

76 million "Millennials" born in 1981-1999.

[21,000,000] <10.5 million>

Members of social classes can be counted in similar fashion, but that is on the basis of far more social science. Regarding who appears actually referred to, some adjustments can be made.

To begin with, there are some remarks about gender, how diversity came to include women as well as people of color for Baby Boomers,[8] how the line between the sexes grayed while Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics were recognized by Xers, and how Millennials not only accept but expect diversity (320 ff.). However, nothing is actually said to the effect that generational relations might be affected by the different styles of thinking, speaking, and values of women. Moreover, it seems likely that generations and their relations are different for people of color, and the exposition seems quick to get to a notion of diversity beyond that focused on gender and ethnicity (322), but at least the image of the melting pot is rejected (326). In effect, the book seems addressed to the two-thirds of Americans of European descent and women as well as so-called minorities seem viewed as behaving like Euroamerican men. To reflect the emphasis on "White" America, the figures between square brackets in the list above have first been reduced to 67% of the numbers begun from.

The figures have then been further reduced to reflect the factor of social class, which is also hardly alluded to in *When Generations Collide.* There are a few allusions to life on the factory floor and there is expression of desire to pull poor children up into the mainstream (69), seemingly as if that mainstream was middle class. Indeed, practically everything in the book is addressed to middle-class managers managing middle-class employees who have hopes of ascending into management.[9] Hence, it seems wise to adjust the figures on the left above to exclude the 1% of super rich, 42% of working class, and 15% of poor in the United States. This leaves ca. 42% of Americans in the middle classes, so that the book is about generations in 42% of the 67% European Americans, which gives the figures in angle brackets above.

It is true that the minority ethnicities are mostly in the lower classes, but there is one more factor that makes the figures to the right quite high. While many large corporations with well-known names are mentioned, there seems no acknowledgement that some two-thirds of Americans work in companies with twenty-five or fewer employees. It is doubtful that management consulting reaches small companies and one can wonder if the intergenerational

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[8] E.g., "With fewer women in the workforce and a lower divorce rate, the Traditionalist family had several advantages. Men could focus more on their jobs, and women had the time to keep the household running. The households weren't taxed with child care costs because the mothers usually provided the child care (and were seldom paid for it)." (100)

[9] One example addresses class as well as ethnicity: "McDonald's Corporation, for example, desperate to staff its fast-food restaurants, has hired a growing number of Asian Americans and Hispanic Millennials who possess the people skills and work ethic McDonald's needs. The challenge was how to bridge the often-significant language barrier, especially at the drive-through, where employees and customers can't make eye contact and the scratchy microphones make speech in any language unintelligible. Solution? McDonald's has installed digital screens at many drive-through order stations that confirm an order visually. If you can't understand the transaction via the microphone, you can confirm your order right on the screen." (158) No concern is evident for the difficulties Asian and Latino Americans might have with the English speakers in a nation with no official language.

structure found in large corporations holds in them. In sum, rather than relating firmly to 270 million Americans, it seems more plausible that something like one-tenth of that number is related to in *When Generations Collide*. In that case, the authors's findings are more plausibly understood as referring to *middle-class Euro-American men in large corporations*. There can be no doubt, however, that these are the people who play the major role in the economy and society of the United States.

Some Phenomenology

At this point it can be asked how the generational dimension of the sociocultural world can be approached phenomenologically. Attitudes appear the best things to begin with. There is access to attitudes in the type of reflective observation best called self-observation, they can then be analyzed, and descriptions produced. Generational attitudes are like gender, class, and ethnic attitudes in being toward members of the own group in self-approving (or disapproving), self-willing, and self-categorizing as well as toward others in other groups in the parallel ways. Such attitudes have been reinforced since childhood, are traditional in groups and deeply habitual in individuals, and are, in short, cultural. Moreover, they can be analyzed into their volitional, evaluative, and cognitive components as well as for the types of experiencing involved.

For example, there are three sorts of attitudes discernable in *When Generations Collide* that crosscut the four generations. These are the attitudes of employees, managers, and of the management consultants who wrote this book. These are all positive practical attitudes, which is to say attitudes not toward destroying the businesses, but rather toward helping companies survive and improve. Being practical, they are attitudes in which the volitional component predominates over the valuing and believing components also discernable in them. On the basis of the types of direct and indirect experiencing characterized in the statement above, the consultants believe that there are four generations in the workplace, offer descriptions of them and their relations, disvalue corporate leadership that ignores generational differences, and urge understanding for the sake of improvements in the attitudes of managers in recruiting, orienting, training, motivating, retraining, evaluating, etc. and thereby in the working lives of the employees who produce and distribute goods and services.

The analysis of attitudes verifiable through self-observation furthermore shows that their objects include positive and negative intrinsic and extrinsic uses, values, and belief characteristics, manners of givenness, presentation and appresentation, etc. Attitudes are not only disclosed upon reflective analysis in self-observation but, derivatively, in indications such as the clothing that managers wear in contrast to the clothing of the employees they manage. Then thinking, including stereotyping as well as careful research such as that of Lancaster and Stillman, can occur. The work of Alfred Schutz could be used to clarify how this thinking is typifying or model constructing. In this way the reflective analysis of attitudes can extend to categories including millions of people.

Another question deserves attention at this point. Many will wonder how such an analysis might be considered philosophical when it seems rather sociological. Those with knowledge of 20th Century philosophy can recognize, however, that distain for research seeming like sociology comes from positivism and hence ought not to be accepted in phenomenology naively. At the same time, there may be considerable wisdom in phenomenological philosophy associating itself with qualitative and interpretive tendencies in the cultural disciplines in ways analogous to how the analytic philosophies are associated with the naturalistic and formal sciences. Besides the food for philosophical thought that can come from this association, there is power and influence to be gained within universities and the wider society.

Otherwise, the suggestion that the present essay is something like sociology can be responded to in at least three ways. In the first place, phenomenology is not and never has been confined to philosophy. Husserl himself believed the *Logische Untersuchungen* pre-philosophical and later recognized the possibility of a phenomenological psychology and others have relied on phenomenological procedures in over a score of disciplines beyond philosophy, beginning with Binswanger and Jaspers in psychiatry before World War I.[10] The analogous possibility of phenomenological clarification within even management consulting is thus conceivable. Secondly, there is the possibility of *philosophically* phenomenological reflection on non-philosophical disciplines, be they cognitive in the case of the sciences, be they axiotic in the case, e.g., of architecture, or be they practical in such disciplines as nursing or even in the practice of management consulting.[11] And, thirdly, if one accepts that theory and evidencing are refined from the lifeworld and recognizes that the lifeworld is concretely and originally sociocultural, then ethnicity, gender, class, and even generation are essential for clarifying the foundations of the scientific cultural disciplines.

Some additional preliminary remarks: The ranges of the birth years of the four generations discussed by Lancaster and Stillman are different and this is not explained. Presumably the women who do not work outside the home, retired

Traditionalists, and Millennials not yet in the workforce (half of them are prepubescent) are nevertheless believed to participate in cultures of those in their generations working in companies. The Traditionalists are said to include actually two generations, which are not distinguished and named, presumably because people in the earlier of those two generations, who were born between 1900 and presumably the early 1920s, are elderly. Furthermore, the concept of "Cusper" is introduced for people who identify with characteristics of two successive generations, i.e., Traditionalists and Boomers, Boomers and Xers, and Xers and Millennials, which can make the scheme more workable,[12] but this concept is actually not significantly relied on in the analysis, except that Cuspers are said to be the best managers (32-39). Finally, how the generations differ with respect to preferences in music, television shows, and icons or reference points in history are mentioned (8, 14), but also not used in the analysis. *When Generations Collide* is organized chiefly into chapters on management issues to which generational differences are then related. This is reversed in the summary below, so that the four generations are successively sketched and management issues related to them.

Traditionalists

The Traditionalists were born between 1900 and 1945. They grew up under the shadow of the Great Depression and feel lucky to have jobs. They believe in patriotism, hard work, and respect for leaders (3). They have struggled to get where they are and care about having their earned status recognized (11). Half are veterans and their preferred workplace has a militarily formal

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[10] Cf. Lester Embree, et al., *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997). The non-philosophical disciplines with phenomenological tendencies within them recognized in this work are architecture, cognitive science, dance, ecology, economics, education, ethnic studies, ethnology, film, geography, law, linguistics, literature, medicine, musicology, nursing, political science, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, and theology.

[11] See Lester Embree, "Introduction: Reflection on the Cultural Disciplines." In *Phenomenology of the Cultural Disciplines*, edited by Mano Daniel and Lester Embree, 1-37. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994.

[12] "One Cusper explained, 'Although I'm not really a Traditionalist or a Boomer, I inherited my parents' sense of loyalty. That means I have been willing to stay at this company through thick and thin. At the same time, through the bad times I learned the Boomer quality of adaptability. I appreciate it when I see them challenge the status quo. As a result, I've been able to be both a supporter of policy and a change agent when needed." (40)

quality.[13] They typically did not receive specialized training but instead learned the hard way on the job (279). They will now live longer than they expected, they worry about money, and they plan to work beyond retirement, having typically thirty years to live beyond age sixty five (126). They are the healthiest, wealthiest, and best-educated generation ever to retire, retirement for them is the time for the enjoyments they did not have time for when working; they account for 80% of luxury travel (126).

Traditionalists value job security above all else, respect institutions and like to be of value to them (80). They are dutiful listeners difficult to involve in discussions, they can be gotten to talk, but they do not want to look stupid playing games (288). They are loyal, have a great deal of experience, and are the centers of networks (202). They value consistency and continuity in corporate culture (203). They recognize chains-of-command and their central personality trait is *loyalty*. "This is a generation that learned at an early age that by putting aside the needs and wants of the individual and working together toward common goals, they could accomplish amazing things" (19). In the preferred world of the traditionalist, which is top-down, authority accepting, and disciplined, they are strong silent types who consider no news about their performances to be good news (255). "When it

comes to feedback, Traditionalists learned from the military model to button it up and listen hard to the voice of authority. Obedience was paramount, and talking back was out of the question. They knew enough to stand up straight and listen hard when they were being reprimanded, and they went out of their way to show that they heard the message loud and clear" (259). It is best to give them feedback in private (262).

These people prefer to work their entire careers for one employer or at least in one field (55). Job changing is considered a sign of failure for those who put job security and loyalty ahead of happiness (242) and they do not feel comfortable even talking about different career tracks (56). Yet the recent tight labor market has led to "mining for silver" (218). When they are hired, the orientation programs ought to emphasize the history, culture, and mission of the organization and they should be told what they would contribute to the organization (219). They care about leaving a legacy.

What are the attitudes of traditionalists toward the other generations, which are all younger then they are? Sometimes attitudes are shared by Traditionalists and Baby Boomers and sometimes the objects of attitudes belong to more than one generation. Thus Traditionalists and Boomers are together bothered that Xers are trying to do jobs without having the appropriate experience (60), Traditionalists see Xers and Millennials "as being spoiled, expecting too much too early in their careers, and having a lack of appreciation for how lucky they are to have a job" (80), while Millennials complain about being put in the same category as Xers (xxiv). The older generations do not consider the younger credible, while the younger consider the older to lack cutting-edge skills (43). Having fought for their jobs, Boomers consider seriousness at work important and, like Traditionalists, prefer "a formal environment with specific dress codes and rules of conduct" (142), which clashes with the desire of Xers and

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[13] (19) "The workplace that many Traditionalists entered was a formal environment with specific dress codes and rules of conduct, both written and unwritten. Men wore suits, ladies wore stockings, bosses were addressed as 'sir' of 'ma'am,' and only certain approved-of items were appropriate for desktops. Protocol and formal ways of behaving at work created a consistent, professional environment for fledgling organizations that were trying to grow and expand during the earlier part of the last century. Much like the military model many businesses were designed to emulate, setting norms for dress and behavior for all encouraged the conformity necessary to achieve organizational goals." (142)

Millennials to be informal and have fun at work. And in a youth-oriented culture, Traditionalists do worry that they are behind the times (219) and complain in their exit interviews that everything is too automated, too fast paced, and that there is no pride in work any more (248).

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers are of course the children of the Traditionalists, especially of the 500,000 who believed they had chiefly won World War II and came home to an America that was no longer in depression but elated.

Boomers grew up in a relatively affluent, opportunity-rich world. Traditionalist parents did everything they could to create a world in which their children would have opportunities they had only dreamed of and to encourage their offspring to pursue those dreams. Energy that had been turned outward by Traditionalists toward a world in turmoil was now turned inward by idealistic Boom/ers intent on fixing what was wrong with America. Educated and able young idealists questioned the ideals of their parents' generation and protested the status quo, pushing for change in the areas of civil rights, women's rights, reproductive rights, and even the rights of Mother Earth, giving birth to the ecology movement. (22)

There were 50,000,000 television sets in 1960, when the oldest Boomers were fourteen (21). The unprecedented number of dual-income families produced far more disposable income, which they spend more and save less than their parents did (83). They also make up the largest generation, thus had to compete hard for positions and advancement while receiving less orientation and training from their employers. Students of how the company evolved, Boomers are sensitive to nuances of corporate culture and savvy about company politics (222 f.).

Optimistic and competitive (21), Baby Boomers seek to build stellar careers, they love being challenged, and they want satisfaction and fulfillment (57). They happily change jobs when they find better opportunities, so that opportunities need to be found within the corporation to retain them (243). When recruited, they want to roll up their sleeves and plunge in (226). Yet they use a "double-speak" whereby they will "let it all hang out" in private but are circumspect in public, for everybody is competing (259) and they need to worry about how they look (288). And "For this generation of strivers, rewards came to be about money, title, a better shift, seniority, the corner office, the up-front parking spot, and any other marker that let you and especially others know how you are doing" (82).

Baby boomers currently have the most responsibilities they have ever had, they will retain their competitiveness, and they feel that they will continue to move up (190). Where their attitudes toward other generations are concerned, they are in revolt against many of the values and methods of the Traditionalists. For example, their ideas about feedback "forced Traditionalist role models, bosses, and mentors to sit down with Boomers on a regular basis and let them know where they stood" (256) and their willingness to change jobs clashed with the Traditionalist belief that job changing indicates failure. With respect to younger people, Boomers fear being passed over by those with higher technological skills and requiring less salary less (xxiv). While they can recognize the tremendous potential in a Generation Xer, Boomers expect him to fit in, i.e., that "once in the door, he would adapt to the way they had always done business and buckle down to working his way up the same ladder *they* had climbed up on," which was not exactly the typical Xer's idea (248). Boomer bosses who think that training is a perk that helps employees to leave (279), repel Millennials, who expect to be learning continually (281).

Generation X

The biggest difference of the Xers is the size of their generation, which is only a bit over half as

large as those that came before and after (6), the U.S. birthrate having gone down in the three decades after the introduction of the birth control pill (157) at the same time that the demand for talent kept going up. Members of Generation X have been able to got ahead fast as "The long economic expansion of the 1990s created a situation of almost full employment" (5). Companies could "cherry-pick" Boomers but there are many fewer Xers to choose from (156) and, as the Boomers retire, Xers are moving into leadership positions (6). Where technology is concerned, Gen X is the first to play video games (288) and it contains the "techno-savvy" youth who are needed. "Whether it's instant meals from the microwave, instant cash from the ATM, instant news from CNN, or instant information from the Web, whenever they've wanted something, they have been able to get it" (258). They are difficult for Traditionalists and Boomers to understand and be comfortable with.

Generation Xers' need for freedom has been confusing for many Boomers and Traditionalists. The challenge is that during the birth years of Generation X, the U.S. divorce rate tripled. At the same time, many women entered the workforce, so that many more families had two working parents, which meant that Generation Xers came home to an empty house. We then hit the 1980s and suddenly these same latchkey kids who saw their parents spend more time at work than at home saw their parents tossed out on the street by their companies because the economy went sour. Consequently, we have a generation that is simply not willing to pay the same price for success that they saw their parents pay. – This doesn't mean Xers aren't ambitious or willing to work hard. They are both. But Gen X is a generation that's already focused on balance and freedom at an age when the Boomers wouldn't have given it a thought. (84)

A generation that has seen every role model indicted in court or at least exposed as all too human does not have heroes. Members of

Generation X see the formal and political as too slick. They deconstruct them and want absolute straight talk, the more raw, the more real (260). They are thus skeptical of traditions and institutions and must have faith in themselves (24). For them the world is dangerous, they must be individually resourceful (25), and they prefer to rely on their generational peers (228). They use peer groups to replace their families and seek more casual atmospheres (143). They also use technology to lower the wall between work and home (144). And they want fun with their work:

R. J. Pittman is a twenty-eight-year-old San Francisco millionaire and entrepreneur. One of his ventures was converting a warehouse into an incubator for high-tech start-ups. In designing the workplace for tenants, he put a game room/break area right in the center. From La-Z-Boys to laser tag, it was a place to hang out, have fun, and just relax. Should we be surprised that when potential tenants looked at the space, that was their favorite part? "If you're going to spend sixteen hours a day at work, … you might as well be able to work hard and play hard, all in the same environment." (144)

The concern in Generation X is not with finding job security but with finding *career security* and thus they seek to build "portable careers" (58). They feel the more secure the more there is on their résumés. Their frequent job changing may look flaky, unreliable, and disloyal to Traditionalists and Boomers, but Xers are happiest when being coached and trained and they always wonder if the company will invest in them (59), although they do not depend on it for help (52). They want autonomy and oppose hierarchy, seeking camaraderie instead (245-46). When interviewing for a job, they often interview the interviewer (185) and refuse to let negative aspects be glossed over (228). They are not interested in hearing about a company's past; they look for young, dynamic leaders, agility, flexibility, and change. They want innovation, not tradition. (152). They save money in part

because they doubt that they will receive Social Security (134), but they want to enjoy things all along and thus not wait to retire, so they take substantial time off between jobs, e.g., to compose music (135-138). And they want "freedom" and, paradoxically, this can attach Xers to their companies: "Portable savings, investment and retirement plans, continuous training, flexible leave policies, paid time off, accelerated career pathing, even things like relaxed dress codes and open office designs have helped foster a more 'free' and flexible sense of the corporate environment, thus making Xers all the more committed" (86).

With some repetition, the members of Generation X can be characterized in terms of their many wants, which is already interesting if older generations focus on what the *company* wants. After autonomy they want a good schedule and a way to have time off (247). Because they see the work world as full of uncertainty, they want to feel safe now, not later (85). From the outset they want to hear about career paths (229). They want to talk about the future and are proud of their many job changes and varied experiences (191). They have been through many orientation programs already and if they must endure more, they want superior production values in them (226-227). They want to know how they are doing all the time, hearing either immediately or in a few days (256), and they want to send feedback up to those above them as well as to have it come down (269). Incidentally, when in authority they do not want to be called "boss" and prefer something like "team leader" (298). And they want to feel that they are constantly learning new skills and will leave if they are not; the more they learn, the more they stay (280).

What are the attitudes in Generation X toward the younger as well as the older generations in the workplace today? "Having operated in the shadow of the Boomers for so long, they've become like those hand-picked intelligence units that pass information about the enemy back and forth with extreme efficiency. Xers tend to see their peers as allies in a silent battle to get out from under the shadow of the Boom" (76). Traditionalists often feel that they are seen as out-of-date and disposable (189), which is probably how Xers often see them. Xers do not like showing respect for elders (310) and they hate extra meetings and memos from those older and higher than they (305).

Millenials

Born between 1981 and 1999, Millennials are also referred to collectively as the "Echo Boom," "Gen Y," "Baby Busters," and "Gen Next" (27). This is the post-Cold War generation that does not know that there once was an East and a West Berlin (14). Since the average age at the time of writing is ten and few are employed full time yet, one must be especially cautious about the characterization of this generation. Nevertheless, "This is the generation that has had access to cell phones, personal pagers, and computers since they were in diapers. While the Xers were to first to jump on board the personal computer, Millennials can brag about being able to take it for a joyride on the information superhighway. Through the Internet, they have visited virtually every corner of the globe and have been able to choose between hanging out at the local mall *or* the virtual mall." (28)

"Members of this generation have had instant access to information all their lives" (230). They are greatly concerned about personal safety and feel empowered to take positive action when things go wrong, something that comes from their optimistic and idealistic Boomer parents (29). Indeed, "It's as if the Traditionalists have given the Millennials a dose of the *loyalty* and faith in institutions. Boomers have given them the confidence to be *optimistic* about their ability to make things happen, and Xers have given them just enough *skepticism* to be cautious. As a result, the pragmatic Millennials have combined these traits into their own identity. If you want to

remember just one key word to describe Millennials, it's *realistic*." (29)

Millennials have a deep appreciation of diversity.[14] In contrast with the three generations with chains of command, changes of command, and self-command respectively, they oppose commanding and favor collaborating (30). After all, they were raised in families in which they participated in major decisions and day-to-day negotiations all along. They are difficult to bully and they can contribute from the beginning (31). While the Xers benefited from a labor shortage, Millennials have benefited from the economic expansion of the 1990s (230), a third of them in 2002 having already worked twenty or more hours a week (207). If anything, their parents "over-programmed" them for life (65). They are prepared to move up, down, and sideways, some of them actually do not want to become managers, to be retained they do need to be given feedback, training, and support for all sorts of moves. Expecting to have ten complete career changes in their lifetimes, this generation interested in "parallel careers."[15]

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[14] (30) "A Millennial was interviewing for a summer job building Web sites and was turned off by a Traditionalist manager who went to great pains to explain that his company had a 'diverse' work environment. – 'I finally figured out what he meant by a diverse environment,' she explained. 'He had, like, two people of color working there. As if that's supposed to impress me. We have more diversity in our high school office than they have in the whole company. I thought, *If you think that is such a big accomplishment, I don't want to work for you.*'" (30)

[15] (66) "A Millennial graduating from college in 2002 might enlist in the Peace Corps and spend a couple of years abroad, then return to join corporate America to work in human resources, using the people skills developed working abroad. After learning how to recruit and retain employees internally, our Millennial might choose to apply those skills to the customer service unit, where she will be trained to now interact with customers instead of employees.

When it comes to rewards, Millennials want work that is meaningful for the client as well as the employee and that is fun all day (139). They can mistake silence for disapproval (273), are used to being busy (119), want flexibility in all activities (117), and do not care about accomplishing amazing things (193). Tangible rewards are attractive to fund busy lives (86), but the intangibles also matter: "These include a fun environment, the ability to work in teams with peers, having bosses they can relate to, and being allowed to participate in work decisions" (87).

Boomers had the wild-eyed optimism to believe they could change the world, and they accomplished some amazing things. The trouble is that Millennials don't seem to know or care much about those. Perpetually youthful Boomers need to be prepared to feel like fossils interviewing Millennials and to resist the temptation to lecture or reminisce. To hardened Xers, who tend to look at the business world as a tough nut to crack before it cracks you, the buoyancy of the Millennials can seem downright annoying. Xer interviewers wonder sometimes if Millennials are operating in the real world, and if they are, how come Xers never got a taste of it. (193)

Generational attitudes in general

Lancaster and Stillman conveniently supply summaries of seven "clash points," which are where generational conflicts are most likely to break out between generations in the workplace:

Again, the Millennial is using all the skills already obtained to move in a new direction but will be acquiring new knowledge as she learns all about the company's offerings. It won't be long before this self-motivated Millennial with people skills and good understanding of the company's products and services might notice patterns in the types of things customers are complaining about. That would be enough to propel her in yet another career direction—research.—Exhausted? Well, guess what? Our Millennial is now only thirty-two!" (67)

(1) Concerning *career goals*, Traditionalists want to build a legacy, Baby Boomers want to build a stellar career, Generation Xers want to build a portable career, and Millennials want to build parallel careers (55);

(2) concerning *rewards*, Traditionalists want the satisfaction of a job well done, Baby Boomers want money, title, recognition, the corner office, Generation Xers want freedom as the ultimate reward, and Millennials want "work that has meaning for me" (77);

(3) concerning *balance between work and the rest of one's life*,[16] Traditionalists say "Support me in shifting the balance," Baby Boomers say "Help me balance everyone else and find meaning myself," Generation Xers say "Give me the balance now, not when I'm sixty-five," and Millennials say, "Work isn't everything; I need flexibility so I can balance all my activities" (110);

(4) concerning *retirement*, Traditionalists consider it the time for their rewards, Baby Boomers consider it a time to retool, Generation Xers consider it a time to renew themselves (cf. 134), and Millennials consider it a time to recycle themselves (125);

(5) concerning job *changing*, Traditionalists believe it carries a stigma, Baby Boomers believe can put one behind, Generation Xers believe it is necessary, and Millennials recognize it as part of their daily routine (242);

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[16] "Balance today implies everyone is supposed to do everything and be good at everything. Men are supposed to be physically buff and know how to cook. Women are supposed to trade a few stocks on-line while looking like a Victoria's Secret underwear model. Kids are supposed to be smart, well adjusted, great in school, and in line for imminent Ivy League admission. And grandparents should be agile, in shape, smiling, fun, attentive, and, of course, rich." (102)

(6) concerning evaluation or *feedback*, Traditionalists say "No news is good news," Baby Boomers say "Feedback once a year, with lots of documentation," Generation Xers say "Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing," and Millennials want "Feedback whenever I want to it at the push of a button" (255); and

(7) concerning *training*, Traditionalists say "I learned it the hard way; you can, too!" Baby Boomers say "Train 'em too much and they'll leave," Generation Xers say "The more they learn, the more they stay," and Millennials say "Continuous learning is a way of life" (279).

More phenomenology

These clash points pertain to aspects of work especially of interest to managers. They and the characterizing comments summarized above are based on idealization from direct and indirect observations. How far they extend beyond the workplace is not discussed in *When Generations Collide*. It was suggested earlier that such things could be approached phenomenologically. Now it may be further suggested that one might find oneself in sympathy and antipathy toward the characterized generations, in which case a type of theoretical *epochē* can be facilitate a balanced comparative treatment. Then again, more can be said about the practical attitudes evident in this book. The willing component in the encountering of things is constitutive of practical characteristics or, more simply, the uses discernible in things through noematic reflection, such uses are intrinsic so that the objects with them are ends and extrinsic so that the objects are means, uses can be neutral as well as positive and negative, firm or resolute or shaky, i.e., hesitant, practical objects form extensive systems, situations, and perhaps even worlds, and so on.

Interestingly, however, discussion of practical things often slides into discussion of values and valuing, which is easy because willing and valuing are quite parallel, and this shift is actually the beginning of justification. Thus, for

example, the hierarchical, formal, ritualized, and authoritarian situation intentively correlative to the Traditionalist attitude tends to be preserved by Traditionalist managerial actions and would typically be said by them to be best. A positive or negative end is justified, to begin with, if the thing purposed is positively or negatively valued. Lancaster and Stillman even list imperatives they call "value propositions" used in slogans of military recruitment: For Traditionalists it was "Uncle Sam wants *you*," for Baby Boomers it was "Join the people who've joined the army," for Generation Xers it is "Be all that you can be," and for Millennials it is "The power of one" (164)

The fundamental message of Lancaster and Stillman is not merely that four generations with different values and purposes exist in today's corporations but also that not to adapt to this situation will hinder and harm companies. Thus practical change is urged. To accomplish it, the authors seek to help managers who read their book as well as attend their consultations to experience what the problems are. This experiencing is first of all the indirect experiencing that is accomplished through language but it can evoke remembering of directly experienced events and prepare one to recognize what is happening in future clashes. But the consultants especially try to get managers to feign or fictively experience alternative possible futures. Going beyond what they state, one could attempt to feign the operation of a company where managers and employees were all Traditionalists or, alternatively, all are Millennials, each such fictively experienced thing being like a nightmare for those in the opposite generation. And if something is indirectly or directly experienced in a serious way and thus present or past actual, it is positively believed in and if it is clearly feigned, it is believed possible. Such is what can found and motivate valuing and thereby willing, i.e., justify them, as well as

undermine positions. All this is basically Husserlian.[17]

The typical workplace in a large corporation is multigenerational today. Marketing is differentially aimed at different generations. Concerning the generational conflicts that arise within the company, some relief probably already comes with making such things thematic. One needs to consider, for example, how different generations prefer different rewards (77) and different generations need to be recruited with different messages (168). There are cases where three generations have worked together to develop policies (45). Diversity is generally considered a good thing (45) and it is asserted that "we need to look at how each generation shares a common history and how, living through certain events and conditions, each generation has adopted its own personality. …When these personalities meet around the boardroom table, each one has valid reasons for believing his or her generational perspective is right. *In reality, no one is right or wrong ... just different.* By taking time to learn about these differences, companies can gain a competitive advantage in recruiting, managing, retaining, and motivating the generations." (32)

Such a relativism is perfectly acceptable in management consulting and other non-philosophical practices. For the philosopher, however, no more than one of the mutually exclusive positions can be true. But the conflicts come from totalizing the perspectives, i.e., imposing them on an entire company, when it could well be that there are different parts of the total operation that benefit from different attitudes. Thus company security is probably best done with the quasi-military ways of Traditionalists while at least in some industries

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[17] Lester Embree, "Advances Concerning Evaluation and Action in Husserl's *Ideas II*." In *Issues in Husserl's "Ideas II,"* edited by Thomas Nenon and Lester Embree, 173-198. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.

the research departments are best staffed by members of Generation X. Whether such a "situated multicultural" approach is pertinent for other dimensions of the sociocultural lifeworld, i.e., class, ethnicity, and gender, fortunately need not be considered here. And beyond that is the question of whether the generations at work in large companies (and also bureaucracies) in countries other than the United States are at all similar. There will be different generational differences and shared attitudes toward one's own and other generations, but sociocultural worlds are always generationally structured. Closer phenomenological analysis is needed and can be done.