

The Self-Other Relationship Between Transcendental and Ethical Inquiries*

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Abstract: This paper discusses two approaches of the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The Husserlian one, a transcendental phenomenological investigation of the possibility of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and the Waldenfelsian one, an ethical phenomenological investigation of day to day intersubjective interactions. Both authors pretend to give account of the conditions of possibility of intersubjective interaction. However, Husserl starts with the investigation of the transcendental structure of subjectivity, that is, the fundamental conditions required for the appearance of consciousness. By contrast, Waldenfels looks first at practical interaction and draws conclusions on the deeper structure of subjectivity based on the traces he discovers to be characteristic for this interaction. Our interest lies in determining which of the two approaches should be given priority for the investigation of the constitution of intersubjectivity.

Keywords: subjectivity, intersubjectivity, transcendental phenomenology, ethics, Edmund Husserl, Bernhard Waldenfels

Introduction

This paper discusses two approaches of the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The Husserlian one, which is a transcendental phenomenological investigation of the possibility of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and the Waldenfelsian one, which is an ethical phenomenological investigation of day to day intersubjective interactions. Both authors pretend to give account of the conditions of possibility of intersubjective interaction. However, Husserl starts with the investigation of the transcendental structure of subjectivity, that is, the fundamental conditions required for the appearance of consciousness. Relevant turns out to be the interplay between temporality of consciousness and embodiment with its sensitivity. By contrast, Waldenfels looks first at practical interaction and draws conclusions on the deeper structure of subjectivity based on the traces he discovers to be characteristic for this interaction.

The Husserlian theory on intersubjectivity is a phenomenologically descriptive theory; it aims at giving account on how intersubjectivity is possible:

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How come that we recognize the other person, or animal, as subjects. How come we do not perceive each other as mere objects, or simulacra. Because phenomenology is a method of investigation from the first person perspective, accounting for the subjective conditions for possibility of experience and perception in general, intersubjectivity is also investigated as a phenomenon given to the first person perspective. Regarding constitution, Husserl will arrive to the result that subjectivity and intersubjectivity are constituted reciprocally, none holds priority. Still, the subject is a principle of individuation. There cannot be inter-subjectivity without individualized subjectivity. Where there is no individuation, there is no inter-, but only idem. Where there is only idem, there is no consciousness of self or other. The subject has priority for the transcendental phenomenological investigation only in what regards the method. The question to be answered is: What are the subjective conditions for the possibility of perceiving the other as another subject? Therefore, the subjective mechanisms of perception are those primarily investigated to account for the constitution of intersubjectivity.

Transcendental phenomenology is concerned with the ontological conditions for the possibility of experience. Our concern here will be with the ontological conditions for the possibility of experiencing intersubjectivity, or the other as a subject just like ourselves. The level of interaction transcendental phenomenology is interested in is not the practical level, the level of aware consciousness, of act intentionality, of cultural interactions, etc. Rather, it is primarily interested in the passive syntheses that take place at the pre-cognitive level of consciousness, characterized by operative intentionality. These pre-aware processes support, make possible aware interaction at the practical level. So, once again, transcendental phenomenology does not aim at giving account of the practical norms for intersubjective interaction.

A descriptive theory aims at describing what is the case. By contrast, a normative theory sets standards, rules for what should be the case, for what ought to be. Descriptive theories are not entirely strange to normativity. All research has to respect general norms like truthfulness, engagement to an objective attitude, etc. These are epistemological norms, but they can also be understood as ethical norms. Despite the Husserlian theory on intersubjectivity being descriptive, it has been widely criticized by ethical, normative theories for being solipsistic, as it has subjectivity as the center of its investigations.

In this paper I will review and analyze some of Bernhard Waldenfels' arguments targeted against the Husserlian theory of intersubjectivity. Waldenfels develops a responsive phenomenology on ethical grounds. He continues the French tradition of phenomenological ethics. I argue that he interprets the Husserlian statements as if they would describe the practical level of interaction. Therefore, Waldenfels declared transcendental phenomenology as violent and offering the *I* a privileged place to the detriment of the *other*.

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Waldenfels suggests that one should always start from ethics, as every human enterprise has ethical consequences.

The biggest challenge for all kinds of research is to avoid being influenced by what the researcher would like to be the case, or to turn previous knowledge into norm, in which case knowledge becomes presupposition. Being very sensitive to these kinds of dangers, Husserl aimed at developing a philosophical method to help one get rid of all the presuppositions and hopes based on established knowledge. The philosopher who adopts this method should pay very close attention to how things themselves are given to her in different modes of experience, and describe her own discoveries. The result should be a purely descriptive philosophy.

In this paper I propose that we understand individuated subjectivity as a fact about human understanding and interaction that cannot be simply given up, overcome to the point of dissolution, of becoming no-one. In descriptive terms, subjectivity is just a fact; in normative terms, it could be understood as a limit of our freedom. Ethics blames metaphysics and transcendental philosophy of being idealistic when it comes to the rational capacities of subjectivity. I suggest that ethics itself falls prey to idealism if it thinks it can approach the other and the world in general independently of the ontological facts determining subjectivity. Waldenfels argues that any kind of research should start with ethics, as long as every human endeavor and any human action have ethical consequences. I argue that every action with ethical consequences is grounded in human limits. Therefore, practical theories should ground their accounts in the results of ontological theories.

I will interpret Waldenfels' statements in transcendental phenomenological manner, as long as they are directed to the Husserlian phenomenology. Anyway, I am aware of their different implications and importance for the practical intersubjective interaction and for our day to day existence.

Should we Start with Ethics?

Waldenfels rejects the Lévinasian phrase by means of which ethics is defined as first philosophy. He argues that any philosophical endeavor *should* start with ethics, but to define it as first philosophy denotes a belief in principles, in *arche*, concepts which involve authority. As long as Waldenfelsian philosophy claims that no one is ever the first one, but everyone is always the second, encouraging talk about first philosophy would be contradictory. Likewise, the idea of ethical principles cannot be argued for, as long as ethics is grounded in experiencing the other as affect, demand. Anyway, our author is of the opinion that any philosopher should first pay attention to ethics, to make sure they start with the right attitude. Let us first see how this requirement works in the case of giving account on perception.

The philosopher admits that perception for instance is not an ethical act; but he emphasizes:

Wenn man wahrnimmt, ist das etisch oder nicht? Natürlich ist das kein etischer Akt, aus dem ich jemandem einen Vorwurf machen kann, aber das Ethos einer bestimmten Lebenseinstellung ist beteiligt. Jemand stürzt auf der Straße. Sie übersehen dies, gucken nicht hin. Das ist Wahrnehmung, aber keine bloße Wahrnehmung. Der Wahrnehmende verhält sich nie etisch neutral.¹ (Waldenfels in: Rotaru 2010, 267)

There is truth to this view. In every act of perception one can read ethical aspects. But even if we admit that no act of perception is pure perception, it does not mean that perception cannot be investigated only regarding pure perceptive aspects. That someone fails to perceive, let's say, someone else's appeal could be explained through their general attitude towards others. At the same time, overseeing something could be rooted in objective facts about perceptive mechanisms: vision impairments, or even facts that do not represent impairments. As Waldenfels definitely agrees, these failures do not fall under ethical requirements. Then why should they be judged by means of ethics? It is true that working on the attitude towards the other one can learn to perceive more, to be more sensitive to the other's call. But perception here does not refer to natural, physiological aspects of perceiving; the concern is rather with *understanding*, being open to the other's situation and need. How can one expect from a descriptive theory, interested in objective, embodied facts about perception to be careful not to violate ethical norms concerning behavior towards the other? I find this request to be in contradiction with the ethical norms for rigorous research. I argue for the opposite: Pure perceptive aspects should be taken into account by ethics, as constitutive aspects of perception set the boundaries for what I can be held responsible for perceiving or not.

The most famous example for how Husserl analyzes perception draws on the fact that perception is perspectival. According to my position in relation to things, I can only see some of the sides of the things perceived. If I walk around the things that I perceive, or if I turn them around, I gain access to the sides that were first hidden from me. Still, at no time, under no circumstances, will I have direct access to all the sides of what I perceive. Despite this, I perceive unities, not only sides. This fact about perception rises for Husserl questions regarding the unity of consciousness, the unity of the perceived, the relation between consciousness and world.

Another fact revealed by his inquiries is that spatiality builds itself around the subject's body. Something is close or far, it can be seen or not, it is to my left,

¹ "Perceiving: Is it ethical or not? Of course this is not an ethical action on the basis of which someone could be blamed, but the ethos of a specific attitude towards life is involved. Someone falls on the street. You miss it, you don't look at that. This is perception, but not mere perception. The perceiver never behaves in an ethically neutral manner." (Translation of all German quotes belong to the author of this paper.)

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or above, etc. The change of my position changes the coordinates of the exterior things. One cannot perceive as if the own body would not be the point that opens a perspective on the world. Linked to the concept of perspective is the concept of horizon. Husserl uses this concept as a spatial metaphor for how things or the world as a whole is given to consciousness. It draws attention to the fact that consciousness is not momentarily, it is not restricted to what is presently and directly given to it. Rather, based on what it is directly given to it, it has a perspective on what it could be. That is, what is directly given in intuition opens a horizon of what there could be.

Horizont besagt einen Modus des Bewußtseins, aber gegenüber der Intention im Richtungssinn eines Gegenmodus von 'Intentionalität.'² (Husserl 2001, 196)

Horizon stands for the unthematic background of consciousness. This is why Husserl describes it as opposed to intentionality, where intentionality is understood as describing thematic acts of consciousness.³

Judging from the perspective of ethics, Waldenfels argues for replacing the concept of horizon with that of verticality. The concept of horizon, according to Waldenfels, encourages viewing the relation between self and other as centered in a single pole, namely the subject, subordinating therefore the other to the self. By contrast, viewed by means of the concept of verticality, what is alien would be understood as interwoven with the own. The latter concept is borrowed from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who in *Le visible et l'invisible* talks about the verticality of history, of the past, of the world, and even of intersubjectivity in order to attribute a universal dimension to existence.

Wenn Merleau-Ponty sich auf eine Vertikalität bezieht, so bevorzugt er nicht eine Dimension neben anderen etwa in der Weise, wie Platon der 'zweiten Ausdehnung' (αὐξη) in der Fläche (ἐπιπέδον) als dritte Dimension die Tiefe (βάθος) hinzufügt. Vielmehr geht es ihm darum, wie es im Anschluß an Heidegger heißt, eine 'universale Dimensionalität' des Seins selbst zurückzugewinnen.⁴ (Waldenfels 2007, 420)

Verticality is supposed to break the perspectival order of the world, which is centered in my present consciousness, in the position of my body. What is situated in the depth, it is said, or in the height, is not accessible by simply changing one's position, as in the case of what is in front or behind. (Waldenfels

² "Horizon means a manner of having something consciously given, but regarding intention in the opposite manner of 'intentionality.'"

³ As we can notice in the quote above, Husserl places *intentionality* between quotation marks. This is because for him intentionality does not characterize only thematic acts of consciousness, but also unthematic processes. The intentionality animating lower levels of consciousness is operative intentionality.

⁴ "When Merleau-Ponty refers to verticality, he does not favor a dimension next to others, in the way Plato adds a 'second extension' to the surface, as a third dimension of the depth. Rather, he wants to win back what in connection to Heidegger means a 'universal dimension' of the Being itself."

2007, 420) The concern is not only with the centered perspective, but also with the ideal possibility of access to what is not me. But Husserl does not admit this ideal possibility. Actually, the concept of horizon can be understood as indicating the fact that we have limited direct access to the world. What is directly given to me opens certain possibilities in the horizon, but also closes up or excludes other ones. To the extent that any positioning enables, it also disables.

Regarding the relationship with the other, the concept of horizon is considered to be inadequate because it entails the image of a fully self-consciousness subject, while in fact the self is intertwined with otherness, with the alienness of the other.⁵ The intertwining is described as “intersubjective verticality.” (Waldenfels 2007, 422) The verticality of intersubjectivity should emphasize that there is no defined place for the self or for the other, that there is no privileged place for what is one’s own in relationship with alienness.

First of all, the sphere of the self, in Husserlian terms, is better described as a set of possibilities than as a privilege. It would be a privilege if the other would have no access to the possibilities granted by the coordinates of my objective position. But the objective position can always be switched between me and the other. Secondly, for there to exist an interweaving between what is one’s own and otherness, the own also has to exist, not only the different. If Waldenfels does not admit the idea that a position open for one certain possibilities and for another different ones, then he cannot justify the talk about the other.

Waldenfels argues that we should give up the concept of horizon even when we talk about physical space and together with it the traditional concept of spatiality, as it involves objective reference points and a hierarchy among different dimensions. (Waldenfels 2007, 422) Experience of spatiality according to the concept of verticality seems to lack the qualities associated with embodiment. I find Waldenfels’ attempt to exclude embodiment from the experience of spatiality to be at odds with his commitment to de-idealize the subject starting from embodiment.

The body does not only give structure to the experience of spatiality, it is what makes the experience of space possible in the first place. Disembodied beings would not be able to experience space; as Descartes would put it, having no extended properties leads to not being able to experience the extended. The body links us to a certain place in space; one does not experience space as from nowhere. In Husserl’s words, as human beings we are our body and this links us to spatiality, which divides into pairs of opposites: Up, down; left, right; far, close, etc. Who could testify that perception does not order itself according to a center, that is, a body? Consciousness depends on coordinates that determine our place

⁵ To name the other, Waldenfels uses both “*der Andere*” and “*der Fremde*.” In English these concepts have been translated as the other, and the alien, respectively. The term used by Waldenfels to stand for the otherness of the other is *fremdheit*, which in English has been translated as alienness.

at different moments. The sum of all these coordinates sets our possibilities and shapes our identity.

The horizon represents an ontological dimension of our being in the world, while verticality is the result of an ethical interpretation interested in the way we ought to be. The natural attitude, according to which the other is given in the horizon, has to be subject of a critical attitude, in order to make place for the verticality of the practical ethical relationship with the other. But this is not a reason to eliminate the concept of horizon from ontological theories.

Replacing the Subject with the Respondent

Waldenfels also argues for replacing the concept of *subject* with that of *respondent*. He argues against the concept of subject associated with the ideal of pure rationality, which ignores embodiment. Embodiment means that we do not have full control upon ourselves, and that our acts do not begin with ourselves.

Die Instanz, die in der Moderne den Titel 'Subjekt' trägt, tritt vorweg als Patient und als Respondent auf, also in der Weise daß ich beteiligt bin, aber nicht als Initiator, sondern als jemand, der buchstäblich bestimmten Erfahrungen unterworfen ist, als Subjekt in jenem unüblichen Wortsinn, den Lacan und Levinas sich zunutze machen.⁶ (Waldenfels 2006, 45)

This view is also a reaction to the Husserlian description of the subject, which is considered to pay tribute to the traditional ideals of rationality. But in fact, embodiment plays a major role in Husserl's theory on subjectivity, which upholds that activity is grounded in affectivity. One can read in Husserl:

'Rezeptivität' ist wohl dem Sinne nach ein Ausdruck, der eine *niederste Stufe der Aktivität einschließt* [...]. Subjektiv im ursprünglichen Sinne ist auch das 'passive' Ich (in einem zweiten Sinne) als *das Ich der 'Tendenzen'*, das von Dinge und Erscheinungen Reize erfährt, angezogen wird und dem Zuge bloß nachgibt.⁷ (Husserl 1952, 213)

So, Husserl had already recognized that responding to affection occurs before any activity, and implicitly that the subject comprises a domain of unknown and uncontrollable.

In support of his argument that the subject should be replaced with the respondent, Waldenfels appeals, for example, to a scene described by Josef Roth in his novel *Radetzky Marsch*: In a war scene, captain Radetzky stands next to the

⁶ "The instance that under Modernity was wearing the title 'Subject' appears first of all as patient and respondent, therefore in a manner in which I participate to something, but not as initiator, but as someone who is literally subjected [*unterworfen*] to something, that is, subject in that unusual sense of the word used by Lacan and Levinas."

⁷ "'Receptivity' is according to its sense an expression that designates a *lower stage of activity*. [...] In original sense, subjective also means the 'passive' ego (in a second sense), as the ego of 'tendencies,' which experiences stimulation from things and appearances, is attracted, and gives in to this attraction."

king on a hill on the battle field. Suddenly, they hear gun fire. Radetzky notices a bullet coming towards the king, jumps on the king and knocks him down to the ground. The king is unharmed. Radetzky is turned into a hero. The incident makes Waldenfels wondering where is the big hero, where is the subject?

Es ist ein Subjekt, dem etwas geschehen ist und das im richtigen Augenblick geistesgegenwärtig geantwortet hat. Deshalb sage ich statt Subjekt Respondent.⁸ (Waldenfels in: Rotaru 2010, 259)

We agree that in this example Waldenfels is right about the subject, or rather about the lack of a big subject. This does not mean that there cannot be situations in which people act as authentic subjects according to the traditional image of the subject. Accounting for only one type of behavior does injustice to the other kinds.

If our behavior looks at times more like responding than like genuine initiative it does not mean that our whole relating to the world resumes to responding. Husserl emphasizes that we are continuously becoming and that the world is history because each of us is a new beginning. By continuously taking over what is already given we turn the already given into life, and so the already given is modified through personalization. If we analyze closer the fact of responding to appeals, it becomes clear that only an identity can respond to appeals. For there to be given an answer, a subject has to exist; there has to be someone to register the affection. In this sense the subject has priority. In answering, the subject is only a respondent, but the fact of responding is subjectively personalized, even if responding is just a reaction of the subject and not something initiated by him. One does not respond to everything; different persons respond in different manners to the same kind of affection or appeal. The response is followed by an action which may not always be the result of genuine deliberation and choice, but which definitely has the potential of authenticity. Action is grounded in affection, acting is grounded in responding. I argue that to the same extent that a person is a respondent, she is an agent. The difference is made by the observer's preferences.

Concerning subjectivity, we must be clear about what aspect of subjectivity we refer to, or to what kind of subject. There can be distinguished three kinds of subjects that our authors are concerned with: the transcendental subject, the psychological subject, and the rational subject. For Husserl, the transcendental subject represents the sum of the fundamental conditions of possibility for subjectivity: the body, temporal consciousness, and intersubjectivity. These are the conditions that make possible human experience. They are the aspects that shape every experience, every perception. The subject that Waldenfels brings into play I will describe as psychological subject, as it brings into discussion personality traces, strength of will, spontaneity, and the

⁸ "There is a subject to whom something happened, and who in the right moment answered quick-wittedly. This is why instead of subject, I say respondent."

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like. The rational subject is linked to concerns about the degree of understanding reality. We are less interested in this aspect here. What I want to point out is that while Husserl refers to the transcendental subject, Waldenfels refers to the psychological subject. He holds that the subjective characteristics accounted for by Husserl depict a strong psychological subject.

To argue for the existence of the transcendental ego, at least in Husserlian terms, does not mean to argue for a strong psychological subject. The transcendental ego stands for the possibility of experience; it explains the unity of consciousness and the possibility of reflection. To be a subject means for Husserl to exist for oneself, to be aware of oneself.

Subjekt ist, in der Weise seiner selbst bewusst zu sein, zu sein. Erfasse ich mich in der Reflexion, so ist das, ich erfasse mein identisches Ich als Pol meines Lebens, oder ich erfasse von Leben zu Leben fortgehend, immer neu reflektierend, mich selbst als identische Einheit und mein Leben selbst als Einheit eines vielgestaltigen Stromes usw.⁹ (Husserl 1973, 151)

Self consciousness is far from existing only in extraordinary situations, namely only when we reflexively turn our attention upon our conscious life. Stating that subjectivity disposes of itself by being aware of itself, Husserl does not subscribe to the Cartesian thesis regarding the possibility of complete self transparency and self infallibility. He only points to the profound link between something being lived and given to the first person perspective. According to his understanding, the givenness to the first person perspective does not only secondarily characterize what is lived. Rather, it defines the existence of the lived. By contrast to physical objects that can exist independently of appearing to a subject, what is lived is essentially determined by its givenness to a subject by means of a qualitative feeling. To have something given as lived means to experience “how it is like” to have that specific experience. Every “how it is like” is conscious. The “how it is like” aspect of experience is given directly, not by means of reflexivity or judgments. To have first person experiences involves a primitive form of self-consciousness.

The act of reflection, for example the explicit awareness of seeing a lamp on the desk, is considered double grounded. Reflected awareness does not disclose a subject enclosed in itself, but a subjectivity transcending itself, pre-reflexively oriented towards its object:

⁹ “To be a subject means to be aware of oneself. If I understand myself in reflection, then I understand my identical I as core of my life, or I understand myself, going from life to life, continuously reflecting, as identical unity, and I understand my life itself as unity of a flow.”

Ich in der natürlichen Weltlichkeit habe Weltbewußtsein und Selbstbewußtsein mit dem Sinn, selbst in der Welt zu sein. 'Gerichtet' bin ich nur gelegentlich auf mich, in der reflexive-aktiven Selbstwahrnehmung.¹⁰ (Husserl 1973b, 78)

Pre-reflective awareness is not outside intentionality; it is characterized by operative intentionality.

Reflection is directed towards something already given before thematization; it is disclosing rather than producing its object of interest. In reflection I find myself as already being in relation with something, I find myself as having been affected. Reflection is therefore not a *sui generis* act, it does not appear out of nothing, but requires motivation. For Husserl, to be motivated amounts to being affected and to respond to the affection.

Jeder Akt setzt voraus Affektion; das, worauf er sich hin richtet, ist schon im Bewusstseinsfeld, unerfasst [...].¹¹ (Husserl 1973b, 78)

When I start to reflect on something, that something already existed for me for a while.

Ich bin für mich ganz ursprünglich als selbstwahrnehmendes (selbstgegenwärtigendes), ich kann mich selbst aktuell kennenlernen weil ich schon passiv in originaler Selbstgegenwärtigung bin und von da affiziert auf mich aktuell hinsehen und mich in meinen originalen Eigenheiten erfassen kann etc.¹² (Husserl 1973b, 120)

Therefore, the primacy of affection does not contradict the possibility of authentic reflection or the existence of the subject.

Rejecting the subject is closely linked to rejecting intentionality.

So wie das Pathos diesseits der Intentionalität, so ist unsere Response jenseits der Intentionalität anzusetzen. Die Responsivität geht über jede Intentionalität hinaus, da das Eingehen auf das, was uns zustößt, sich nicht in der Sinnhaftigkeit, Verständlichkeit oder Wahrheit dessen erschöpft, was wir zur Antwort geben.¹³ (Waldenfels 2006, 45)

To make the point that intentionality should be replaced by the fact of responding, Waldenfels exemplifies with a situation found in *Der Mann ohne*

¹⁰ "In the natural attitude I have consciousness of the world and consciousness of myself as being in the world. Only occasionally am I 'oriented' towards myself, in the reflexively-active perception of myself."

¹¹ "Each act presupposes affection; that [something] towards which [an act] orients itself already exists in the field of consciousness, ungrasped [...]."

¹² "For myself I am entirely originally self perception (self givenness), I can make acquaintance with myself in an actual manner because I am already passively in original self presence and affected by this [self presence] I can look at myself in an actual manner and I can grasp myself regarding my original traces."

¹³ "Just as pathos is [placed] on this side of intentionality, our response has to be placed on the other side of intentionality. Responsivity exceeds any intentionality, because undertaking what happens to us is not exhausted by the meaningfulness, intelligibility and truth of what we give as answer."

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Eigenschaften, by Robert Musil. The related event starts with two persons running by chance into an event „that we are used to describe as car crush.” But this event cannot be defined as such right from the start:

Alles beginnt mit einem ‘Auflauf’, also mit einer gestauten Bewegung: Etwas war ‘aus der Reihe gesprungen, eine quer schlagende Bewegung; etwas hatte sich gedreht, war seitwärts gerutscht, ein schwerer, jäh gebremster Lastwagen war es, wie sich jetzt zeigte, wo er, mit einem Rad auf der Bordschwelle, gestrandet dastand.¹⁴ (Waldenfels 2006, 39)

It seemed that there was also a casualty to this car crush. Reacting, the man walking by explains to the lady accompanying him that the brakes haven’t been hit at the right distance and that the ambulance will come soon; he will mention statistics about the number of victims of car crashes. Due to this attitude, the accident can be integrated into an order, turned into a technical problem and a statistical fact. This way of experiencing the event is for sure an extremely superficial one.

The story of the accident is used by Waldenfels as illustration of a happening that strikes us, imposes on us, attracts, scares, and provokes us, gets us thinking and questions the degree of our rationality. He argues that not everything that happens can be ordered according to existing rules, that pathos precedes and escapes intentionality. But pathos does not rule out intentionality; for Husserl, pathos or affectivity involves a certain form of intentionality – the operative intentionality.

Husserl widens the Brentanian concept of intentionality which characterized only the polarity between consciousness and object. For Brentano’s student, not only reflexive conscious acts are intentional, but also sub-reflexive, sub-conscious processes. Intentionality present at lower levels of consciousness is called operative intentionality. The theory of operative intentionality is aimed at linking consciousness to the body, it is a result of the fact that consciousness is in an operative manner present in bodily processes. Intentionality is what renders the body capable of being affected.

We have a tendency to react with reticence towards unusual, disturbing events that challenge our system of values. Our tendency is to understand everything by means of the values we already submitted to. Waldenfels does not only say that we should become aware of this tendency and try to keep it under control, but he expects us to merely replace it with responsivity. It is pretty difficult to change our habits; this fact indicates first of all that the subject defines itself through its habits. Change is experienced as giving up a part of oneself. The human tendency is to confirm oneself as a unitary subject.

¹⁴ “Everything begins with an ‘agglomeration,’ so with a strangulated movement: something had leaped ‘out of the order, a diagonal striking movement; something rotated, slipped sideways, it was a heavy yet slowed down truck, as it now showed, where it stood aground with a wheel in the curb.”

Does the Idea of Subject Contravene to an Ethical Attitude?

Even if psychoanalysts state that “one is never completely at home,” they do their best to make us feel at home with ourselves. Regarded medically, even if ideal, the idea of a subject at peace with herself is valued positively; it requires good knowledge of one’s own motivation, which is the result of decreasing alienness to oneself.

Concerning the idea that the ego is nothing more than introjection of the other, Ernest E. Boesch wonders:

Indeed, what would we introject? In fact, ‘The Other’ is a fiction. There exist only others, but no Other. And these others are a multiple variety. The shouting politician, the glib banker, the dreaming poet, the harsh policeman, the cruel torturer, the compassionate healer, the Mother Teresa, Hitler and Stalin, the Eskimo in his snow igloo, the bushman in his cave, the insane in the asylum, the beggar in the slum – those and many more are ‘others.’ [...] In fact, ‘other’ simply means ‘not like I’. What of all these should I introject? (Boesch 2007, 4-5)

To introject the other would mean that the other has priority in any kind of interaction, that the subject first understands the other, captures their difference and specificity, and absorbs it to become someone. But in fact, says Boesch, most of the time we are ignorant about what is behind the appearances of the others. Understanding the other is riddled with speculation and guessing. People speculate and take guesses based on what their self-knowledge makes accessible of the other’s difference.

Of course, in the process of constructing our self all we experience around us has its impact, but the process implies selections, evaluations, transformations – in short, what Piaget called a dynamic interplay between assimilations and accommodations. (Boesch 2007, 5)

We do this according to a personal schema, even if not warily. This brings him to the conclusion that alterity is a relational concept, determined from the perspective of the self, perspective that changes depending on the context.

Conclusion

I agree that the responsive theory describes the reality of subjectivity and intersubjective interactions, but not the whole reality. This theory encourages an entirely positive ethical attitude towards the other. I argue that the other cannot be done justice unless we accept the idea of subject, the possibility of self reflection and delimitation. I draw the conclusion that transcendental phenomenology does not contravene to the requests of responsive ethics, or of ethics in general. On the one hand, the two discourses are concerned with different, independent perspectives. On the other hand, even if they were both to be judged according to their practical consequences, the Husserlian transcendental approach proves not to be far from the responsive requests. Transcendental phenomenology is concerned with the natural, ontological

characteristics of subjectivity. Based on these characteristics it can determine our behavioral tendencies and the limits of our understanding. Responsive ethics is first of all concerned with the norms for ethical behavior, leaving the impression that it believes that the ideal can take place independently of any natural limits.

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