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From Nature to Spirit: Husserl's Phenomenology of the Person in *Ideen II*

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Abstract

In this article, I explicate Husserl's phenomenology of the person as found in *Ideen II* by examining the most important aspects of persons in this work. In the first section, I explicate the concept of the surrounding world (*Umwelt*) with special attention to the difference between the different attitudes (*Einstellungen*) that help determine the sense of constituted objects of experience. In the second section, I investigate Husserl's description of the person as a founded, higher order, spiritual (*geistig*) objectivity. I consider this description of the person by examining the symmetry between the organization of *Ideen II* as a whole and the order of the constitution of the person. In the final section, I look at the relationship between the constitution of the person and the spiritual (*geistig*) world.

Amidst the barrage of secondary literature on Husserlian philosophy, the phenomenological conception of the person has received less attention in recent years than other prominent themes such as temporality, transcendental subjectivity/intersubjectivity, and the phenomenology of the lived body to name just a few. Some who have chosen to write on this theme use it as a benchmark by which to situate Husserl's thought in relation to other early 20th Century phenomenologists (see especially Alles Bello, 2008; and De Monticelli, 2002). For others, the person is one of many foci within the debates that surround empathy and intersubjectivity (see for example Beyer, 2012; and Moran, 2004). In addition to these approaches, a small amount of literature has begun to emerge on what Husserl calls, in some of his later and unpublished manuscripts, the "transcendental person." Sebastian Luft's "The Transcendental Person: Another Look at the Husserl-Heidegger Relationship" is the first, and only, significant article I know of on this topic. His argument centres around understanding the "transcendental person" as an attempt to respond to Heidegger's criticism of his insistence on discussing subjectivity in terms of the transcendental

ego instead of *Dasein*.¹ While all of these are important tasks, it is difficult for the beginning phenomenologist, looking to gain her bearings in the field, to find a basic resource that answers the question "What is a 'person' for Husserl?" (Woodruff Smith, 1995; and Stack, 1974 are notable exceptions). With this in mind, the goal of the present article is an explication of Husserl's phenomenology of the person as found in *Ideen II*. It is my hope that clarification and explication of Husserl's conception of the person may contribute to understanding the role that this concept can play in other debates within phenomenology.²

I approach this task in the following way. First, in *Ideen II*, Husserl writes, "As person, I am what I am (and each other person is what he is) as subject of a surrounding #world [*Umwelt*]."³ To understand what a person is then requires one to understand the Husserlian conception of the *Umwelt*. This is the task of the first section, where I explicate the concept of the *Umwelt* with special attention to the difference between the different attitudes (*Einstellungen*) that contribute to the sense (*Sinn*) that constituting subjectivity bestows on objects of experience. A critical point emerges in the analysis of attitudes. Whether or not one experiences persons depends upon the constitutive attitude in which one engages experience. When one does experience persons, and we do, we experience them as particular kinds of objectivities - as motivated individuals who are not wholly determined objects in the causal nexus of nature. In the second section, I investigate Husserl's further description of the person as a founded, higher order, spiritual (*geistig*) objectivity. I consider this description of the person by examining the symmetry between the organization of *Ideen II* as a whole and the order of the constitution of the person. In the final section, I look at the relationship between the constitution of the person and the spiritual (*geistig*) world.

It should be noted that the goal of this article primarily exposition. I wish to explicate Husserl's rather complex notion of the person as we find it in this text and answer the question "What is a 'person' for Husserl?" As such, a great deal of the text is dedicated to parsing Husserl's constitutional analyses, interpreting his examples, and attempting to provide others that elucidate his descriptions. Along the way, I raise objections and do my best to defend Husserl's analysis.

1. Person as Subject of a "Surrounding World"

Rendering the German term, *Umwelt*, as "surrounding world" conveys the sense of an environment, a word which might better capture, in English, the sense Husserl gives to the *Umwelt*. The *Umwelt* envelops the person. It is the world of practical agency. In the surrounding world, the person acts as a person. Husserl writes, "And a person is precisely a person who represents, feels, evaluates, strives, and acts and who, in every such personal act, stands in relation to something, to objects in his surrounding world."⁴ The surrounding world is one in which the person perceives the objects around her in relation to herself. This is a world in which one engages, not one abstractly viewed, measured, and studied. That world we might call nature — when it is considered as the object of the natural sciences.⁵

To understand the world as *Umwelt*, as opposed to nature, consider the difference between a person taking a stroll along the beach and a scientist working in a lab. In her lab, the scientist analyses the results of experiments, measures compounds with special attention to accuracy, and divides objects according to their properties as reagents, catalysts, syntheses, and so forth. As she strolls along the beach, the engagement in her environment is different. The world presents itself in terms of affordances and hindrances. The ocean is an affordance for swimming or a hindrance to walking. The sand is firm enough on which to walk easily or is soft and so she alters her gait accordingly. Some stones are flat enough for skipping others large enough that she must walk around them. This engaged mode of acting in the world is a stark contrast to how, in her lab, she analyses the water in terms of its chemical properties, the stones in terms of their mass, volume, and origins as igneous or sedimentary.

When Husserl classifies the personal world as the *Umwelt*, he also claims that different intentional objects are present in different types of experience.⁶ At the risk of simplifying Husserl's claim, the point is that nature is what the natural sciences study; the *Umwelt* is the world in which we act, judge, and live on a personal level, and the two are not identical.

One might object that the distinction Husserl is making is simply a matter of attention. When the scientist is at the beach, if she is any fun, she does not analyse the chemical composition of the sand. She builds a sand castle. When she is in her lab, she analyses the composition of the same sand, and in doing so sees it for what it is at the chemical, biological, or "scientific" level. The point of the objection is that this difference between her activities in the lab and on her day off is a matter of how she chooses to spend her time and direct her attention. The world is not really different at the beach than it is in the lab. In the lab, her job is to study the way

the world in a scientific manner, as opposed to how it appears in ordinary perception. To put it another way, the difference, if there is one, between the surrounding world and nature is a matter of where and how one directs one's attention. For the scientist, it is not the case different objects are present in the lab and at the beach. The difference is a matter of how one looks at those same objects. On a recreational day at the beach, the scientist is just not attentive to the chemical, physical, and biological make up the objects of her surroundings.

In short, Husserl's potential answer to this objection is that the objector is right in one sense and wrong in another. There are different attitudes in which one engages the world. This is what the objector claims when she says that the distinction Husserl is making is a matter of where and how one directs her experience. With this, he agrees. However, where the scientist goes astray is in the claim that she experiences the same objects in the lab as she does at the beach. To claim this is to ignore the finer points of the experience of these objects.

Husserl maintains that there are distinct ways in which subjects experience the world. He calls these ways "attitudes" (*Einstellungen*). An attitude is a holistic mindset, or mode, in which one engages experience that affects the sense constituting subjectivity bestows on experience. It is not an individual stance toward a particular experience. It is essential that all experience presupposes a specific attitude (*Einstellung*) toward the world.⁷ In *Ideen II*, Husserl often presents the various attitudes in opposing pairs. I will discuss the personalistic and naturalistic pair below. Furthermore, a change in attitude constitutes a concomitant change in the intentional objects of experience. He writes, "A change in attitude means nothing else but a thematic transition from one direction of apprehension to another, to which correspond, correlatively, different objectivities."⁸ The question is what he can mean by this.

Husserl is not saying that depending on how one views an object of experience it can be used as X or Y. For example, depending on one's needs a coffee cup can appear as something to put coffee in or it can appear as a paperweight. These are various uses of the same object, and both fall within the personalistic attitude. His claim is that a shift in attitude results in the concomitant experience of a different objectivity. He also does not mean that a shift in attitude makes an object appear that was not previously there in primal presence. Changing one's attitude does not create new objects ex nihilo. Attitudes are constitutive. They contribute to the constitution of intentional objects. They do not create them. An *Einstellung* is a comportment of the experiencing Ego toward the world

that influences the sense that subjectivity bestows on experience and hence impacts the kinds of intentional objects one experiences. It follows from this that certain types of objects appear only from within certain attitudes.

I will give two examples to illustrate this point. First, consider the following example. A professor of literature says to her class, "Tell me something about Moby Dick," while holding up a copy of the book for the class to see. She will not accept the answer, "It's in your hand," as legitimate. The teacher's question addresses the book as a higher level objectivity, qua cultural object. The student, who some would call sarcastic, is addressing the book merely qua physical object. To put it in slightly different terms, the teacher asks about the book as an object of the human sciences, and the student's answer addresses the book as an object of the natural sciences. The teacher and the student adopt different attitudes. The teacher cannot accept the student's answer as correct because the student does not occupy the appropriate *Einstellung* for a literature class. But, are student and the teacher are talking about different objectivities? Or can one say that they address the same object from different perspectives?

For Husserl, the teacher and student are not talking about the same object viewed from different perspectives. They are talking about two different objects of experience, each of which is constituted by a different attitude. In the personalistic attitude, a book is more than the paper, ink, and glue that make it up as a physical object. It is a cultural or spiritual (*geistig*) object. When I read a book, I do not experience the pages made of paper, the words printed in ink, or the letters that make up the words. When I read a book,

I 'live in the sense, comprehending it.' And while I do so, the spiritual unity of the sentence and that of the sentence-nexuses are there before me, and these in turn have their character, e.g., the determinate peculiar style impressing itself on me, a style which distinguishes this book, as a literary product, from any other of the same genre.⁹

When I experience a book, I live in it as I read it. What appears to me is the world that the author creates qua spiritual (*geistig*) object, which is indeed founded upon but not reducible to this particular example of the physical book. The book to which the student sarcastically refers, the book as a purely physical and measurable entity, is an object of the natural sciences. It is not the object one studies in a literature course.

The disagreement with the scientist from above can now be restated. The scientist holds that she experiences the same objects but from different perspectives when she is in the lab and when she is at the beach. Husserl agrees that she occupies a different perspective when in the lab than when

she is at the beach, provided that by perspective here we mean *Einstellung*. He wants the scientist to notice the different intentional objects of her experience. In the lab, her experience is of silicon dioxide and its various crystalline structures. At the beach, her experience is of sand, its softness, moisture, and tendency to find its way into picnic baskets and coolers. These are different intentional objects. They possess different properties, and different attitudes are operative in their constitution.

I now wish to discuss a second example that is directly applicable to Husserl's theory of the person and serves to further elucidate the distinction between the naturalistic and personalistic attitudes. Husserl argues that, in the personalistic attitude, our experience of other persons is an experience of them as motivated individuals not as determined objects in nature's causal nexus. In my experience of persons, I experience them as free beings, beings who nature influences but does not determine. Persons can allow nature to motivate them toward certain ends or they can choose their own ends by resisting the influence and motivation of external forces. Husserl puts it quite succinctly. "There is no question here of a causal relation," he writes, "we are altogether outside the attitude required for grasping natural causality... To introduce natural causality here would be to abandon the personal attitude."¹⁰ The natural scientist would argue that persons are, as a matter of course, related to their world causally. They are material bodies in the world just like all other material bodies. The causal relations between material entities like this are necessary. If a person jumps off of a building, she will accelerate toward the surface of the earth at the same rate as any other object. The laws of physics, chemistry, and biology apply to human beings in the same manner as they apply to non-human objects.

The phenomenologist need not dispute this at all. The point Husserl wants to make is that the scientist occupies a specific attitude when she makes this claim. The attitude that the scientist occupies affects the sense that constituting subjectivity bestows on the experienced object. Thus, in this attitude the scientist's experience is of a different object, not simply the same object from a different perspective. To put it another way, persons, strictly speaking, do not show up in the naturalistic attitude. In the naturalistic attitude, one finds "animated Bodies, Objects of nature, themes of the relevant natural sciences. But it is quite otherwise as regards the personalistic attitude, the attitude we are always in when we live with one another, talk to one another, shake hands with one another in greeting."¹¹ It is in the personalistic attitude that one experiences persons. Science is conducted in the naturalistic attitude. In this attitude, human beings, or perhaps it would be better to say *homo sapiens sapiens*, appear as the

objects of the natural sciences. Here one does not experience persons per se, but bodies with mass and volume. One does not experience motivated, spiritual beings but causally related physical entities. In the personalistic attitude, we experience genuine others, self-conscious, embodied subjects, moral agents.¹²

The difference here is a difference of attitude, and close attention to the experiences had in differing attitudes reveals a difference in intentional object of experience. Persons are not causally related to their world because the realm in which persons exist is not constituted by causal relations. To speak of causality requires one to leave the personalistic attitude. It requires one to address natural scientific objects, not persons.

I wish now to return to the working definition of the person as subject of a surrounding world and expand on the notion of the *Umwelt*. It has already been noted that the *Umwelt* is the practical world in which persons live and act. The foregoing analysis has sought to claim that the experience of the *Umwelt* includes the experience of persons, both our own and others and is constituted by the personalistic attitude. The *Umwelt* is the intersubjective, shared world of practical action, values, feelings, morality, law, religion, and culture. It is the intersubjective space in which we lead our everyday lives. As Husserl puts it in a passage that could serve as a definition of the *Umwelt*,

The surrounding world is the world that is perceived by the person in his acts, is remembered, grasped in thought, surmised or revealed as such and such; it is the world of which this personal Ego is conscious, the world which is there for it, to which it relates in this or that way, e.g. by way of thematically experiencing and theorizing as regards the appearing things or by way of feeling, evaluating, acting, shaping technically, etc.¹³

The *Umwelt* is the space of culture and history. In the surrounding world, the personal Ego relates to other persons and to objects that have certain predicates that they can only have in relation to subjects. The surrounding world is the world where one has feelings and emotions, where one finds values and acts accordingly. It is the world in which these things (feelings, emotions, and values) emerge as real Objectivities. These objectivities arise as part of culture and have their meaning in this context. Human culture is the difference between a lump of coloured paint, and a beautiful painting by Mondrian. Even this is not completely correct because paint is an object that only gets its meaning from within a certain history and culture.

2. Person as Founded Entity

Having thus far expounded on Husserl's notion of the person as subject of a surrounding world, it is imperative to also understand his theory of the person as founded, higher order objectivity. In his article "Persons, Subjects, and Human Beings in Husserl's Ideas II," Thomas Nenon argues we should understand the overall project of *Ideen II* as an attempt to understand "the status of ourselves and others as those special kinds of entities that in the modern tradition have commonly been thought of as subjects," adding that this can further be seen as Husserl's attempt to answer Kant's question, "*Was ist der Mensch?*"¹⁴ In *Ideen II*, read as a response to this question, we find that the person is a spiritual objectivity founded upon the lower strata of material and animal natures. In fact, the organization of *Ideen II* itself reflects the structure of the person. The book is divided into three sections on the constitution of "Material Nature," "Animal Nature," and "The Spiritual World." These strata, organized from lowest to highest, reflect the constitution of the human person.¹⁵ The human person has a material, animal, and spiritual nature and its constitution must be understood in terms of all three. In what follows, I use this organization to discuss the founded structure of the person.

a) The Founding Relationship in General

Before looking at this structure, a few words on what it means for a relationship to be founded are in order. In order to understand this, it is useful to examine one of Husserl's own examples. He gives the example of hearing the beautiful tone of a violin and seeing it played. The long passage is worth citing in full.

When I hear the tone of a violin, the pleasantness and beauty are given originally if the tone moves my feelings originally and in a lively manner, and the beauty as such is given originally precisely within the medium of this pleasure, and similarly is given the mediate value of the violin as producing such a tone, insofar as we see it itself being played and grasp intuitively the causal relation which is founding here. Likewise, the beauty of the violin's external structure, its elegant form, is given immediately and originally, whereby the particularities and connection motivating the pleasure come actually to the fore in the unity of the constituting intuition and exercise their motivating power.¹⁶

The founded intuitions, in this case those of beauty, pleasantness, and elegance, are meaning intentions that can either be fulfilled or not by further experiences.¹⁷ Beauty is not a natural property of material nature.

Neither are pleasantness and elegance. And yet, we do judge some tones pleasant, some objects beautiful, and some forms elegant. These higher order predicates are founded in, and dependent upon, more basic predicates of material objects. The beauty of the tone of the violin is dependent upon the violin, its bow, and the musician playing it as natural objects behaving in certain naturally and causally describable ways. The elegance of the violin is founded in the material from which it is carved and the craftsmanship of its creator. These natural objects and the relationships between them must hold in order for the higher order meaning intentions (beauty, pleasantness, etc.) to be fulfilled. However, the higher order evaluations of beauty and elegance are not reducible to the lower order sense experiences in which they are founded.

Husserl discusses the foundational relationship in the Sixth Logical Investigation. Here he is talking about categorial intuitions and observations of states of affairs, but the basics of his account of founding appear to be the same as in the later *Ideen II*. He writes, "In the sensible whole, the parts A and B are made one by the sensuously combinatory form of contact. The abstraction of these parts and moments, the formation of intuitions of A, B, and contact, will not yet yield the presentation A in contact with B. This demands a novel act which, taking charge of such presentations, shapes and combines them suitably."¹⁸ In other words, grasping a state of affairs is essentially a different kind of intuition than perceiving an object. He calls these new intuitions categorial intuitions and juxtaposes them with sensuous intuitions.

Sensuous intuitions have their object "in a straightforward (schlichter) manner."¹⁹ For Husserl, this means an immediate grasp of a sensuous object without its being constituted in any relational way or in connection with another object. This is the lowest level form of perception as found in his account of perception in Logical Investigations. These perceptions can, and do, build upon one another and "can serve as basic act[s] for new acts which in their new mode of consciousness likewise bring to maturity a new awareness of objects which essentially presupposes the old."²⁰ The new acts of which he speaks are categorial acts. Categorial intuitions are founded acts that, among other things, serve to grasp states of affairs, for example those expressed in language by the use of prepositions. To grasp the state of affairs that the book is on the table is the work of a categorial intuition. If we examine the experience of grasping the fact that a book is on a table, at the lowest sensuous level, we find 'the book,' 'the table,' and contact between the two given in experience. However, the state of affairs presents a new object to consciousness by use of the preposition 'on.' It is

grasped as part of a higher order intuition. The new object in experience is the state of affairs — that the book is on the table. To put it plainly, Husserl argues that a state of affairs is just not identical with a sensuous experience.

Categorial intuitions depend upon lower level sensuous experience in order to maintain. However, they are not reducible to the mere sensuous perception. Husserl calls this non-reducible and yet necessary relationship "founding." To return to the violin example, the founding relationship is the same. The beauty of the violin is founded in its make up vis-à-vis material nature. However, this beauty is not reducible to material predicates. Just as there is something more than sensuous experience at play when we perceive a state of affairs, so too more is at work than sensuous perception when higher order objects or predicates are given in originary perception. The beauty of the tone of the violin is given originally in a founded perception.

b) Material and Animal Natures

I now return to the tripartite division of nature Husserl proposes in *Ideen II* and begin with material nature. The "essential feature" of material nature is extension. This includes not just its extension in space, but also extension in time. Perhaps it is better to say duration in time.²¹ As Husserl frankly puts it, all of nature, "the totality of 'real' things," exists in space and in time.²² These two most basic forms comprise the essence of material nature. I will not go into Husserl's detailed phenomenological analyses of space and time as the ultimate categories of the real. It should suffice for our purposes here to say that when Husserl talks of material nature, he is speaking of things that are inert, merely extended in space and time.

Having understood the founding relationship should help us understand Husserl's account of animal nature as founded in material nature. The person's animal nature emerges as those sets of properties that we have specifically in virtue of having a body that we live in and through and having a soul. These are founded, in the sense understood above, not material properties. We have these properties as a consequence of our psychic nature being founded in the lower order material nature. Here is Husserl.

In experience, these new properties we speak of are given as belonging to the body in question, and it is precisely because of them that it is called Body or organism, i.e., an "organ" for a soul or for a spirit. On the other hand, we have to say that these properties are precisely not material properties, and that means that by essence they have no extension, that they are not given in the way in which all properties are given which fill Bodily extension.²³

The properties proper to animal nature include things like sensitivity and psychic life. They differ from the properties of material nature in part because of the way that they belong to bodies. For example, the colour of a thing drapes itself over the extended materiality of that thing. A property belonging to animal nature, like sensitivity, is not extended in space in the same way. The sense of touch is founded on the materiality of the body, but it is not a material property of that body.

Likewise, soulful (*seelisch*) life is founded in the material make up of the brain, nervous system, and the rest of the body. However, conscious life is not itself a material property. It has essential features, such as intentionality, which cannot be described in physical terms or reduced to the purely physical. Other animals too have properties that are founded upon the lower material stratum but are not reducible to being properties of this stratum. In this sense, the founding relationship between the properties of material nature and animal nature appears to be similar to the founding relationship between sensuous perception and categorical intuitions described in the Logical Investigations. Furthermore, these properties are taken to be essential properties of animal nature.

Constitutional analysis of animal nature must also acknowledge that, at least when it comes to human experience, the properties of animal nature present themselves to us, as subjects, in a reflective manner. "The qualities of material things as aestheta...prove to be dependent on my qualities, the make-up of the experiencing subject, and to be related to my Body and my 'normal sensibility.'"²⁴ For this reason, the most important constitutional analysis in the examination of animal nature – the most important for the question 'What is a person? – is the constitution of the human Body, which is constituted in sensation and operates as the centre of orientation for the living ego.²⁵

The conclusion of section forty-seven of *Ideen II* leaves Husserl's analysis in a strange position. He has proposed a three-tiered stratification of nature, and has described the lowest two strata. However, in doing so he appears to have described all of nature. What is there beyond material and animal nature? Here is Husserl on this quandary. "The analysis of nature in our consideration of nature thus proves to be in need of supplementation. It harbors presuppositions and consequently points beyond to another realm of being and of research, i.e., the field of subjectivity, which is not longer nature."²⁶ What supplementation could he mean? What is this field of subjectivity that is no longer nature?

3. The Person and the Constitution of the Spiritual World

Husserl wants to move beyond the naturalistic attitude in which he conducted the analysis of material and animal nature. To do so, he must pass from soul to spirit. The distinction to be grasped between soul and spirit is most easily understood as the distinction between the subject of experience considered from within naturalistic attitude, as a phenomenon of nature, and the personal Ego.²⁷ The soul is, for Husserl, "merely a stratum of real occurrences in the Body."²⁸ His examination of the founding relationship between material and animal nature and his examination of the psychic in animal nature was an examination of the psychic as a part of nature. Here is Husserl on the relationship.

Thus were built on one another, with respect to the constituting basic characters of the apprehension: the experience of the physical as foundational and, resting on it and enveloping it, the experience of the Body, which is constitutive of man and animal; based on the latter, as constitutive stratum is the experience of the soul.²⁹

In summary of preceding sections, he showed how nature obtains its grounding as follows: Physical nature provides the sense for everything found in it; in other words, physicality or extension is the most basic strata. Resting on this and enveloping it is the experience of the Body (*Leib*), that constitutes man and animal. Based on the Body is the experience of the soul – by which he means intellectuality conceived of as a part of nature. However, because consciousness is not simply a part of nature, but is essentially related to it, the investigations must continue to the new realm constituted by consciousness. The field of subjectivity that is no longer nature is spirit. In what follows, he investigates the difference between the pure Ego as the subject of nature and the "Ego as person or as member of a social world."³⁰ The first section of this article covers much of this in dealing with the person as subject of the *Umwelt*. However, I would like to return for a moment to the person as a member of the social world.

It is essential to understand that the *Umwelt* is the social world. It is essentially intersubjective. Here is Husserl commenting on what one finds in the surrounding world. "The subject finds consciously in his surrounding world not only things, however, but also other subjects. He sees them as persons who are engaged in their own surrounding world, determined by their objects, and ever determinable anew."³¹ This seemingly trivial point has a critical impact on the make up of the surrounding world and on the prospects of phenomenology as an intersubjective science.

When we experience other people, we experience them as related to a surrounding world. After all, being related to a surrounding world is an essential part of what it means to be a person. However, it is not as if my surrounding world and the surrounding worlds of other persons are unrelated. On the contrary, "We are in relation to a common surrounding world."³² Our lives are linked in and through an inseparable intentional link because we stand in relation to common objects. I am a person for you and you are a person for me. I stand in relation to your consciousness as you stand in relation to mine. We are in personal association with one another. For Husserl, the personal association is the "normal sense" of being a person, and is constituted together with the common *Umwelt*. "Correlatively spoken, the one is constituted essentially with the other. Each Ego can, for himself and for the others, become a person in the normal sense, a person in a personal association, only if comprehension brings about the relation to a common surrounding world."³³ This will mean that the common surrounding world is of necessity co-constituted with and through the other person.

This is why one can claim that the *Umwelt* is the space of history, culture, and morality. As such, at this level, we see the emergence of further higher order objects – those objects which populate our common surrounding world. These gain their determinations through "acts of personal mutual determination."³⁴ These acts unite us into groups as sharers of objects and languages. Persons comprehend themselves not simply as animate bodies or as part of an animal nature founded on a material nature. Persons comprehend themselves not only through body language, facial expressions, and verbal discourse, but also as active members of communities, as Husserl puts it, "as personally united."³⁵

The communal, spiritual *Umwelt* is our communicative world. It is designate thus because of that fact that it is constituted in our experiences of others, which involves an experience of the process of coming to a mutual understanding with them. We form "relations of mutual understanding" through a process of communication.³⁶

[S]peaking elicits response; the theoretical, valuing, or practical appeal, addressed by the one to the other, elicits, as it were, a response coming back, assent (agreement) or refusal (disagreement) and perhaps a counter proposal, etc. In these relations of mutual understanding, there is produced a conscious mutual relation of persons and at the same time a unitary relation of them to a common

surrounding world.³⁷

The surrounding world as the communicative world is constituted in our experience of others in and through understanding, agreement, misunderstanding, and disagreement all of which are understood as mutual and as pertaining to our shared *Umwelt*.

Relations of mutual understanding constitute our common surrounding world. We can disagree about the colour of a house. I believe the house to be grey, and you believe it to be blue. We communicate about it. We enter into dialogue. We go to visit the house. We compare colour swatches and finally reach an agreement. In this process of coming to a mutual understanding, we have constituted a part of our common *Umwelt*. Even if we fail to reach an agreement, we constitute part of our common surrounding world in and through communication.

Relations of mutual understanding and their importance for the constitution of a common *Umwelt* are not limited to discourse about physical objects. Insofar as our surrounding world is a spiritual one, we also come to mutual understandings regarding spiritual objects. As spiritual beings, our surrounding world includes – among other things – attitudes, beliefs, and desires. As a political activist, I may try to come to a relation of mutual understanding with you on a topic that we cannot go and visit like we went to visit the house painted the mysterious colour. For example, I may try to persuade you that a universal wage is just and that the government should implement it. In doing so, I attempt to constitute a common surrounding world in which other people share my attitudes, beliefs, and desires. These mutual understandings are just as much a part of the constitution of the personalistic world as are physical objects.

Other persons, groups of other persons, and personal associations are at the centre of Husserl's account of the constitution of the *Umwelt*. In fact, he concedes that the solitary person is only ever an abstraction.³⁸ An individual may reach an understanding of her own surrounding world by abstracting from all relations of mutual understanding. "In this sense there exists, therefore, 'onesided separability' of the one surrounding world in relation to the other, and the egoistic surrounding world forms an essential nucleus for the communicative one in such a way that if the former is ever to be separated off, the processes of abstraction needed for it have to come from the latter."³⁹ The very resources one needs in order to abstract to the case of the isolated person, argues Husserl, come from the communicative world, which is itself an intersubjective space. The processes of abstraction that we exercise as solipsistic egos, or to reach the phenomenologically

reduced solipsistic ego, have their basis in the shared communicative world. One reason for this lies in the fact that the surrounding world is constituted in language through the back and forth process required to reach mutual understanding. Even though the phenomenological method can be thought of as solipsistic, the world Husserl constitutes in and through this method is never ontologically solipsistic. For essential constitutive reasons, an ontologically solipsistic world makes no sense for Husserl.

4. Conclusion

For Husserl, there is no one simple answer to the question “*Was ist der Mensch?*” What we find in his analysis is an account of a stratified, founded way of being. The person is a spiritual being that is the subject of a surrounding world which is co-constituted by personal associations and relations of mutual understanding.

However, this is not the full story. The very question of whether or not one experiences persons depends upon the *Einstellung* one adopts towards one’s experience. The holistic mindsets that underlie each of our experiences influence the sense that constituting subjectivity bestows on experience. To be in the attitude in which one experiences persons is to be in the aptly named personalistic attitude. In the natural scientific attitude, one does not experience persons. In this case, “what is introjectively posited is the other Ego, lived experience, and consciousness, built upon the fundamental apprehension and positing of material nature and apprehended as being functionally dependent on it, as an appendix of it.”⁴⁰ Understood from the point of view of nature, or perhaps it is better to say from within the naturalistic attitude, the comprehension of the other subject is founded upon a comprehension of an animated, material nature, his *Leib*. What is posited is the other as a conscious Ego, having lived experiences by virtue of, and having a zero-point of orientation in, his *Leib*. The other is posited as conscious of nature, as fundamentally and causally related to that nature, and as a part of nature itself. On the other hand, as spirit and from within the personalistic attitude, “the Ego is posited as person ‘purely and simply’ and posited, consequently, as subject of its personal and thingly surroundings, as related to other persons by means of understanding and mutual understanding, as member of a social nexus to which corresponds a unitary social surrounding world, while at the same time each individual member has his own environment bearing the stamp of his subjectivity.”⁴¹ Spiritually, people are related to others in relations of personal associations. They are subjects of a commonly co-constituted *Umwelt*. They form

communities and constitute objects of material spirit.

Any answer to the question “*Was ist der Mensch?*” that is intellectually honest must admit the difficulty of the question itself. To give one answer and insist on it alone is to deny the complexity, the depth, and the breadth of what it means to be a human being. Husserl’s complex multilayered analysis of the person in *Ideen II* recognizes this fact. Here he shows us that what it means to be a person is to be a complex phenomenon and is analysable from a great many perspectives. On this account, the person is a higher order, spiritual objectivity founded on the lower strata of material and animal nature. The person is the subject of a surrounding world that is co-constituted by and with other persons through relations of mutual understanding. It is also acknowledged that one may alter one’s attitude. One may engage experience from an attitude that does not experience persons at all. In some cases, this might be necessary, as when a surgeon operates to remove a tumour from a patient or when a scientist is performing an experiment in a lab. In the natural sciences, a certain distancing shift of attitude is necessary.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Luft, S. (2005). Husserl's Concept of the "Transcendental Person": Another Look at the Husserl-Heidegger Relationship. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 13(2). In 2012, the first dissertation dedicated solely to Husserl's conception of the transcendental person, of which I am aware, was successfully defended by Colin J. Hahn at Marquette University. Sebastian Luft supervised the dissertation. I have not had the opportunity to read Hahn's work.
- 2 Although there are other texts within the Husserlian corpus that also shed light upon this topic, especially portions of *Cartesian Meditations* and *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, I have chosen to concentrate on *Ideen II* for this article because it is here that Husserl has his most sustained treatment of the person.
- 3 Husserl, E., Biemel, M., Ijsseling, S., & Archives Husserl à Louvain. (1991). *Husserliana : gesammelte Werke. Bd.4, Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Bd.2, Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic. In translation,

- Husserl, E. (1989). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book* (R. Rojcewicz & A. Schuwer, Trans.). Dordrecht ; London: Kluwer Academic. 185/195. Hereafter, *Ideen II*. Pages cited refer first to the German text followed by the standard English translation.
- 4 *Ideen II*, 186/195.
 - 5 Nature is, in this sense, the correlate of a particular attitude, or way of approaching the world. It is the result of the particular method of natural scientific study. Cf. *Ideen II*, §1-2, 49. For a concise discussion of this topic see the entry on "nature" in Cohen, J. and Moran, D. (2012). *The Husserl Dictionary*. London ; New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
 - 6 *Ideen II*, 210/221.
 - 7 An *Einstellung* is not a worldview. The various attitudes in which one may engage experience are more fundamental than any particular worldview. When Husserl wishes to speak of a worldview he uses *Weltanschauung* rather than *Einstellung*.
 - 8 *Ibid*.
 - 9 *Ideen II*, 237/248.
 - 10 *Ideen II*, 235/247. Emphasis in the original.
 - 11 *Ideen II*, 183/192.
 - 12 One could argue that it is because persons, as such, do not appear within the naturalistic attitude that it is so important for the sciences to maintain ethics committees to oversee their research. Failure to consider persons *qua* persons can be seen at the heart of so many experiments gone wrong from the Milgram experiment and the Stanford Prison experiment to the atrocious eugenics carried out in name of medicine in Nazi death camps in the Second World War.
 - 13 *Ideen II*, 185/195. Emphasis in the original.
 - 14 Nonon, T. (1996). Persons, Subjects, and Human Beings in Husserl's *Ideas II*. In K. S. u. M. Tichy (Ed.), *Das Andere der Identität* (pp. 49-63). Freiburg: Rombach Verlag.
 - 15 John Drummond's article "The 'Spiritual' World: The Personal, the Social, and the Communal" first brought this symmetry to light for me. See Drummond, J. (1996). The 'Spiritual' World: The Personal, the Social, and the Communal. In T. N. a. L. Embree (Ed.), *Issues in Husserl's Ideas II*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
 - 16 *Ideen II*, 186-7/196
 - 17 I am indebted to Thomas Nenon's article, "Persons, Subjects, and Human Beings in Husserl's *Ideas II*" *op. cit.* for clarifying the nature of this relationship.
 - 18 Husserl, E. (2001). *Logical Investigations, Vol. 2* (J. N. Findaly, Trans.). London: Routledge.
 - 19 *Ibid*, 282. Emphasis in the original.
 - 20 *Ibid*. Emphasis in the original.
 - 21 *Ideen II*, 28-9/30-2.
 - 22 *Ideen II*, 28/30.

- 23 *Ideen II*, 33/35-6.
 24 *Ideen II*, 56/61. Emphasis in the original.
 25 A detailed analysis of Husserl's constitution of the body would take me beyond the purview of this paper. Those who are interested should see *Ideen II*, especially sections 35-42.
 26 *Ideen II*, 172/180.
 27 *Ibid.*
 28 *Ideen II*, 175/184.
 29 *Ideen II*, 174/184.
 30 *Ideen II*, 175/184.
 31 *Ideen II*, 190/200.
 32 *Ideen II*, 191/201.
 33 *Ideen II*, 191/201.
 34 *Ideen II*, 191/201.
 35 *Ideen II*, 192/202.
 36 *Ideen II*, 192/202.
 37 *Ideen II*, 192-3/202-3.
 38 *Ideen II*, 193/203.
 39 *Ideen II*, 193/203.
 40 *Ideen II*, 228/240.
 41 *Ideen II*, 228-9/240.

Merricks's Eliminativism: Neither Objects Nor Persons

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Abstract

Merricks (2001) defends eliminativism about material objects such as baseballs and statues, but not persons. Section 1 of this paper discusses his Overdetermination Argument, which shows the causal redundancy of baseballs and statues but cannot do the same for persons because of consciousness's non-redundant causal powers. In Section 2 I defend Merricks's argument for the non-existence of material objects, while in Section 3 I consider arguments against his exemption of persons, concluding that this exemption fails because it relies on the false premise that consciousness is not necessitated by microphysical properties. Merricks's eliminativism about material objects is correct but must also extend to persons.

Keywords: Merricks, eliminativism, overdetermination, persons, consciousness

Section 1

1.1

Merricks's argument for the non-existence of material objects is as follows, using the example of a baseball shattering a window:

- (1) The baseball - if it exists - is causally irrelevant to whether its constituent atoms, acting in concert, cause the shattering of the window.
- (2) The shattering of the window is caused by those atoms, acting in concert.
- (3) The shattering of the window is not overdetermined.
Therefore,
- (4) If the baseball exists, it does not cause the shattering of the window (2001, p.56).