

In the Lifeworld with Others in Community

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Abstract: Husserl proposes a theory of intersubjectivity that begins with transcendental consciousness embedded in the lifeworld alongside others, and in which the community is founded upon a structure of essences. The lifeworld is given and shared by all consciousnesses; it is a condition for empirical and eidetic intuitions, epoché, and eidetic and transcendental reductions. In this world, there are real objects along with other subjects that are recognised through empathy, constituting a community of selves. Even so, how to share their experiences? The experiences can be different, but there is a limit to variations, a limit given by the essences. Thus, the collective constitution of the world and its objects is in permanent progress. It is always possible to give them new meanings, within the limits of their essence. It is the communal constitution of the world.

Keywords: Husserl; Essence; Lifeworld; Intersubjectivity; Community

Contemporary philosophers, such as Apel (2000: 41) and Habermas (1992: 44), insist on criticizing the classical philosophy of subjectivity grounded in the thought of Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, arguing that transcendental philosophy suffers from an incorrigible methodological solipsism that renders it incapable of explaining intersubjectivity. The solution would be to replace the Western philosophical paradigm. Philosophy should assume an intersubjective, linguistic, and pragmatic perspective rather than starting from transcendental subjectivity, from reason, and/or consciousness.

These philosophers particularly criticize phenomenology, as they consider that the theory of intentionality ignores intersubjective, linguistic, sociocultural, and historical conditions. There would be no such thing as pre-linguistic intentions; meanings would not be grounded in intentional experiences that intuit the essences of objects. It is the opposite: intentionality is only possible because there is a deep formal pragmatics of language on which it is based. In other words, experiences would only be transformed into intentional content when the physical states provoked by them were translated from a linguistic structure of intersubjectivity.

Therefore, truth would not be inferred from subjective experience, the exercise of rationality, or transcendental deduction. Instead, it would express a claim to validity manifested intersubjectively through language. This is so because truth is not to be sought privately, but

instead on a linguistic and argumentative basis, sought through a valid critical claim, and its meaning would be measured by its potential to achieve consensus. However, Apel (2000: 218) does not wish to discard the transcendental, but rather to renew it. The transcendental would take on a new form; it would no longer be the unity of consciousness and lived experiences, but a unity of intersubjective interpretation. Unity would not be evident; it would have to be achieved. As Zahavi (2001: xix) explains: “The transcendental synthesis of apperception is thus replaced by an intersubjective process of forming a consensus, and the transcendental subject is formed into a linguistic community.”

Despite criticism, Husserl’s Phenomenology presents a solution to intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is addressed explicitly in several works, such as *Ideas II* (Hua IV) and *Crisis* (Hua VI). In Husserl’s Phenomenology, the texts collected in volumes XIII, XIV, and XV are dedicated to intersubjectivity, XIII to empathy, XIV to community, and XV to communitarian teleology. Similarly, language is addressed in *Logical Investigations* (Hua XIX) and Lectures on the *Theory of Meaning* (Hua XXVI). Husserl not only addresses the themes of intersubjectivity and language in depth but also offers a phenomenological proposal that is quite coherent with the premises of his philosophical system. It surpasses contemporary theories of language in many aspects and refutes criticisms of the “aporias” of a transcendental philosophy.

In this article, I present some reflections on intersubjectivity. A fundamental premise is that Husserl does not isolate the subject from the world. The effort is precisely the opposite: understanding the subject as inserted, part of, and constituted within the lifeworld with others as a community.

1. In the lifeworld

The nomenclature of “lifeworld” varies throughout Husserl’s works. In 1912, Husserl used the term “*Umwelt*” (surrounding world) in the first manuscript of *Ideas II*. In the 1920s, in *First Philosophy* (1923/1924) and *Phenomenological Psychology* (1925-1928), Husserl adopted the term “*Erfahrungswelt*” (world of experience). Finally, in the 1930s, in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1935-1938), Husserl settled on the term “*Lebenswelt*” (lifeworld).

However, the fundamental characteristics of the lifeworld are preserved: it is a priori, transcendent, and co-given (Cadena, 2021). It is a priori because it is universal and has a regular

structure of essences and relations of essences that provide regularity and predictability, cognizable through the natural sciences (Hua VI: 142). It is transcendent because it is independent of subjectivity; its eidetic structure and its existence and functioning are not affected by human knowledge, interpretations, or wills. It is co-given because it is the same one common to all subjects within it.

The lifeworld is a phenomenological presupposition. Phenomenological ontology assumes it as its premise; its method and epistemology depend on it, as does the understanding of concepts such as intentional consciousness, empirical and eidetic intuitions, epoché, eidetic reduction, and transcendental reduction.

Intentional consciousness is always “awareness of,” always directed toward something other than itself. The world awakens it. Consciousness needs stimuli and interaction. It has a natural curiosity to understand the surrounding world. Its content depends on and is supplied by interacting with the lifeworld through the body. The subject and the lifeworld are inseparably related (Hua IV: 185).

Thus, intuition is an act of consciousness, but its content, the intended object, is not a fabrication of the human mind. “Intuition” should never be confused with “imagination”, just as “constitution” should never be taken as “creation” but rather as “unveiling” or “revelation”. Phenomenological intuition is the awareness of something in the lifeworld (Hua IV: 186). Intuition transforms something other than consciousness into an object to consciousness; consciousness captures the object in the world, manifesting itself as a phenomenon. Consciousness is a pole at which phenomena converge; it is a focused consciousness with the lifeworld as its objective. It does not manage to capture it entirely, but at least manages to capture it through its experiences, successively and gradually. Only then does the process of constitution begin (Crespo, 2009: 106) as the revelation of the lifeworld. Understanding the world is a task carried out by consciousness, but not by an isolated consciousness; on the contrary, a consciousness nourished by the world carries it out since its contents come from experiences, and the world also feeds it back since the senses are directed to objects according to their essences (Hua III: 279) in the relationships of the self with others.

Intuition can be empirical or eidetic (Hua III: 13). Both are always the intuition of something distinct from the agent of knowledge, independent of it. In such a way, the meanings given to a lived object are limited by its essence (Hua III: 310-312). It is not possible to violate specific laws of logic, such as the principle of non-contradiction, or change laws of nature, such as the law of gravity. It is possible to desire that an object be, at the same time and in the same

relation, entirely white and completely black, but this will remain a wish. Even thinking about this possibility is impossible; it is entirely white or black. In the same way, I cannot turn off the law of gravity. It is a law that governs the relationship between material things. However, I can simulate the absence of gravity in a closed environment through free fall. Why? Because the object is intuited, not created by the subject. The object fills cognition; it is apprehended as a phenomenon, as something that manifests itself, that appears, given in experience, and not a product of the imagination. The essence of the lived object is manifested and intuited through its phenomenon; it exists within it. In other words, the existence of the object and its manifestation are limited by its essence and the laws of essence. I can change some characteristics and give them new meanings, but always under the limitation of its essence.

Epoché (Hua III: 56) is the starting point of the phenomenological method. It distances it from all solipsism since it presumes the lifeworld around it, the subject inserted within it, as “part of” (Hua VIII: 252/253). The task of phenomenology is to describe the essences manifested in the lifeworld. The epoché will thus allow for fulfilling the first principle of phenomenology: seeing all original intuition as the trustworthy source of knowledge. That is, accepting the world as it presents itself, looking at things themselves without any expectations, not legislating over the world, and not wanting to fit events into predetermined categories. No transcendental ideas would guide the experience or cognition of the world. It is precisely the opposite; one must accept the world as it is, as it presents itself.

Eidetic reduction is only possible because essences are given; they are a priori, not in the Kantian sense, but in the phenomenological sense. They are transcendent; their place is the lifeworld. They are manifestations of ontological necessities, a particular reflection of a universal. Essences are not a creation of the subject (Hua IV: 299). If they were so, it would not be essence, since it would be neither universal nor necessary; it would depend on moods and agreements, varying in space and time.

Transcendental reduction also brings the idea of an agent of knowledge inserted into the lifeworld, constituted within the world and its objects. In transcendental reduction, the subject realizes he is an agent of knowledge. He occupies a privileged position within the world, thus fulfilling the role of unveiling it, but this does not mean that the subject can corrupt the world, its laws, its essence, and its ontological structure. Once again, the lifeworld and its essences are a priori, and it is up to the subject to tirelessly seek to understand them (Hua IX: 86).

These concepts reveal that Husserl understands the subject as an agent of knowledge inserted in the lifeworld, part of a network of relationships with all the objects that make up this

world, objects that can be ideal, formal and real, including inanimate things and animated beings, some beings endowed with consciousness, desires, feelings, with the capacity to judge, creativity and language, transcendental egos, beings that perform a specific act of consciousness called empathy.

2. With others

In the lifeworld, in addition to inanimate things, there are also animate beings, animals, and human beings. We observe what others experience through the perception of bodily manifestations; this is the act of empathy. Empathy allows us to recognize, by analogy (Hua IV: 229), the other as a being endowed with consciousness and free will (Hua VI: 272), to open up to the other, and to feel with the other (Hua IV: 168). It is a giving act, but not an original one (Hua III: 8 / Hua IV: 168). Once the original experience is not shared, the feeling remains pertaining to the other.

Nevertheless, because we share the same world, what is knowable to oneself is also, in principle, knowable to every self (Hua III: 90). Although we are not all factually in a relationship of empathy, there are essential possibilities for establishing a mutual comprehension founded on intersubjective relations, which are, in turn, founded on the structure of essences of the lifeworld. In Husserl's words, "I then posit with this reality an analogon of my Ego and of my surrounding world, thus a second Ego with its 'subjectivities,' its sense data, changing appearances, and things appearing therein. The things posited by others are also mine: in empathy I participate in the other's positing" (Hua IV: 168).

We are in the lifeworld with others, and laws of essence govern these relationships. In this sense, Max Scheler (2004: 125) points to a series of shared feelings that underlie intersubjective relationships and the apprehension of values. "*Miteinanderfühlen*" means to feel with the other; for example, a father and mother who love their children simultaneously feel the same. "*Nachfühlen*" means to feel the same as another. It is not exactly a shared feeling. It is more like grasping the other's feelings without a subsequent feeling; for example, a torturer perceives the victim's feelings but does not share them. "*Mitgefühl*" means to feel for the person, what is called sympathy. The feeling is not the same, but there is a fraternity; one feels for the other; for example, the other who suffers is the object of sympathy. "*Gefühl ansteckung*" is a psychological contagion; the person loses himself in the group, for example, a soccer fan

base. “*Einfühlung*” is like a positive psychological contagion, an affective identification or unification. There is no distance between the self and the other, for example, the relationship between a mother and a newborn. Having this reality as an equal is the basis of the movement of spontaneous love for the human being, that is, of love for a being simply because he is a human being. After all, it has a human face.

For the latter emotion essentially involves the ascription of reality to the subject whose feelings we share. It therefore disappears when the supposedly real subject is replaced by one that is presented as figurative or fictitious. It is precisely in the act of fellow-feeling that self-love, self-centred choice, solipsism, and egoism are first wholly overcome.

The emotional realization of the unity of mankind as a species must therefore have been already achieved in fellow-feeling, if benevolence (or humanitarianism) in this particular sense is to be possible. (Scheler, 2008: 98-99)

Sympathy, understood as “feeling with” and “sympathizing with,” is not an act of intellectual consciousness; it is like opening oneself to the other, allowing oneself to see the other as a human being, feeling before thinking. This feeling, for Scheler (2008), is fundamental to any moral action.

Edith Stein proposes a more detailed definition of empathy with three stages: first, the recognition of the other as a being endowed with soul, will, and autonomy; second, the opening to feeling with the other, but not in an original way; third, the cognitive resumption of the experience, an attempt to understand the other’s feelings, their causes, and motivations. (Stein, 2005: 7-8)

Despite differences in the definitions of empathy and sympathy, all three phenomenologists hold that a condition for intersubjectivity is sharing the same lifeworld with the same underlying eidetic structure. Husserl develops the following reasoning: “The surrounding world constituted in experiencing others, in mutual understanding and mutual agreement, is designated as the communicative one. It is, by essence, relative to persons, who find themselves in it and find it as what is over and against them” (Hua IV: 193). Thus, the apprehension of the body allows for the apprehension of objects as things in objective time and space in the objective world. Therefore, the thing that is constituted for the singular subject acquires the character of a mere subjective “appearance” of the thing of “objective reality,” and each of the subjects intersubjectively understands the same world (Hua IV: 81). More simply, empathy is the first step to the constitution of the intersubjective objectivity of things and,

therefore, also of man. Men are intersubjective objectivities, linked souls, objectively determinable in the substantial-real unity. They are units dependent on the objects of nature (Hua IV: 170-171).

3. In community

The community's spiritual world is constituted over this real basis. That is to say, sharing reality or the lifeworld with its structure of essences, from which it derives physical and biological laws, makes spiritual relationships between humans possible. It makes possible the production of natural knowledge, communication, intersubjective relationships, the recognition of the other, the giving of meaning and the constitution of the surrounding world in a community.

That is to say:

Furthermore, the individual, separate realities, or rather their ego-subjects, enter into relationships of mutual understanding ("empathy"); through "social" acts of consciousness, they establish (directly or indirectly) a completely new form of unification of realities: the form of community, spiritually unified through inner moments, through intersubjective acts and motivations. (Hua XXVII: 88)

While movement in nature is governed by the law of causality, human and intersubjective movements are governed by the laws of motivation: "we speak in effect of reciprocal 'actions' of some men upon others" (Hua IV: 231). Motivational relationships have different facets: on the one hand, there is a real-causal dimension, since objects and people are under the laws of nature, for example, the passage of time; on the other, there are references between subjects and *noemata* of things, references that are produced by acts of the subject, for example, the giving of meaning, judgments, empathy, purposes, and so on. We are all under a natural and real dimension, independent of subjectivity, and, at the same time, a motivational and ideal dimension, dependent on subjectivity. In this dimension, the ends, the telos of the individual and the community are found.

In this sense, Husserl expresses his concern with the telos of the community in the *Prolegomena* (Hua XVIII: 234) and in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*:

But instead of inquiring further in the sphere of our own intuitions, let us turn our attention to the fact that in our continuously flowing world-perceiving, we are not isolated but rather have, within it, contact with other human beings. Each one has his perceptions, his presentifications, his harmonious experiences, devaluation of his certainties into mere possibilities, doubts, questions, illusions. But in living with one another, each one can take part in the life of the others. Thus, in general, the world exists not only for isolated men but for the community of men; and this is due to the fact that even what is straightforwardly perceptual is communalized. (Hua VI: 166)

Knowledge is produced communally and must be subject to values and ends. Knowledge cannot be separated from ethical concerns. Abandoning this axiological and teleological direction can generate a crisis, such as the one Husserl (Hua VI / XXVII) identified as being experienced in Europe at his time.

The teleological sense given to action distances the agent from immediate satisfaction and puts him into perspective. The purpose of knowledge (and of all action) cannot be egocentric; knowledge must be at the service of the community. Knowledge disconnected from the idea of an end distances it from its guiding value, truth, and all other higher values, such as Justice. In this way, knowledge ends up being used to achieve lower values, to satisfy ephemeral values that might lead to oppression and violence. Progress for progress's sake, science as a panacea for all problems, leads to unlimited disputes and uses knowledge as an instrument of concentration of power, not as a means of improving people's lives. Zahavi (2001: 3) similarly states that: "according to Husserl, this responsibility also turns out to have intersubjective dimensions, for the self-responsibility of the individual includes a responsibility to and on behalf of the community as well." Well, it is the responsibility of the person who gives the impulse in the sense of definitive evidence, the evidence of truth, and other higher values.

Thus, Husserl's main concepts cannot be fully understood without considering intersubjectivity and ethical concerns. Moreover, intersubjectivity is fundamental to the constitution of objectivity, reality, and transcendence since none of these can be constituted by an isolated ego. This transcendental intersubjective sociability is the basis upon which truth and essences are intended and constituted. In this sense, Zahavi (2001: 16) asserts that the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity consists precisely in clarifying the contribution of intersubjectivity to the constitution of objectivity.

The world is the world of all (Hua III: 52). The world is experienced as a common world, common to all egos. This is possible for phenomenology because the locus of the a priori is not

individual consciousness; the locus of the a priori, of the universal and necessary, is the world. The world and its contingent objects are a manifestation of an a priori eidetic structure. This structure exists not solely for one subject but for all egos. For this reason, for phenomenology, the singular always presents itself to consciousness through the universal. Moreover, in this sense, Husserl (Hua III: 40) admits a new approach to Platonic realism.

Accidental characteristics are variable, but essences, eidetic relations, and ontological structure are not. A simple example, borrowed from Descartes, is “all matter is spatially extended.” This is a tautology. It is an analytical a priori proposition. It is the essence of all matter (physical things) to occupy space and be extensive. It is impossible to change this essential characteristic. It is a characteristic that, if removed from the object, it ceases to be what it is and becomes something else. All essential characteristics are valid for all objects under the same ontological region. Hence, it is important to affirm ontological realism as the foundation of all Husserlian phenomenology; essences are the same for all singular objects under the same ontological region. In parallel, another example: “All matter is heavy.” It is a synthetic a posteriori proposition. This is an accidental characteristic that can vary across space; its weight will change depending on the body’s position. I cannot change the fact that a body occupies space, but I can change its weight. So, some variations are possible at the limit of essence.

When analysing a physical object, it is easy to perceive that there are invariable eidetic elements and variable accidental elements. On the one hand, there are objective eidetic relationships: a melody is a harmonic sequence of notes or sounds, and, like all sounds, it propagates through the air. Therefore, no air, no sound, no melody. There is an essential relationship between air and sound. On the other hand, the duration, intensity, or pitch of the melody can vary. Besides, there are eidetic relationships between the object and the subject, which are subjective relationships. A melody has a physical dimension: the sound waves reach the ears. The sense of hearing perceives the phenomenon of sound. This, however, is not the only stimulus it provokes. It can awaken the psychic dimension, the listener’s feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness; it can awaken the spiritual dimension, and the listener can consider it beautiful or not. However, the sense of smell cannot perceive a melody or recognize the value of justice, although it may evoke different feelings. These are possibilities or impossibilities based on the essence of the melody object.

The same thing happens with ideal objects, such as values and purposes. Ideal objects have an eidetic dimension and eidetic relationships that limit possible variations. It is the realm

of the spiritual sciences, which, unlike the natural sciences, is governed by the laws of motivation. It is the realm of practical philosophy. According to Aristotle (Met. VI, 1, 1025b22), practical philosophy studies the movement originating in an agent's decision or choice. It includes politics, economics, rhetoric, and military science, with ethics as part of politics, as described in Nicomachean Ethics (Et. Nic. I, 2, 1094b). Kant defined this understanding by defining practical philosophy as everything possible through freedom, the exercise of which must be determined by reason, as explained in the Doctrine of Method (KrV, A796/B824).

Husserl has a similar understanding, exploring the themes of practical philosophy in several works, including *Prolegomena* (Hua XVIII: 60), *Ideas I* (Hua III: 9 and 90; 66, 239 and 252; 96), *Ideas II* (Hua IV: 212), his articles for the *Kaizo* journal (Hua XVII), and *Die Krisis* (Hua VI: 2 and 240). In this sense, Husserl asserts that every normative and practical discipline presupposes one or more theoretical disciplines whose content is separate from normativity and serves as its foundation (Hua XVIII: 59-60). Theoretical disciplines are responsible for investigating the founding essences that make normative and practical disciplines possible. It is an ontology of normative and practical disciplines; its object of study is the essences and eidetic relations that make these disciplines possible.

One of the essentials of practical philosophy is that its laws are not causal but motivational. Thus, Husserl introduces the idea of value and purpose. What motivates individuals and communities is the values and purposes they pursue as they exercise their freedom. In the spiritual sciences and in practical philosophy, to live is to be within a communal horizon: "The word life here does not have a physiological sense; it signifies purposeful life accomplishing spiritual products: in the broadest sense, creating culture in the unity of a sense, creating culture in the unity of a historical development. All this is the subject matter of numerous humanistic disciplines" (Hua VI: 315).

For Husserl (Hua VI: 25), there are higher values, spiritual values, that last longer, are authentic, less dependent on other values, and have primacy in practical life. Human beings, as free beings, rationally strive to live a life full of value, fighting against the devaluation, collapse, and emptying of values. This is an essential characteristic of human beings; we can understand this spiritual, axiological, and teleological dimension and act motivated by it.

Although essentially founded in psychical realities which, for their part, are founded in physical realities, these communities prove to be novel *objectivities of higher order*. In general, it is shown that there are many forms of objectivity that defy all psychologistic and naturalistic

misinterpretations. Such are all kinds of *value-objects* and *practical* objects, all concrete cultural formations which determine our actual life as hard realities, such as *the state, the law, custom, the church*, and so forth. Objectnesses must be described with respect to fundamental kinds and in their hierarchies just as they become given, and the *problems of constitution* set and solved for them. (Hua III: 318)

In the same sense, Husserl states:

As I said, mankind understanding itself as rational, understanding that it is rational in seeking to be rational; that this signifies an infinity of living and striving toward reason; that reason is precisely that which man qua man, in his innermost being, is aiming for, that which alone can satisfy him, make him “blessed”; that reason allows for no differentiation into “theoretical”, “practical”, “aesthetic,” or whatever; that being human is teleological being and an ought-to-be, and that this teleology holds sway in each and every activity and project of an ego; that through self-understanding in all this it can know the apodictic telos; and that this knowing, the ultimate self-understanding, has no other form than self-understanding according to a priori principles as self-understanding in the form of philosophy. (Hua VI: Anhänge IV)

Just as individuals choose values and purposes to guide their actions, communities also choose values and purposes that promote sociability. In this context, there are more valuable and less valuable ways of life. The most valuable way of life is the one dedicated to higher values such as truth and justice. Similarly, communities that promote the common good are more valuable. In this sense, Edith Stein (2005: 215) establishes a reciprocal dependence between the individual and the community. The community is a unity of several individuals, and its character changes over time.

We’ve found various linkages between the individual and the community. The character of the community turns out to depend on the individual distinctiveness of its members and, furthermore, on its typical composition. On the other hand, we find the individual determined in his character by the community, as a representative of a type in a new sense that isn’t intelligible apart from communal life. (Stein, 2000: 296)

In this sense, Bello (2014: 55) adds, “Indeed, only on the spiritual plane is the ‘person’ configured as an individual or as a community, since the community can be considered, by analogy, as having an individual personality.” Communities may have different values and

purposes, but these are the elements of sociability that unite people and from which criteria for judgment and action are established.

Thus, the community is composed of individuals who share the same lifeworld and choose common values and goals. It is possible to live in transcendent objectivity because one experiences the other ego. The experience of other egos living together, and the experience of an object with other egos, provide a clearer, more distinct understanding of the world.

In the community, the constitution of the world and its objects are constantly in progress. Giving them new meanings within the limits of their essence is possible. Furthermore, living with other egos allows the self to recognize that it is part of a community of selves. Through empathy, recognizing the other implies recognizing them as equals; the other is endowed with consciousness, creativity, will, feeling, and freedom, just as I am. Recognition is achieved by analogy; therefore, there is a reciprocity between the self and the other. There is an exchange of essential characteristics. In the same way, the experience of the self becomes mediated by the experience of the other, who also sees, at first, the other as an object since the self is also an alter ego for the other; the other objectifies him, which allows the self to see himself as a third party and as a member of a community of selves.

4. Conclusion

For Husserl, the communal constitution of the world is one condition of possibility for the existence of subjects separate from one another, and this reciprocal understanding is only possible through the transcendental constitution of objectivity. Thus, there is no separation between intersubjectivity and the constitution of the world; the community of selves gives meaning to objectivities. It is always important to remember that each and every meaning given to an object must rest on and be compatible with its essence.

Therefore, the community of selves is fundamental to understand the world and its objects. Typically, when we think of objects, we think of real objects, and among these are concrete objects, but when we think of ideal objects, we think of values. How would it be possible to understand such objects without the other? To think about the cognition of objects is to think that these objects are constituted, in the phenomenological sense, communally. Not in the sense of being created, but in the sense of being unveiled, human beings give meaning to objects under the limits of their essences; they have different experiences and perspectives on

them, but they intuit and understand their essence and what is contingent on them. Without a community of selves to give meaning, one that respects the hierarchy of values but which, at a certain point, fails to respect it and demands a reaction from the self, others, and the community, it would be practically impossible to understand values.

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