Presentation will be based on this paper but it will also include an explication of Husserl’s discourse of persons as cultural-historical subjects.

Selfhood, Personhood and Embodiment: A Husserlian Approach
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Several misconceptions about phenomenology stem from the notion that Husserl’s transcendental self is a solitary creator of all meaning of objectivity – the meaning of the world and all beings included in the world: natural entities, physical things, living beings, human artifacts, works and tools, linguistic signs and mathematical objects, as well as all conscious subjects or other selves, as we may call them.

Two misinterpretations come together here: First Husserl is believed to argue that the constitutive basis of all meaning is in one universal transcendental subjectivity, shared equally and in some mysterious way by all rational conscious beings. Second, it is supposed that the constitutive subject that Husserl discloses is a-temporal and non-changing. These misconceptions make Husserl’s transcendental self look very much like Kant’s – and it seems to me that many commentaries and critiques still suffer from the habit of reading Husserl through Kantian eyes.¹

I will argue in this chapter that Husserl’s transcendental self is not universal but individual, not stable but in constant change, not beyond time but temporal through and through. With this understanding of the ego, it becomes easier to see why Husserl and his followers insist and argue again and again that the constitutive basis of all meaning of objectivity is not in one transcendental self but is in the community of such selves, in transcendental intersubjectivity. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in his Phenomenology of Perception (Phénoménologie de la perception 1945): “Transcendental subjectivity is revealed subjectivity, manifested to itself and to others, and is for that reason transcendental intersubjectivity”.²

By focusing on Husserl’s discussion in two central works, the second volume of Ideas (Ideen 1952, written in 1912–1928) and Cartesian Meditations (Méditations cartésiennes 1931, Cartesianische Meditationen 1950), I demonstrate that his mature conception of selfhood is much more refined and plausible than standard presentations and superficial critiques suggest. Already in the 1910s, Husserl argued that phenomenological investigations disclose the transcendental ego not merely as a performer of transient acts or as an empty act-pole but as a temporal sediment of actions and affections. Husserl called ‘person’ this internal temporal formation, and argued that as such the person is not an outcome of activity but founded on primary passivity.

Husserl outlined this view in the 1910s and 1920s in his manuscripts; he systematized the account at the end of the 1920s in Cartesian Meditations. As early as in 1925, he sent the manuscript Ideas to his assistant and colleague Martin Heidegger who at that time was working to finish his habilitation treatise, Being and Time (Sein und Zeit 1927). Heidegger read Husserl’s manuscript and

¹ For an illuminative comparison between Kant’s and Husserl’s concepts of transcendental subjectivity, see David Carr’s The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
included in his own work a short but highly interesting critical commentary.³ He saw Husserlian phenomenology as hopelessly tied to the basic concepts of Cartesian epistemology. The task of the true phenomenologist became the “destruction” of this heritage, not in order to overcome it but in order to disclose the stratified and mediatory character of the concepts that the tradition hands down to us.⁴ I end my article by investigating the controversy between Husserl and Heidegger about the concepts of personhood and by questioning the tenability of the critical remarks Heidegger launched against Husserl’s “Cartesianism”.

14.1 The transcendental ego: Act-pole, person, and monad

Husserl clarifies his concept of the self or the ego, the I, by distinguishing between three different senses of selfhood: first, the ego as an act-pole, or ego-pole, as he also calls it [Ich Pol, Ego Pol]; second, the personal ego [personales Ich, Person]; and finally the ego in its full concreteness as a monad. All these distinctions are already in operation in the second volume of Ideas, but Husserl does not explicate them fully or clearly until Cartesian Meditations.⁵

It must be emphasized, that this tripartite conceptual framework of selfhood is transcendental for Husserl. The terms ‘act-pole’, ‘person’ and ‘monad’ refer to different structures of transcendental consciousness as it is given after the phenomenological-transcendental reduction; and thus the descriptions and explications are supposed to be purified from all existential theses. So what is at issue are not worldly beings or parts, levels, or properties of such beings, but the nature of the consciousness in its constitutive work on being.⁶

In Husserl’s explication, the ego as an act-pole or ego-pole is the subject of intentional acts, that is, the ego studied merely as the performer of acts. Husserl argues that every act discernible from the stream of experience radiates or emanates from one identical center; every act is given to us as such a ray. So to begin with, the ego is a structural feature of conscious activity; it is the pole of all the acts

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⁵ Husserl’s phenomenology is explicitly Cartesian in aiming at giving an apodictic (doubtless) foundation to all sciences, from logic to ethics, and from the natural sciences to the human sciences. Husserl argues, however, that Descartes was misled by two unfounded assumptions: first, by the assumption that the ego cogito is a thinking “thing”, and second, more fatally, by the assumption that all eidetic sciences are similar to the mathematical sciences. Hua1, 63–64/23–25; Hua3, 163–174/184–193; cf. Hua6, 80–85/78–84. For a detailed explication of Husserl’s critique of Descartes, see Sara Heinämäa, Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 11-17.

⁶ By arguing that Husserl’s concept of personhood has a transcendental dimension, I challenge the current reading of Hiroshi Goto, Der Begriff der Person in der Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls: Ein Interpretationsversuch der Husserlschen Phänomenologie als Ethik im Hinblick auf den Begriff der Habitualität (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004). I have no problem with Goto’s ethical implications but I argue that his reading neglects the sections in which Husserl explains the transcendental dimensions of personhood. My interpretation moves in the same direction as the readings of Anthony Steinbock and Sebastian Luft; Anthony Steinbock, Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl (Evaston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 33–37; Luft, “Husserl’s concept”.
(factual and possible) that stand out from the streaming continuum of consciousness. It is as if the acts were centered round the ego – in a similar way as they are centered round the object-poles.7

However, having made this basic point, Husserl argues that the transcendental ego is not merely an act-pole or a permanent structural feature of transient acts. It is also a temporal formation, and as such it refers back to its own past.8 Husserl’s formulations are quite explicit on this second point in his manuscripts from the 1910s. Compare the following paragraphs from Ideas II, the “Encyclopaedia Britannica article” (1929) and Cartesian Meditations:

The pure Ego of any given cogitatio already has absolute individuation, and the cogitatio itself is something absolutely individual in itself. The Ego, however, is not an empty pole but is the bearer of its habituality, and that implies that it has its individual history.9

There is also, inseparable from this [intentional] life-process, the experiencing I-subject as the identical I-pole giving a center for all specific intentionalities, and as the carrier of all habitualities growing out of this life-process.10

(…) this centering Ego is not an empty pole of identity (any more than any object is such). Rather, according to a law of “transcendental genesis”, with every act emanating from him and having a new objective sense, he acquires a new abiding characteristic.11

Husserl uses the terminology of ‘habits’ [Habitus, Habitualität] to describe the temporal constitution of the ego as distinct from the ego in its function of performing acts. He warns that we should not take this terminology in its everyday sense of routines and social customs.12 The reference is to certain processes in internal time in which acts are established and new acts are sedimented on earlier ones thus forming a kind of act-form or act-gestalt.13 This gestalt is unique to the individual, and we can thus say that the ego has a specific mode or style of acting.14 The unique styles of individuals can be classified as belonging to general types but they cannot be classified as belonging to any naturally determined class. Husserl explains:

7 Edmund Husserl, Hua3, 137–138/155–157; Hua4, 97–100; Hua1, 100/66.
9 Husserl, Hua4, 299–300/313; cf. Hua4 310–311/324; Hua33, text no. 14, �. In Ideas, Husserl uses the term ‘pure Ego’ for the Ego-pole (e.g. Hua4, 325/337, Hua14, 42–43, 47), but in an appendix to the second volume he writes: “This old reflection of habituality is still extremely immature; although everything essential is glimpsed, the description is not carried through to the end with precision. In the first place the doctrine of the pure Ego – before all else as a pole – has to be <?> revised?” (Husserl, Hua 310/324 (English translation modified)).
11 Husserl, Hua1, 100/66.
12 Husserl, Hua4, 111/118.
13 Husserl, Hua1, 67/28–29, 100/66–67.

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Every man\footnote{I have argued elsewhere that Husserl’s analysis hold for both sexes; see Heinämaa, Toward; Feminism”, in A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathal (Malden USA, Oxford UK, Victoria Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2006)).} [Mensch] has his character, we can say, his style of life in affection and action, with regard to the way he has of being motivated by such and such circumstances. And it is not that he merely had this up to now: the style is rather something permanent, at least relatively so in the various stages of life, and then, when it changes, it does so again (…) in a characteristic way, such that, consequent upon these changes, a unitary style manifests itself once more.\footnote{Husserl, Hua4, 270/283, cf. Hua34, 200.}

Husserl calls “transcendental person” or “personality” of the transcendental ego [Person, Pesönlichkeit] the gestalt that is formed in the establishment and habituation of acts in internal time.\footnote{Husserl, Hua34, 200, cf. 158, 246; cf. Hua1, 101/67; Hua4 212–213/223–224, 317–318/329–33. Husserl distinguishes the transcendental person sharply from the empirical or worldly person. The latter is the human being as part of the world; the former is free of all worldly being.} For him, the ego is not a momentary actor, that wills, enjoys, and posits being, but the ego has already willed, has enjoyed and has posited being. The ego is not merely the totality of simultaneous acts but formed in time. In other words, the ego has a genesis\footnote{Husserl also uses the term ‘teleiosis’ in this context, Hua4 349/360.}, an internal past and an origin.\footnote{Husserl, Hua4, 251/263; Hua1, 103–105/69–70; Hua13, 43–44; cf. Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, xiii-xv, 147; Phenomenology, xviii-xix, 126.} And more: the ego is (also) its own past.\footnote{Cf. Steinbock, Home, 33–36; Toine Kortooms, Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology (West Lafayette, India: Purdue University Press 2002), 176, 210.}

Husserl illuminates this process of habituation of acts, both in Ideas II and in Cartesian Meditations, by studying the case of judgment formation.\footnote{Husserl also uses the term ‘teleiosis’ in this context, Hua4 349/360.} He explains that always when we make a judgment, the judgment becomes our own in a specific way: it becomes part of our transcendental habitus. The judgment remains our own in this way, until we refute it by another act, and after this it still remains ours as a judgment once held and acted on, and then refuted. This does not mean that we repeat the judgment in every moment until we refute it, but that we are, from the very moment of making the judgement, the ones who thus judge and believe.

For example, when the patter on the roof makes me believe that it is raining outside, I am bound to the reality of rain and the presence of raindrops. My judgment is transient and passing: after a moment I am back again in my work, absorbed in the texts that I am reading. The patter of raindrops no longer occupies the center of my attention but has moved into the background of my experience. But in this process, I have not ceased to be the one who believes that it is raining; I am still bound to the reality of the rain, even though I no longer actively posit the being of the raindrops.

The permanence of belief manifests itself in my responses: if I were asked about the patter, even when absorbed in my work, I would answer – without hesitation – that it is due to rain. The conviction also shows in other, non-verbal, ways in my behavior. When I go out, for example, I take an umbrella and put on rubber boots. It is (perhaps) only when I open the door, and see the clear blue sky and the neighbor’s children with the watering hose, that I come to abandon my belief. However, I do not thus return to the earlier moment or to my life as it was before I paid attention to the patter and judged that it is raining. Instead, now, after the abandonment of the belief, I am the person that was convinced of the reality of rain, but is not any more.

In a similar way, when my love dies, I do not in any miraculous way get rid of or liberate myself from this emotion, but continue carrying it in myself, now in the mode of the past. It is not that I think that I was mistaken about my feelings, that I had confused love with friendship, desire, or hatred,
for example. I am aware that I really have loved, but at the same time I am aware that I have lived through and have passed this love, and that the feeling belongs to my past. I do not live anymore as loving – now I live as having loved.\textsuperscript{22}

Husserl emphasizes that we should not confuse the permanence of decision, belief, and emotion, with the experience of remembering or imagining such states.\textsuperscript{23} It is of course possible for me to remember my experience of a recent shower of rain – really and genuinely recall it as past – \emph{but only after} I have abandoned my conviction of the presence of raindrops. As long as I hold the belief, as long as I have not refuted it, I can always return to it and I find it unchanged and as my own, as part of me. According to Husserl, the permanence of the conviction holds even through sleep. He claims:

Likewise [cf. judgment] in the case of all kinds of decisions, value-decisions and volitional decisions. I decide: the act-process vanishes but the decision persists; whether I become passive and sink into heavy sleep or live through other acts, the decision is continuously in validity and, correlatively, I am so decided from then on, as long as I do not give the decision up.\textsuperscript{24}

So as a summary, we can say that with the concept of person, Husserl starts a new discussion about the temporality of the transcendental ego: the ego-pole or the act-pole is an identical center of acts, but the concrete ego is a person constituted as the whole of experiences streaming in time, transient as acts but permanent as accomplishments and sedimented one upon another. The act-pole and the person are not two separate parts, levels, or phases of the ego but essentially bound together, and only distinguishable by analysis.

As the transcendental person is essentially a temporal formation, investigations of its nature belong to \emph{genetic phenomenology}. This is explained already in \textit{Ideas II} but the methodological implications are emphasized and clarified in full only in \textit{Cartesian Meditations}. In \textit{Ideas II}, Husserl writes for example:

\begin{quote}
In reflection I therefore always find myself as a personal Ego. But originally this Ego is constituted in the genesis pervading the flux of lived experiences.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Compare this statement to the following paragraph from \textit{Cartesian Meditations}:

\begin{quote}
With the doctrine of the Ego as pole of his acts and substrate of habitualities, we have already touched on the problem of phenomenological genesis and done so at a significant point. Thus we have touched the level of \emph{genetic phenomenology}.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Genetic phenomenology explicates the temporal order of meaning constitution. It does not confine itself to the investigation of individual histories but, by a method of eidetic variation, aims at illuminating the essential steps and phases in all temporal institution or establishment of meaning and sense. The mature Husserl argues that static analyses are a necessary part of phenomenology but are not sufficient in themselves, because phenomenology aims at accounting for the structures of meaning as well as for their genesis and origins. Thus Husserl’s concept of the transcendental person enriches

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] From the point of view of Husserl’s phenomenological analysis, the account that Locke offers of personhood in \textit{An Essay Concerning Human Understanding} (1698) is weakened by the confusion between memory and sedimentation (see especially paragraphs 9–10 in Chapter XXVII of Locke’s work).
\item[25] Husserl, Hua4, 251/263.
\item[26] Husserl Hua1,103/69; cf. Hua27 278–279/316–318; ‘‘Phenomenology,’ Edmund Husserl’s article”, 146–148.
\end{footnotes}
and concretizes his account of subjectivity by enclosing the essence of the temporal unfolding of the self.

To complete the Husserlian analysis of subjectivity, however, we need to introduce still another concept: that of the monad. Husserl argues that the transcendental ego, in its full concreteness, is not confined to its activity and acts, but is also necessarily bound to its intentional objects. The ego is a whole which includes the acts and the temporal formation of acts as well as the intentional objects of the acts. Husserl uses the Leibnizian term ‘monad’ to describe this whole. He does not choose this terminology in order to argue that the ego is alone or autonomous in its constitutive activity. On the contrary, Ideas II and Cartesian Meditations explicitly reject such notions as misunderstandings and argue that phenomenologists must proceed to investigate transcendental intersubjectivity. The term ‘monad’ is telling for another reason: with it, Leibniz referred to a “windowless spirit” that is not causally influenced or acted upon by outside factors.

What is crucial for Husserl in Leibniz’ account is that the relation between the monad and what is outside of it and other from it, is not a causal relation but a relation of expression. It is as if the monad, instead of being influenced by its outside, would resonate with it. The relation is comprehensive so that every single monad expresses the whole complexity and multiplicity of the world. In an analogous way, Husserl argues that in its full concreteness the ego covers or encompasses all the intentional objects of its acts – encompasses them precisely as intentional objects and not as material causes or effects.

Thus understood, the transcendental ego is determined by two kinds of relations, firstly as a person by its own past, and secondly as a monad by its intentional objects. By its intentional relations, the transcendental ego is bound to other egos and, due to them, connected to a world and not just to a subjectively specified environment. The ego is not solitary, Husserl argues; the solus ipse is an abstraction. This is explained in detail already in Ideas II, but Husserl returns to the topic again in the fifth Cartesian Meditation. At the end of Ideas II, he explains in a footnote:

According to our presentation, the concepts I–we are relative; the I requires the thou, the we, the “other”. And, furthermore, the I (the I as person) requires the relation to a world of things.
Therefore I, we, and the world belong together: the world as a common surrounding world which bears the stamp of subjectivity.

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29 Leibniz, Monadology, 269–270, 276.  
31 See also his manuscripts on intersubjectivity from 1905–1929, i.e. Hua13–15. Cf. Zahavi, Husserl and Transcendental.  
32 Husserl, Hua4, 288/301–302 (translation modified), cf. 198–199/208–209, 249–250/261. Merleau-Ponty argues that the genetic basis of the I-you constitution is in an anonymous subjectivity. This should not be understood as a fusion of the self and the other self but means the unparalleled, nameless subject of perception and motility. For a detailed account of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of anonymity, see Sara Heinämaa, “Personal and Anonymous: Merleau-Ponty’s Concept of the
To sum up, the self has three “dimensions” in Husserl’s mature account: it is an act-pole, it is a person constituted in inner time, and it is a monad related to intentional objects. These dimensions are not given separately but can only be distinguished by analysis. If we keep this in mind, then we can clear up several misconceptions about “Husserl’s subjectivism” and the “self-centeredness” of phenomenology.

First, we see that the self as a pole is merely an abstraction from the concrete whole of the ego, constituted as a process of change and development in inner time. Accordingly, the ego-pole is not a-temporal but trans-temporal or supra-temporal. Second, the self should not be understood as a universal principle in which all humans or all rational beings take part. Rather it is an individual with individual characteristics and with an individual style of changing and developing. To be sure, this individual exhibits certain essential structures, such as the structures of inner temporality and those of intentionality, but these structures do not have any separate being or existence as distinguished from the stream of lived experience. On the contrary, the essential structures of experience show or disclose themselves only within such a stream. Third, the self is not a sole basis of meaning or a solitary creator of objects, but always already related to other similar selves in its process of constitution and self-constitution. It relates to other selves by its body – the body understood, not as one of the experienced objectivities, but as a specific mode of experiencing, typical of perception, affection and sensation.

14.2 Personhood and embodiment

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger presents two critical claims against Husserl’s account of persons. First, Heidegger argues that Husserl’s notion of personhood is inadequate: Husserl defines the person as a performer of acts but leaves unexplained what it means to *perform* acts. In paragraph 10 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates the problem as follows:

> Essentially the person exists only in the performance of intentional acts, and is therefore essentially not an object. (...) A person is in any case given as a performer of intentional acts which are bound together by the unity of meaning. (...) Acts get performed; the person is the performer of acts. What, however, is the ontological meaning of “performance”? How is the kind of Being which belongs to a person to be determined ontologically in a positive way?

Heidegger then argues that the critical questioning cannot stop here. There are several fundamental problems involved in the classical phenomenological account of personhood. The second problem is that Husserl’s notion of the person as a *spiritual-bodily* whole is naïve. In Heidegger’s understanding, this is due to Husserl’s failure to explain the unity of the three different kinds of being: body, soul, and spirit. Heidegger argues: “When (...) we come to the question of man’s Being, this is not something we can simply compute by adding together those kinds of Being which body, soul, and

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Subject”, a paper presented at Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception 60 Years Later, September 30 – October 1, Center For Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen. Husserl uses the concept of anonymity to describe the absolute basis of all constitution in inner time-consciousness, e.g. Hua9, 478; Hua10, 75; Hua14, 29; Hua33, 277–278.


spirit respectively possess – kinds of Being whose nature has not as yet been determined.”

Heidegger claims that these shortcomings have roots in phenomenology’s indebtedness to Cartesian epistemology, to its concepts of substance, transcendence, and knowledge. He argues that philosophy must break away from this tradition and inquiry back to its forgotten basis. Thus classical Husserlian phenomenology can be substituted by the ontological analytic of Dasein.

In the second part of my article, I argue that Heidegger’s presentation of Husserl’s account of personhood is misleading. This holds for the remarks presented in Being and Time as well as for the earlier, more extended discussion in the lecture course from 1925 on the History of the Concept of Time. I will answer Heidegger’s two remarks separately. I start from the claim that the person, as Husserl frames it, is nothing but a performer of acts, and I proceed to study how Husserl’s account of the spirit-body union relates to, and differs from, the accounts that we find in the tradition of Cartesianism.

We have seen above that Husserl defines the person, not merely as a performer of acts, but also as a maintainer of earlier activity. This still leaves Husserl’s concept of person tied to the concepts of act and activity, and to this extent Heidegger’s presentation seems right: the person is defined and determined by activity, insofar as it carries or habituates earlier acts. However, the self is not merely an originator of acts, or the objects constituted in them, but is also a passive receiver or heir of earlier activity. Merleau-Ponty even claims that Husserl’s genetic phenomenology implies the idea that the self receives its acts, not just from its own past, but also from other, previous forms of consciousness. This, according to him, is possible due to the mediating function of nature as experienced in motion and sensation.

Moreover, Husserl himself argues in Ideas II that all the activity constitutive of a personal self has a passive basis in the stream of lived experiences. He writes:

I am originally not a unity composed of associative and active experiences (if experience means the same as it does in the case of thing). I am the subject of my life, and the subject develops by living (...) The Ego does not originally arise out of experience (...) but out of life.

Spirit is not an abstract Ego of the position-taking acts but is the full personality, I-human, the “I take a position,” the I think, I value, I act, I complete works etc. Then there also belongs to me a basis of lived experiences and a basis of nature (“my nature”) which manifest in the movement of lived experiences.

Thus understood, the personal self is formed, to a certain “extent”, from acts, but it is not merely an intentional agent nor actively accomplished. I can reflect on myself and objectify myself by will, but, as Husserl emphasizes, the possibilities of self-reflection and self-objectification are based on the

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37 In his marginal remarks to Heidegger’s study of Kant, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik 1929), Husserl points out that Heidegger, in a similar way to Kant, is arrested in his philosophizing by the image of God as the subject of infinite creative intuition distinct from finite and receptive human intuition. For Husserl, such comparisons and contrasts are both unnecessary and confusing. Edmund Husserl, Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931). Collected Works, Vol. 6, ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997, 24–31.
39 E.g. Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, 249; Phenomenology, 215. For a detailed account of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of anonymity, see Heinämaa, “Personal”.
40 Husserl, Hua4, 252/264.
(transcendental) fact that the ego is already given before reflection and objectification, passively

Heidegger’s second critical remark concerns Husserl’s discussion of the soul-body composite. Heidegger claims that Husserl’s account of this relation suffers from a fundamental naivety about the different senses of being that characterize the relata: the soul, the body, and the spirit. Without taking a stand on the issue, if such an explication is really missing from Husserl’s mature works, let us see what Husserl in fact says about the relations between the body, the soul, and the spirit.

The first thing to notice is that, instead of one notion, Husserl offers several perspectives. Ideas II provides at least two different accounts: one that aims at capturing the unity of soul and body as it is conceived within the naturalistic attitude, and a different one for the experience of the spirit-body unity within the personalistic attitude. The work starts with an analysis of the soul-body relation as it is conceived – and must be conceived – within the natural sciences, but Husserl proceeds to argue that this way of conceiving the unity is not our only option and, more crucially, is not epistemologically or ontologically fundamental.

The crucial difference between the naturalistic and personalistic attitude is not topical: both attitudes include bodies and souls, and both make possible certain accounts of their unity. The difference is rather in the order in which being is posited. In the naturalistic attitude, we posit material nature, physical being, as the foundation of all being. Husserl expresses this by saying that the naturalistic thinker fails to see or conceive any other mode of being; everything that is for him, is physical or founded on the physical.\footnote{Husserl, Hua4, 183–184/193.} Fundamental differences between modes of being are neglected, because they are understood as belonging to the realm of “mere seeming”. It is taken to be obvious that all beings are principally of the same kind. Thus, also every mental or spiritual state or process is taken to be part of physical being, a stratum of the physical, an epiphenomenon or an emergent property of highly organized matter.

In the personalistic attitude, we do not posit physical being as the foundation of all being. The spiritual is primary, and everything else is conceived in relation to it.\footnote{Husserl, Hua4, 236–247/248-259.} The living body, for example, is conceived as belonging to a person which is spiritually individuated. Works of art and science, paintings and books, are conceived and seen as sensible expressions of spirit. We do not deny the materiality of things, but we conceive it, we see it, as dependent on and subjected to spiritual individuals.\footnote{Hua4, 297–301/311–315.}

The first part of Husserl’s Ideas II studies the living body within the naturalistic attitude as part of physical nature. In this case, the body, with all its biological and psychological processes, life processes and operations of sensation and thought, is given as a mechanical-functional system, as a spatial-temporal reality. Its soul is “nothing per se”, but only a special part or layer of material nature.\footnote{Husserl, Hua4, 175/184–185.}

The second and third part of the book focus on the constitution of the spiritual world. Husserl argues that within the personalistic attitude, the body belongs to a person, or as he puts it with the German verb “haben”; the person has his body. The body in this case is not a mere physical thing but is an expression of the person. The spiritual “states” and “processes” of the person, his experiences and acts, lend the sensible matter their forms and structures. Thus the sensible body is articulated in a special way as an expressive unity in which all parts are internally bound together and cannot be
removed, transplanted, replaced or substituted.\textsuperscript{47}

Thus understood, or perceived, the body of the person is not a separate reality but belongs to an expressive unity. Husserl explains this several times in \textit{Ideas II}, for example:

\begin{quote}
The human being in the personal world (the world of spirit, we also say, as the domain of the human sciences) is the unity of the living body [\textit{Leib}] as expression of spirit and of spirit as expressed in the living body, given in the personalistic attitude.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes exactly these sections of \textit{Ideas II}, and argues that they reformulate the understanding already expressed by Descartes:

\begin{quote}
The experience of one’s own body runs counter to the reflective movement which detaches subject from object and object from subject, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality. Descartes was well aware of this, since a famous letter of his to Elisabeth draws the distinction between the body as it is conceived through use in living and the body as it is conceived by the understanding.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

The point, however, is not that Husserl just repeats in new concepts what Descartes already had presented. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty argues that Husserl proceeds to analyze the unity of body and spirit in a new way: by comparing it to linguistic unities. Thus Husserl’s main contribution is not in revivifying the Cartesian account of the soul-body union but in introducing the concepts of \textit{expression} to the analysis of the internal relation between spirit and body.

Husserl argues that sensible material requires spirituality, spiritual units, in order to be articulated as living bodies of human beings, in a similar way as mere sounds and visual shapes require spiritual units – meanings – in order to be articulated as words. The person and his or her body are one, not by first appearing as two separate things and being then tied together, afterwards, but by appearing as each other’s necessary constituents, the articulating structure and the articulated sensible matter.\textsuperscript{50} Husserl uses the analogy to language – to words, sentences and texts – throughout the third part of \textit{Ideas II}. In the supplements, he explains again:

\begin{quote}
It is just like reading a newspaper: the sensory-intuitive paper with markings is unified with the sense expressed and understood in the word-signs. Likewise in the case of any other literary offering, whether it be spoken, written, etc. Its has as it were a sensuous living body for a spiritual meaning that is grasped in understanding. In their appearance “living body” and “spirit” are unified in a particular way.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Husserl argues that, before being given as bio-mechanical systems, living bodies appear as sensuous-spiritual wholes, articulated by spiritual units or spiritual individuals. The objects of physiology, anatomy, and scientific psychology, are achieved from expressive bodies by processes of


\textsuperscript{48} Husserl, Hua4, 325/337.


\textsuperscript{50} Husserl, Hua4, 239/251.

\textsuperscript{51} Husserl, Hua4, 320/333 (translation modified).
abstraction. The attempt to reunite such abstract entities is a hopeless and absurd project. In order to understand the spirit-body unity, one needs to return to the personalistic level of experience:

But if I am in the attitude of the human sciences, in which the other spirit is thematically posited as spirit and not as founded in the physical living body \([im\ physischen\ Leib]\) \((…)\), then this corporeal body \([Leibkörper]\), like everything which is not spirit, belongs to the surrounding world of things; it is a thing, that has spiritual meaning, that serves as expression, organ, etc, for a spiritual being, for a person and his spiritual activity.

We fail to realize this as long as we study the body within the naturalistic attitude. The movements and postures of living beings, animals and humans, do not express anything to us but function as reactions to external and internal stimuli. We do not grasp them as gestures but understand them as effects in causal chains.

We are all certainly capable of taking such a stand; and many vital, life-supporting tasks \((e.g.\ the\ work\ of\ the\ surgeon)\) require that one is able to stay in this attitude and act accordingly. None of us, however, can remain wholly in the naturalistic attitude and for ever avoid leaning on the personalistic attitude and its objects. Not even the natural scientist, the biologist, or the physiologist can avoid taking the personalistic stand, for he too has to communicate his results to other persons in order to ascertain their validity and thus needs to relate to his own body and to the bodies of others as expressive and intentional wholes. And even if he gave up his scientific aspirations, he would have to take his own body as an expression of his will when “moving it”.

Husserl’s discussion of the expressive body is based on a conceptual distinction that he made already in *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901). In the first investigation, Husserl distinguished between two senses in which we can talk about signs and signification: expressions \([Ausdruck]\) and indications \([Anzeige]\). These are not two subcategories of some general concept of sign but essentially different ways of standing for something. By distinguishing between expressions and indications, Husserl argued that our common-sense notion of sign is actually equivocal. The essential difference between these two ways of “standing for” is that the relation of expression is internal and the relation of indication is external. The expressive means and the expressed object are necessarily bound together; indications for their part relate to the things indicated only occasionally. To put it more precisely, the expressive means and the expressed content have their identities only as parts of the expressive relation; and the indicative means and the indicated thing are what they are within the relation of indication as well as outside of it.

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl stated that facial expressions, gestures, and bodily postures are not meaningful expressions, but only indicate the internal states of the gesturing person. In *Ideas II*, he argues, on the contrary:

The thoroughly intuitive unity presenting itself when we grasp a person as such \((e.g.\ when\ we,\ as\ persons,\ speak\ to\ them\ as\ persons,\ or\ when\ we\ listen\ to\ their\ speech,\ or\ work\ together\ with\ them,\ or\ watch\ their\ actions)\) is the unity of the “expression” and the “expressed” that belongs to the

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54 Life-supporting in the biological sense of “life”.
55 For a detailed argument, see Sara Heinämaa “Embodiment and expressivity in Husserl’s phenomenology: From *Logical Investigations* to *Cartesian Meditations*”, paper presented at the conference *The Other and I*, September 8–9, Department of Philosophy, Uppsala University.
56 Husserl, Hua19-1, 24–31/183–188.
57 Husserl, Hua19-1, 31/187.
essence of all comprehensible unities. The unity of living body and spirit is not the only one of this kind.\textsuperscript{58}

This means that Husserl’s account of our experience of sensible bodies is refined and specified when he proceeds to transcendental phenomenology. The contrast is no longer between phenomenological-philosophical investigations and the empirical approach. Now we can distinguish between two different natural – non-phenomenological – attitudes: the naturalistic one and the personalistic one. One studies reality by presupposing the foundation of nature; the other takes persons as givens and proceeds to study their expressions and creations. Accordingly, we see that we can understand and investigate the living body in two different ways: as a mere material thing and as an expressive gesture. Both these forms of experience are founded on the sensible synthesis and on the intentional activities of consciousness. The task of the phenomenologist – the philosopher – is to account for these different modes of experience and to disclose their common foundations.

Thus it is misleading to claim that Husserl’s solution to the “mind-body problem” repeats the Cartesian idea of a composite substance, or that it aims at reducing the material substance to a spiritual one. On the contrary, Husserl avoids these concepts and the problems involved in them by introducing the concept of expression to account for the relation between the person and the person’s body. His solution certainly has its own problems, but to state that Husserl’s falls back on Cartesianism does not capture these problems but, on the contrary, hinders any understanding of them.

Bibliography


\textsuperscript{58} Husserl, Hua4, 236/248. For a detailed exposition of Husserl’s conception of the mind-body or soul-body union, see Heinämaa, \textit{Toward}, 21–37; Lilian Alweiss, \textit{The World Unclaimed: A Challenge to Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl} (OH: Athens, 2003), 141ff.


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