

## How do we 'See' that which is 'Invisible'? The Stakes in Husserl's Account of Perceiving the Other

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the similarities and differences between the perception of objects and the experience of another person by presenting Husserl's descriptions of these two comparable and yet decisively different activities of consciousness. This is done with an eye to arguing that while Husserl's phenomenology has often been criticized for its transcendental solipsism and egocentrism, he is to be credited for articulating in a phenomenological way the uniqueness of the encounter with the other and the inaccessibility of the latter's interiority.

**Keywords:** Husserl, perception, phenomenology, interiority

### The Question of the Other of Man

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl claims that transcendental phenomenology, which treats the transcendental ego as its "sole theme," begins as a "pure egology."<sup>1</sup> Driven by the Cartesian impulse to secure the foundation of knowledge and holding as apodictically certain the existence of itself as *ego cogito* that has its conscious life, Husserl sees the basic task of phenomenology as nothing else than the *self-explication* of consciousness, that is, the analysis and explication of constitutive acts of the mind and of their correlates. Through the description of these mental achievements and their objects, phenomenology is able to show us how we

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Levinas uses Husserl's neologism "egology" to characterize the history of Western philosophy as having been ultimately about autonomy and the thinking of the Same. "Every philosophy is—to use Husserl's neologism—an egology," says Levinas in "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite," in Adriaan Perperzak, *To the Other, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 1993), 35. I think we can address the implicit critique in this passage by explaining what Husserl means by saying that phenomenology begins as a "pure egology."

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cognitively have and experience the surrounding world and the objects therein.

One of the basic insights of phenomenology is the correlation of consciousness and the world, or as Hart puts it, the inseparability of being and manifestation.<sup>2</sup> Sokolowski expresses this insight by explaining that we are the datives of manifestation: It is to me, as transcendental ego, that the world and objects therein are shown or given.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenological epoche requires the disengagement from the natural attitude and results in the givenness of the world to consciousness as a phenomenon. From the phenomenological vantage point, we can better recognize the inseparability of the world and of consciousness. Husserl says that “as belonging together essentially, they are also concretely one, one in the only absolute concretion: transcendental subjectivity.”<sup>4</sup> While reality is put out of play through the reduction, the transcendental ego in the phenomenological attitude accomplishes its aim of self-explication by first of all turning to itself and to its own subjective processes.

Though the project of Husserl can be said to be inspired by the Cartesian ideal of an apodictic and thoroughly grounded science, transcendental phenomenology and its method of reduction differ from Descartes’ endeavor and his well-known universal methodic doubt in one important respect: while in Descartes the whole world is reduced to mere chimera, the phenomenologist gains access to an “infinite realm of being of a new kind”<sup>5</sup> or to a new “field of work,” as he restricts his attention to his conscious life. The world of objects is bracketed and nothing else exists (in fact, the question of existence becomes a secondary concern here) apart from myself as the transcendental ego, who remains “untouched in my existential status, regardless of whether or not the world exists and regardless of what my eventual decision concerning its being or non-being might be.”<sup>6</sup> Does this mean, then, that like Descartes who had to win through to the external world of things and other individuals after subjecting everything to doubt, he who engages in phenomenological investigations falls inevitably and unfortunately into solipsism?<sup>7</sup> The answer seems to be both yes and no. We

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<sup>2</sup> James Hart, “The Essential Look (*Eidos*) of the Humanities—A Husserlian Phenomenology of the University.” This paper was delivered as the Husserl Memorial Lecture by Prof. Rudolf Bernet on behalf of Prof. Hart on 28 March 2007 at the Higher Institute of Philosophy in Leuven.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 44 and 112 onward.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations, An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 84.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Husserl himself raises this question. See *ibid.*, 89 onward.

said above that in wanting to establish an apodictic and presuppositionless science, Husserl has to accept nothing as existing but the ego cogito along with its lived experiences. The phenomenologist, however, does not lose the world but retains it as the correlate of consciousness, as its *cogitatum*. My task then as a phenomenologist, Husserl says “is the uncovering of myself, in my full concreteness—that is, with all the intentional correlates that are included therein.”<sup>8</sup> The ego itself is the sole and universal theme of phenomenological description. Given its focus on the ego, phenomenology then is “a science that apparently condemns us to a solipsism, albeit a transcendental solipsism.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, on the other hand, it must be said that Husserl himself considers this transcendental solipsism as a “subordinate stage” in the phenomenological enterprise, which prepares the beginning philosopher to approach higher-level issues pertaining to transcendental intersubjectivity.<sup>10</sup> In the second Cartesian meditation, Husserl says that the question of others—how others “can become positable and thus become legitimate themes of a phenomenological egology”<sup>11</sup> remains to be properly addressed.

It is understandable why Husserl himself raises this issue of the other, for if one thinks about it, any normal individual in the natural attitude would believe—contrary to the claims of the skeptic—that the world and persons other than him or her certainly exist. I experience other persons in my own home, in school, on the street. More importantly, the question of the other seems to force itself upon the phenomenologist whose primary task is the uncovering of the field of consciousness, since even in the phenomenological attitude we have an awareness of other individuals: “Even in our fleeting glance at what is constituted in us—in me always, in the meditating ego—as a world, a whole universe of being, we naturally could not avoid being mindful of ‘others’ and their constitutings.”<sup>12</sup> It has to be added quickly that by “others” here, we do not mean only “synthetic unities of possible verification *in me*” but as Husserl clearly says, “according to their sense, precisely *others*”<sup>13</sup> who are transcendent to the ego. While we neither intend to prove the existence of other human persons nor to justify belief in this, we want to know how it happens that we are aware of the other. This necessarily brings us to the question as to the meaning of experiencing somebody other than myself. How does Husserlian phenomenology account for the presence of the other?

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<sup>8</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

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We have said that it is the task of phenomenology to uncover the accomplishments of consciousness and their correlates. In the natural attitude, we perceive, imagine, remember, speak of states of affairs and pronounce judgments; it is on the phenomenological level, however, that these subjective acts are explicated. On this level we are to describe, for instance, what is required of the subject to perceive a material reality, or in other words, what it means for the subject to perceive a particular object and how this object is given to my consciousness. Now, taking the question of the other person seriously, our concern in this paper is to see what it means to perceive another individual, what it means for another person to be given to us in perception. We wonder if there is anything distinct about the manner I perceive another or if such an experience is no different from the way I perceive objects external to me. We now raise the question as to how I, as the transcendental ego, perceive another individual.

We shall begin to address this question by first giving an account of external perception, that is, our perception of spatio-temporal things. We will show that in the perception of a material thing, there is not only always a play of the multiplicity of appearances and the unification of these into a pole of identity, but also the necessary interwovenness of actual presentation and absence, of the emptiness and fulfillment of intentions. We will point out that though a thing is given in adumbrations, in a manifold of appearances or profiles, it can always be more thoroughly and exhaustively known. It is against the background of external perception that we will consider the main issue we want to address in this paper. We shall turn to a description of how it is possible for us to have an idea of the other. This will then lead us to a consideration of how we perceive other individuals. Is the manner I perceive the other similar to how I perceive things? If not—as perhaps we instinctively feel—how is my experience of the other distinct from my experience of material objects? In the conclusion we will try to reflect on the issue itself. We shall hopefully be able to point out that what is really at stake in understanding how another manifests himself is the realization on our part as to how to conduct ourselves vis-à-vis the other who is manifest in such and such a manner. We will see that the basic insight of Husserl regarding this matter has certain implications for our attitude towards and thus also the way we relate to other individuals.

### **On Our Perception of Things**

Husserl makes it clear that external perception is always partial and perspectival. This is borne out by our ordinary experiences. We see a thing, for instance, and recognize it as a book. Yet we do not see this thing in its entirety all at once. If the book is lying on a table in a certain way, then we

can see only some of its sides, but not, let us say, its spine and back cover. Husserl stresses that to say that a thing is not exhaustively perceived in a single act is not simply to state a fact (which can be countered by the statement of another fact). A particular thing or object is never, *in principle*, completely and at once given “from all sides in a self-contained perception.”<sup>14</sup> A thing is given only in profiles or in the different ways the physical and juxtaposed sides and aspects of the thing are manifested to us. It is rather inconceivable to completely grasp an object, all its sides, along with all its features in a single act of perception. The other sides and aspects are as yet, in a certain sense, “invisible” or “absent.” As we shall see, however, this is not to say that we cannot more thoroughly experience the object.

We can further explain this claim about external perception by introducing the distinction between authentic and inauthentic appearance. In looking at a thing such as a book from a certain viewpoint, let us say that only the fore-edge and the text block are genuinely seen. And yet, the book does not consist only of these currently visible sides. The book is not its sides; in fact, it has other sides, like its back side, that is not visible to me at the moment and yet is also simultaneously co-intended. While the visible sides are authentically or originally given to me in my current act of perception, the non-visible sides are nevertheless still co-meant, though not genuinely or originally given to me at the same time. They are only co-present or merely appresented, and they can become originally present only in other future perceptions. We see thus that external perception always necessarily consists of two interwoven things. From the viewpoint of the intending consciousness, perception involves both actual and intuitive presentation and an empty indication referring to eventually possible perceptions, while from the noematic point of view, the object of perception is seen through adumbrations, and this given here and now indicates what is not actually given at the moment but nevertheless belongs to the same object of a perceptual act.

Furthermore, we also see that it is characteristic of every aspect of an object genuinely seen to indicate other appearances that transcend this current one, other ways this same thing can be manifested. It is as if that which appears in the flesh invites us to examine it more closely as it refers to sides or aspects not yet genuinely perceived, but which are only indicated or prefigured rather ambiguously. In each act of perception, what is perceived is a complex system of appearances that indicates or implies other appearances. Husserl calls the perceived “a system of referential

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<sup>14</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. by Anthony Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 40.

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implications with an appearance-core upon which appearances have their hold.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, though I, as a perceiver, am always confronted with a manifold of appearance, I am intending not merely dispersed and disparate appearances but one and the same object. Husserl says that “In each moment the objective sense is the same with respect to the object as such, the object that is meant; and it coincides with the continual course of momentary appearances.”<sup>16</sup> The identity of the object subsists through the multiplicity of manners of this thing’s manifestation. The object is transcendent to the many modes of appearance in and through which it is made present. Another way of understanding is to notice that we ordinarily come across already formed objects in the world. But as Husserl explains in the *Cartesian Meditations*, the experience of objects is made possible by the synthetic activity of consciousness, which constantly brings the modes of appearance “flow away in the unity of a synthesis, such that in them ‘one and the same’ is intended as appearing.”<sup>17</sup> Although an object is given to me in a multiplicity of appearances, I am able to see it as one and the same object. In and through the process of synthesis, appearances are constituted into a pole of identity that we can at future instances recognize as an object of a certain type. Though a book is made present to me in different ways, though I have different profiles of it as I move around it or turn it, it is the same book that I perceive, and which I can perceive again and recognize at a later time. However, let us also note that while the object subsists in the manifold of appearances, it is nevertheless inseparable from these different ways of presentation. As Sokolowski says in speaking of the transcendence of identities in manifolds, though “the identity transcends each profile and even the entire manifold of possible profiles, it is not separable from them; it is a moment founded on them. There is no identity without synthesis.”<sup>18</sup>

We can better understand the foregoing by referring to the notion of emptiness. In each act of perception the objective sense is the same, as the very same object coincides with the many appearances through which a thing is presented to me. Husserl speaks of “a constant  $x$ , a constant substrate of actually appearing moments”<sup>19</sup> of the thing perceived. This is also the same substrate of those pointers of other thing-moments that are not yet perceptible. These latter refer us to appearances not genuinely perceived at the moment; they are clusters of indications that point to other systems of appearances that are not yet actualized. Husserl explains that

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<sup>15</sup> Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive Syntheses*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 102.

<sup>19</sup> Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive Syntheses*, 42.

every genuine appearance is inseparable from and is permeated by an intentional “empty horizon.” In other words, in all perception, other aspects of a thing not yet originally given are “emptily” co-intended along with what genuine appears, which point to those aspects inauthentically given. In the perception of a book, I intend not only the perceivable sides since I also emptily intend those that I cannot see, like the rear side. Moreover, the sides originally and currently given to me indicate other aspects and other sides of the book as yet “in-visible” from my vantage point.

Such an emptiness that accompanies authentic appearance, however, is not mere nothingness, since it has to be fulfilled in a certain manner. Consciousness is always intentional, a consciousness of some thing, an object of a certain type. Though the empty surrounding halo of consciousness that is awaiting fulfillment may be indeterminate, it is an indication that prescribes the sort of actualizing appearances that will fit the horizon and which can then be integrated into the perception of this object intended. The continual perception of this object and the integration of these co-intended appearances are part of knowing something more thoroughly. Husserl claims that this holds for every process of perceiving. Along with every new perceived aspect is an empty horizon and thus also a system of pointers indicating possible appearances, which can be integrated into the determination of the particular thing being looked at and determined more closely. Thus, possibilities are always implied by actual appearances, just as absence is involved in the givenness of things. As Sokolowski explains, “The horizon of the potential and the absent surround the actual presence of things. The thing can always be presented in more ways than we already know; the thing will always hold more appearances in reserve.”<sup>20</sup>

Now we can also understand the distinction Husserl makes between the “inner horizon” of the determinations of the object originally given and “outer horizon” or determinations that are as yet only ambiguously prefigured. The genuine appearance also bears a horizon, and can also be said to be calling out to me to determine and perceive the thing more closely. If we can return to our illustration, even if I see only the front cover of a book, so many other details, such as the head or the tail, belonging to this visible surface may escape my gaze, but are nevertheless indicated by the profile given to me. I can look at what I am seeing right now more closely and see other aspects or manifestations of this same side. We see then that even in this context of looking at a single side, anticipation or “pre-understanding” is at work, as other aspects of the same side not yet focused on are indicated by what we see. “It—what is already seen—is constantly there as a framework prefiguring something new; it is an x to be

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<sup>20</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 28.

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determined more closely,”<sup>21</sup> says Husserl. On the other hand, along with this inner horizon of the side now seen, there are also outer horizons or foreshadowings of appearances that still lack an intuitive framework and still have to be integrated into the thing currently being perceived.

What actually happens in the progression of perception is the fulfillment of indicative lines of protention as aspects of a thing are seen and determined more closely. The perception of an external thing is a process of the progressive fulfillment of intentions, which goes along with the emptying of those intentions already previously fulfilled. As I look at a book lying on a table, I see the visible sides, while I also emptily intend the other sides that are not authentically appearing. Once I shift my gaze or move the thing appropriately, the once full intending of those previously visible sides become empty, while the formerly empty intending of the other sides become filled. Apart from the inseparability of authentic and inauthentic appearance, we also have the interwovenness of filled and empty intentions. Husserl claims that “Every momentary phase of perception is in itself a network of partially full and partially empty intentions.”<sup>22</sup>

Husserl also says that the process of perception is a process of acquiring knowledge. The process of fulfillment (the determination of indeterminacy) is also a process of knowing something more closely, a process of acquiring an abiding object of knowledge. Husserl explains that the locus of this accomplishment is retention, which co-functions with elementary anticipation. We can understand this by recalling that emptiness turns into fulfillment as anticipations are fulfilled, and every fulfillment turns into emptiness as one passes from one perception to another. This means, one passes from one manifestation to another and the previous appearance then becomes non-visible and falls into emptiness. Yet, thanks to retention, the former manifestation is not lost. Perception does not consist merely in the acquisition of ever new aspects of the object intended, aspects that are lost as soon as attention is directed to other ones, but is geared toward the building up of a unity of genuine perceptions through which an “abiding epistemic possession,” an object of such and such a type, is acquired. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl explains that acts of consciousness constitute objects as such and also as objects of certain types.<sup>23</sup> Such subjective accomplishments not only allow us to become familiar with the world and objects therein, they also make it possible for us to study objects in the various positive sciences. As transcendental subjectivity, I am also able to talk about the products of constitution, to focus on a particular feature of an object and elaborate on this, or I can speak of relations that

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<sup>21</sup> Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive Syntheses*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 77-81.



obtain between this object and something else. I can not only perceive or remember objects, I can also pronounce judgments about them. To once again revert to our example above, when I turn to examine the spine of a book, the front cover that I formerly genuinely perceived disappears from my perceptual field. The empty horizon to which the only vaguely prefigured side of the book now has gained a determinate prefiguring. Even if this particular book is entirely lost from view, thanks to retention, I still have a specific, articulated, and systematic sense of it. Thus, the once unknown object becomes something familiar, something I can re-identify in the future. The fulfilling of empty intentions that happens when I reconsider past perceptions then allows me to recognize the same object in future instances of perception.

We have seen thus that I can only see a spatio-temporal thing in its adumbrations and from a certain standpoint. We have seen too that the aspect that is now authentically given always brings with it horizons of possible experience which can be actualized in further acts of perception. As I intend one visible side, other sides that are not presently visible are also co-intended. Through perceptual exploration I can come to see these other sides and aspects and come to know the object more thoroughly; in this way, my previously empty intendings are fulfilled, while my formerly filled ones become empty. Moreover, through constitutive acts of consciousness, I perceive one identical thing; I gain a single sense that subsists through the manifold of appearances. To grasp an object is to acquire an epistemic possession that I can always re-activate in future instances. At this point, we now turn to a consideration of how we perceive another ego apart from ourselves. We will see how this experience of the other is on the one hand similar to perception of material things, but on the other hand and more importantly, how radically different it is from the former.

### **Empathy as the Manner We Perceive Another**

In the fifth Cartesian meditation, Husserl embarks on a phenomenological analysis of the possibility of having and experiencing the Objective world, the world that is, as transcendent to me, not my production, but is there for everyone. The task is to see how the community of monads, where egos exist with and affect one another, constitutes transcendental subjectivity. This shall be carried out in a number of stages, the first one of which is the analysis of experiencing an alter ego, a “special form of empirical experience”<sup>24</sup> that Husserl names empathy. We will see

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<sup>24</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. by Ingo Farin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 82.

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that it is in the manner of empathy that the ego is aware of another subjectivity on the basis of the perceived presence of an alien body.

Husserl performs a second reduction within the phenomenological attitude and as transcendental ego turns his reflective regard to himself. By abstracting from everything in consciousness that is alien, the ego constitutes a peculiar “sphere of ownness” within himself. What then remains is a substratum of the phenomenon world, mere Nature that has lost its sense of being for everyone. Husserl says that this reduced world is an “immanent transcendency” that is also a determining part of the ego. This world has its own essence that is not mine, but which acquires sense and verification only in my essence. It is on this reduced world that the experience of others and of the Objective world are founded. What I find within this primordially reduced world is “my *animate organism* as *uniquely* singled out—namely as the only one of them that is not just a body but precisely an animate organism”<sup>25</sup> or a lived body. This latter is characterized as the null-point from which the world is perceived, having the capacity to have sensations, an object in which I immediately hold sway, and as that by which I can act within, perceive and experience nature, including my very own body. Thus, when I perform this second reduction, I reduce myself as a man to being primarily an animate organism, a psycho-physical unity, but also a personal Ego that is the subject of my lived experiences. Furthermore, through this second and peculiar reduction, other persons are reduced to what belongs to my own primordial sphere, that is, as bodies.<sup>26</sup>

We see then that the perception of a material thing and that of a person is similar in the sense that the other person is seen as “something.” Just as the object is given in a manifold of appearances, that is, in various profiles and always from a certain perspective, so is the other, in so far as the other is seen as a material body. I do not see the entirety of this other person that is in front of me all at once; I do not even see the totality of the side of this body, with all the accompanying details, that is visible right now. But we have to state clearly that there is a difference between inanimate spatio-temporal things and the other seen as a body. Husserl unequivocally says that, though the other person is seen as “being over there,” as a body spatially distinct from me, his lived experiences, being his very own, are not directly accessible to me. This belongs to the sense of his being another ego, another center of consciousness, apart from me. Otherwise, if this were not the case, then, we (meaning both me and the other) would be identical or the other would be nothing but a moment of my own essence, of my own sphere of ownness.

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<sup>25</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 97.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

But given that the other ego is not given originally, how do I become aware of the other? Husserl counts on appresentation, a kind of making the other co-present. This appresentation, however, is different from the co-intending that occurs when we see things. We have seen above that in the perception of a thing, we simultaneously co-intend the sides that are as yet not originally given. In such a perception, my empty intending can be fulfilled by turning the thing itself or by walking around it so that the other sides previously unseen may become visible to me. But as Smith points out, appresentation through “perceptual exploration . . . is impossible in relation to the appresented ego of the other, which necessarily falls outside my sphere of ownness.”<sup>27</sup> Husserl says that appresentation alone is not enough, given that we are not dealing with something that is originally given, not even with something that can eventually be given, like the other aspects of a material thing viewed from one perspective in a present act of perception. Appresentation is based on a certain original presentation. In the case of the perception of another ego, the original basis is given in my perception of the reduced world within my own sphere of ownness.<sup>28</sup>

To recognize another ego as such is to perceive the other as another body that is active, sensitive, and is a center of perception and not merely a material thing. The other is not a mere *Körper* or an inanimate material thing, since the other is recognized as also governing his or her own lived body. Others are not mere objects in the world that can be experienced. They are also subjects who, like me, experience the world and therefore are also experiencing me. As Husserl says in an early text, the ego finds itself surrounded by “things which it regards as lived bodies but which it sharply *contrasts* to its ‘own’ lived body as *other lived bodies*. It does this in such a way that to each such lived body there belongs again an other I, but a different, other I.”<sup>29</sup> This passage indicates that there is, first of all, a perceived physical likeness between my body and the other alien body, a similarity that “serve[s] as the motivational basis for the ‘*analogizing*’ *apprehension* of that body as another animate organism.”<sup>30</sup> Yet, the question arises as to how I am able to recognize something material as another alien animated body. How do I know that what I am “seeing” is another ego, another subjectivity like me? Notice in the first quotation in this paragraph that recognizing other animated bodies involves “contrasting” them with one’s own and “supposing” that the former are governed by egos. We said above that within my sphere of ownness, I constitute or objectivate myself originally as a lived body, as a psycho-physical unity capable of sensation,

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<sup>27</sup> A.D. Smith, *Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations* (London: Routledge, 2003), 229.

<sup>28</sup> See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 110.

<sup>29</sup> Husserl, *Basic Problems*, 5. Emphasis on the word “contrasts” mine.

<sup>30</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 111.

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governing my own organism, experiencing the world and others. Now, to recognize an alien body within my primordial world as having these very same predicates involves an “analogizing transfer” of sense from my own body to that of the other. The continuation of the passage quoted above from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* gives us an idea of what this analogizing transfer means:

It [the I] regards the lived bodies as “bearers” of I-subjects. But it “sees” the other I’s not in the sense that it sees itself or experientially finds itself. Rather it posits them in the manner of “empathy,” hence other lived experiences and other character dispositions are “found” too; but they are not given or had in the sense of one’s own. Thus, the I finds an I that likewise has its “soul,” its actual consciousness, its dispositions, its character traits, and which likewise comes upon its own thingly surrounding, including its own body as its own.<sup>31</sup>

This passage tells us that I see in the alien body the very characteristics that my own animated body, regarded from within my sphere of ownness, possesses. There is a transfer of sense from my apprehension of my body as animate to the body over there that is anticipatively grasped as having the same sense. To recognize another body as a lived body, that is to transfer the objective sense of my animated body constituted in my primordial sphere to that of the other, requires this seeing of the similarity (apart from and beyond physical appearance) that obtains between my own lived body here and that alien body. Husserl explains that what actually happens in seeing another material body as an animated organism is what he calls “pairing,” an associative and basic form of passive synthesis. When for instance I taste a strawberry for the first time, I come to more or less know its features, such as its scent and peculiar texture. The sense of this thing is, for me, instituted for the first time.<sup>32</sup> The primally institutive original sense of the thing, however, remains alive and effective so that if and when I see another fruit of the same appearance, which I smell and touch, the objective sense (over and above how it looks) of the first fruit, which includes its smell and texture for example, is transferred to the other

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<sup>31</sup> Husserl, *Basic Problems*, 5-6. In this text, the first three sentences are in parentheses. See also pages 85-86.

<sup>32</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 79 and 111.

strawberry.<sup>33</sup> A phenomenological unity is achieved as these two things are recognized as a pair of strawberries. Now in the case of our awareness of another, pairing happens once the other enters my field of perception. What I originally find in my field of perception is the ego. More specifically, I find in that field my body that bears the sense of being an animate organism. Once another similar looking body, bearing certain determinations like the ones I am aware of as possessed by my body, enters my perceptual field, an “overlying of sense” occurs. The other similar body is apperceived according to the objective sense of my own body constituted within my primordial sphere, that is, precisely as a lived body governed by an ego.

It has to be clarified, however, that the other’s body is not directly associatively paired with my body as it appears to me now within my sphere of ownness. As was said in the quotation above, the ego perceives “the other I’s not in the sense that it sees itself or experientially finds itself.”<sup>34</sup> While I am, as a null-point of orientation and center of perception, *here*, the body of the other is perceived to be *over there*, situated apart from me. What the perception of the other’s body awakens in me is only one of the possible ways my body can be presentified to me: how my body would appear *if I were there* where the other body physically similar to my own is perceived. The objective sense of my own body as an animate organism is transferred to the body over there. I then suppose that that body over there has actual and possible perspectives and experiences, which are in fact not originally present since they are other than my own, and which I would have *if I were* actually there. I cannot, however, suppose that that other body is also mine, since I know that I am here, and I bring with me this “here” however I move about or wherever I go. I cannot simultaneously have the same contents within my sphere of ownness “from here” and “from there.” Since this body is not mine, I can see then that this material thing cannot be constituted as an animate organism in my primordial sphere, but in another sphere of ownness. I therefore appresent the other ego (which, along with its own experiences, are not given to me in the flesh) as governing in the animate body over there.

It was said above that in the perception of another ego, appresentation alone is not enough, since the ego and its experiences are not given to me originally. Appresentation has to be fused with and is based upon an original presentation. Another ego that is transcendent to me, that is, to my own private sphere, can only be at most presentified, and so to

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<sup>33</sup> Associative pairing is reciprocal. The transfer of sense can also happen in the other direction. Supposing that I merely touched and smelled the first and then that I taste the second strawberry, I come to recognize that the former would have the same distinct taste too as the second.

<sup>34</sup> Husserl, *Basic Problems*, 5.

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speak “accessed” in a secondary manner. On the level of the second reduction effected by Husserl in his meditations, only I or what belongs to me primordially can be said to be originally present. While what is other is only experienced in a founded manner and does not originally present itself. Experiencing the other in the manner of empathy means experiencing another body whose parts move and function in a certain way, that is, in the harmonious manner I would move about if I were to see myself “over there.” From within my primordial sphere, I am aware of an alter ego through harmonious appresentations just as I am aware of the past phases of my conscious life through presentified harmonious memories. Husserl says that I recognize another ego, since the other is a modification of myself, insofar as the other body is seen as behaving harmoniously (as I see myself as doing as an animate organism). As we have said above, I am aware of the other as another ego governing in a lived body through the contrastive pairing with my own animate organism perceived within my primordial sphere.

The foregoing discussion has also shown us that the recognition of another subject requires the combination of an original presentation and two presentifications. Within my primordial sphere I see myself as a material thing and constitute myself as a null-point of orientation, as active, and as perceptive. Within this sphere, the other is given to me as a material body (original presentation). I recognize this body as similar to my own and thus apprehend it as being likewise an animate organism. I see it in one of the ways that I can presentify myself to myself, that is in the way that my body would appear if I were there in its place (1<sup>st</sup> presentification). Because this body is over there and I am here, I cannot claim it to be a constituted animated organism within my own primordial sphere. This original presentation of another body is fused with the appresentation of another ego apart from me, which I suppose to be governing the alien animate organism (2<sup>nd</sup> presentification).

### **What is at Stake in the Question of the Way I Become Aware of the Other?**

We have thus seen that in a certain sense, the awareness of another ego is quite similar to the perception of a material thing. Insofar as the other is seen as a material body, I cannot grasp this body in all its aspects and features in a single act of perception, just as the seeing of a spatio-temporal object is always partial and perspectival. In seeing some concrete thing, I see only certain sides and aspects of it at a time, while the other sides and aspects are co-intended. These can eventually be seen and the empty intentions directed to them can be fulfilled through perceptual exploration,

by moving myself or the thing so as to get a new viewpoint. However, there is a basic difference between perceiving a thing and the awareness and perception of another individual. Whereas the thing can be more closely known and determined through further acts of perception, its physically juxtaposed sides and its other aspects subjected to my inquiring gaze, the other as another subjectivity is in principle inaccessible. I do not have direct access to the thoughts, desires, and fantasies of the other. The alter ego and its lived experiences cannot and can never be given to me originally. I can only presentify the other ego and his or her subjective processes to myself. It is in the manner of empathy that I am aware of another ego existing and governing in what I perceive to be another animate organism that is like my own. Moreover, it is only through the mediation of the body that I come to recognize another ego's presence. I see this alien material thing to be similar in physical appearance to my own body. But by contrasting it with my own, through associative pairing, I apprehend this other body according to the sense that my body bears, that is, as an animated organism in which another subjectivity holds sway. I also know this body to be governed by another consciousness by way of its harmonious behavior, the way its parts and the body itself as a whole function. I can grasp that another animated body behaves differently from the way mere inanimate things move (which do not move of their own accord but are usually moved by something external to them).

We turn now to reflect on the very question of the manner we perceive another individual. What is at stake in this question? Why do we consider it worthwhile to pursue? It was stated at the outset that from the point of view of Husserl, the question as to how it occurs that we are indeed conscious of other egos is a step that has to be taken toward an analysis of our experience of an objective world that is available not only to me but to everyone else. Phenomenology begins as a pure egology and its task is nothing other than the self-explication of the ego. This includes showing how "the ego likewise constitutes in himself something 'other,' something 'Objective,' and thus constitutes everything without exception that ever has for him, in the Ego, existential status as non-Ego."<sup>35</sup> But apart from this unquestionably worthy task of describing how it is that we have a world that everyone shares, the question of experiencing the other is also important in relation to articulating the manner the other is made present to us, the insight into which helps us to recognize the appropriate way to regard and approach other individuals. What is at issue here is the possibility of theoretically securing the necessary invisibility and essential inaccessibility of the other human person. Now, why is this important? To

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<sup>35</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 85.

do this is to be faithful to what phenomenology sets out to do, which is to see and describe how different things give themselves to consciousness. Sokolowski rightly says that phenomenology “helps us avoid reductionism by bringing out what is proper to each kind of being, not only in its independent existence, but also its power of presentation.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, this question is of utmost importance if we are to avoid, on the theoretical level, the reduction of the other to ourselves as consciousness (or any form of reductionism for that matter), and if, on the practical level, we are serious about giving the other his or her due.

We know that things and organisms other than the human being can be named and thus can be made into objects of thought, experimentation, and manipulation. Through technically advanced means, they can be more thoroughly known and thus more effectively used. The human person, on the other hand, cannot be defined without being reduced to an object that can likewise be exhaustively known, experimented on, used, and manipulated. To insist that the human can be named as an object is in effect to deny the distinction between subject and object; it is to downsize man, because he is not thought as a man as such but is reduced to an object. Throughout the history of thought, different understandings and definitions of man have already been put forward, all these being purported answers to the questions “What is man?” or “What is a man?” But as Jean-Luc Marion points out, to answer these questions with a definition is to decide on the human person’s objectification, to mark out the limits that circumscribe being human and thereby to set the boundaries that separate the human from the non- or sub-human.<sup>37</sup> These definitions may be used to justify—if they do not themselves lead to—the marginalization, exploitation, and/or annihilation of those individuals who do not fit the definition or do not fall under any well-defined category. To kill a person one has to have permission or license to kill. Such license is supported by a certain limited comprehension of humanity, a definition of the human person through universal and abstract concepts, which may lead to the discovery of that which is not human, which can then supposedly be exploited and/or eliminated with justification.

It was Emmanuel Levinas who in our contemporary age philosophically articulated the primacy of ethics by making the ethical meaning of the face of the Other and the response of the ethical subject his central concerns. Levinas tells us that there are certain encounters in which the Other all of a sudden surges up, manifests himself or herself as truly

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<sup>36</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, “*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*, The Privilege of Unknowing,” in *The Journal of Religion* (Issued by the Divinity School of the University of Chicago), 85:1 (January 2005), 11.



other; in such confrontations we may “perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed,” and thus “the human face shine[s] in all its nudity.”<sup>38</sup> Levinas insists that the radically and “absolutely other” is the Other<sup>39</sup> human person who reveals himself as face. Things remain mute as I reduce them to the selfsame and deny them their singularity and identity, but the face of the other, though inviting murder—and though its epiphany does not annul my capacity to kill—imposes on me the ethical impossibility of murder as it enunciates the command “Thou shall not kill.” The face of the Other resists reduction to the same. Though I find the other in the world that can be mine, and though I have the capacity to manipulate, reduce, and comprehend things, the Other always eludes my grasp and puts my existence into question.

Though Levinas criticizes his teacher Husserl for conceiving of the other merely as an alter ego, we can credit Husserl for taking the first steps in phenomenologically articulating the “invisibility” and inaccessibility of the other. Husserl rightly saw that if the lived experiences of the other were given in perception, there would be no fundamental difference between the other and me, that is, “if what belongs to the other’s own essence were directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same.”<sup>40</sup> But as we have seen, the other can only be approached in a secondary way. We recognize another first and foremost as a body. And through an analogizing transfer, we appresent an alter ego governing the body we perceive. The presence of the other is mediated through his or her expressive body, through which the intentions, desires, fantasies, opinions of the other are known. Moreover, this other body is understood by the phenomenologist as constituted within another sphere of ownness that is distinct and apart from his own. The other is here manifested to my consciousness only as a “he” or a “she” or a “you,” but I can never penetrate that other primordial sphere where the other is an “I” for himself or herself. We have therefore seen that Husserlian phenomenology gives us an account of the presence of the other that is, at least in one respect, faithful to the way the other is given to us; phenomenology makes us see that another subjectivity is never in principle given to us originally in perception. Husserl has shown us that our experience of another in the manner of empathy reveals nothing else than what will always escape the apprehending gaze of consciousness.

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<sup>38</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. by Sean Hand (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 233.

<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999), 39.

<sup>40</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109.

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