



Book Review

Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity: Historical Interpretations and Contemporary Applications

Frode Kjosavik, Christian Beyer, and Christel Fricke (Eds.). (2019). *Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity: Historical interpretations and contemporary applications*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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by **Ian Rory Owen**

Even the most attentive and patient student feels overcome by the volume of Husserl's output. As a basic teaching need, there is a demand for concretely written, easily readable texts. Lecturers hope to have texts that they can cite for students and say, "Read this chapter, it gives a concrete overview of the whole thing I have just been talking to you about". The difficulty in appraising Husserl concerns how to make a narrative about a perspective that is so complex and multifaceted. The detailed analyses Husserl provided can, on occasion, be very tangible descriptions. And yet there are reams of writings that talk about the difference between living in everyday experience, as opposed to theorising it in the psychological or transcendental attitudes that were clear to the author but not to his audience. The problems for anyone wanting to get a good grasp of Husserl's original writings are many. I will name a few.

Edmund Husserl wrote like a man possessed, and, given his arcane style and the fact that he was open to changing his mind, there is need for clarity. Among the problems of concluding on what Husserl meant, the entire output, the *Nachlass*, was written over a period of approximately 50 years. Many of the manuscripts are fragmentary and written as a means of recording his own thinking, seemingly only for himself. They are writerly texts rather than lectures. This is why it is refreshing to find a few concrete examples in works like *Thing and Space* (Husserl, 1907/1997) and *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge* (Husserl, 1907/2008), where he expressed himself in clear, tangible ways.

Furthermore, there are varieties of conclusions about the practice of Husserl's methods. This leads to two problems that are more central. Firstly, Husserl attracted many followers, and phenomenology was, and still is, a genuinely radical movement because of its promise. However, anyone who uses "phenomenology", and wants to justify an approach, claims to have genuinely understood the methodology and manner of analysis for concluding on ideals. Husserl's phenomenology maps or models human encounters and the sense contained therein. It is a self-conscious theoretical enterprise at one level. At other levels, it involves the practices of awareness, reflection on and analysis of one's own lived experience, and paying attention to the lived experiences of social wholes of other people. It produces idealised sociality as theoretical constructs to wield. Importantly, Husserl's influence attracted followers – but many took issue with some aspect of his perspective and manner of writing.

Secondly, where this leaves all who read Husserl and phenomenology in its various forms, is with a sense of keen interest in the analysis of qualitatively meaningful social and personal experiences – and yet there is a grand confusion about how this could be achieved, leading to what could be called "justification anxiety" in qualitative research. This anxiety is relieved by expert commentary from persons properly qualified. If this were not to be received, then criticisms of Husserl or phenomenology would be inaccurate and irrelevant, since the criticisms made bore no relation to the original project. If persons wish to take inspiration from Husserl and phenomenology

and develop their approach in some way, then that is their right as free thinkers and actors. However, the fundamental question remains: What are the original methods and standpoints of Husserl, and how are they justified? – or not? – with respect to the evidence that we all have as human beings about what consciousness is and how it fits into the contemporary social world.

If it were humanly possible to have read and digested the entirety of the *Nachlass* and conclude on it in a short space, then that would be a text worth reading. Next best would be texts from experts who can draw conclusions, set a context for Husserl's output, and go as far as suggesting improvements to make Husserl's methods and position more cohesive. *Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* is such a text that works to inform the phenomenological community by means of critical comments that identify some key aspects of what is important in the original project. The worth of *Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity: Historical Interpretations and Contemporary Applications* is that 15 chapters by leading scholars is a sound introduction for the novice and expert alike that provides concrete guidance on some key aspects of Husserl's mission. In the review that follows, I will not comment on every chapter, but I will comment on some that seem most noteworthy for educational purposes. In addition, while I am making this aside, I will make apologies for not commenting on all 15 chapters and also for omitting other more complex matters that could be commented on in relation to this scholarly work.

Christian Beyer supplies a chapter on motivation as part of epistemic rationality. In the psychological scope, the term "constitution" is usually used to make a narrative about experience. The social context of the life-world is due to social acts of all kinds. In holistic view, the other means of expressing, in writing or dialogue, the same situation is that of "intentional analysis of givenness". These are different ways of expressing the same focus on constitution, as shared active structuring of the conditions of possibility for intersubjectivity. There are many aspects to the whole that Husserl was identifying, and he wrote in a manner that demands demonstration and dialogue with the author, to get the details about what was being theorised, and what the conclusions are. Beyer points out that, in accruing learning, the sediments laid down are the trace of childhood and past learning, in a way that contemporary psychologists would describe as the effects of attachment and early learning. Individuals have their habits and skills maintained across the life-span. The habits and knowledge we each have as individuals are the products of our upbringing.

Beyer concludes by staying close to Husserl's texts and citing passages where the perspectives of self and other become entwined, such that the sharing of the sense of cultural objects is what is passed between people. To empathise pre-reflexively, before egoic analysis begins,

is to participate in the social world. Only in ideal conclusions, in works like *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl, 1931/1977), did Husserl conclude that the perspectives of self and other on cultural objects are amalgamated across time, for everyone. The social learning theory is a theoretical idealisation that is self-conscious of its own manner of creation. The point of Beyer's chapter is to focus on epistemic standards of justification in the analysis of social learning. The complicated theoretical stance is born of a desire to be self-reflexive.

Søren Overgaard provides some definitive comments on empathy, the window that monads have on other monads and social encounters. He wants to distinguish between subtly different senses that Husserl identified regarding what it is to understand other people and human social contexts. Overgaard writes that, following Edith Stein (1917/1989), empathy is not emotional contagion or confluence, but rather concerns a felt-sense of connection that includes doing, living, feeling and deciding with others. The full extent of what Husserl wanted theorists to empathise with were not just other people in face-to-face encounters in the social world, but also animals and possibly even foetal life *in utero*. In concluding on what makes the difference between authentic and inauthentic empathy, Overgaard concludes that person A empathises with person B if, and only if, two conditions are met. The first condition is that A does experience in imagination the contents of the other's perspective as it is undergone from his or her point of view, sometimes referred to as "the other remains other" in a different but equivalent wording. The second condition for A empathising B is that A does not confuse A's identity with B's identity, or anyone else's, in a sense requiring further specification. Overgaard concludes that the point of Husserl's critique of Lipps was to prevent the discourse of projection-based accounts of empathy – for instance, like those made by Sigmund Freud.

Two more chapters that are noteworthy contain further comment on the type of science a Husserlian perspective makes. The respective chapters are provided by Mirja Hartimo, "On the Origins of Scientific Objectivity", and Harald Wiltsche, "Models, Science and Intersubjectivity".

Hartimo begins with an account of the cultural life-world of lived experience. Hartimo concludes on "The Origin of Geometry" (Husserl, 1935/1970) as a leading text for understanding intentional history that draws out some key aspects of Husserl's historical perspective. Given that the contents of society are transmitted from generation to generation across the centuries, objectivity across history is exemplified by the intentional analysis of geometry, reading and writing since their inception. Thus, writing is an exemplar for other types of knowledge acquisition. She concludes on the purpose of the transcendental approach to natural science as being that of finding the limits, scope and boundary conditions of theorizing attitudes of approach to regions of essence.

The point is to see that guiding concepts and relationships between them, and their regions, relate to practising science as it is lived by a scientific community, somewhat like Thomas Kuhn's (1962/1996) approach to philosophy of science.

Wiltche focuses on sedimentation and formalization as topics of self-justification, meta-theoretically, in the exemplar of geometry that is passed on across the generations. His point is that the creation of mathematical models in science is the use of exact essences. The work done in creating the models is often unconsidered in philosophical critiques of science. The use of mathematics is intersubjective, in that it includes generations of mathematicians, and that is a condition of the possibility of science. Thus, science is not just intersubjective in that it requires replication by cohorts of other scientists, but in that its mathematical tools are also intersubjective in the work they do.

However, if there were to be just one reason for buying *Husserl's Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*, then it would be to get guidance from Iso Kern, the editor of *Husserliana XIII, XIV and XV* (Husserl, 1973a, 1973b, 1973c). In a 90 page opening chapter, Kern provides guidance on seeing essences as part of eidetic imaginative variation and works to make Husserl's position more cohesive. Kern provides 29 sections on key aspects of empathy and intersubjectivity. What is novel is that Kern stresses that love and sex are part of the evidence of the manifold ways in which human beings are experientially given to each other. Husserl was interested in empirical, biological and developmental approaches such as those termed attachment relationships. This is because, like empathy, they are forms of relating through which the other makes himself or herself known and is given. Kern notes that, in sex, the other's pleasure is a shared mutual goal, and this mutuality makes a unity occur. Sex is a mutual satisfaction and co-achievement of the sexual and attachment drive, although only the case of heterosexuality is considered. Two people in love can give each other negative feedback in a positive manner. Kern comments with authority on multiple aspects of the key points of how mutuality and reciprocity occur in all possible forms of interaction between self and other. In love, the loving self participates in the desire of the other. In a loving family, for instance, the aims of others are shared, so that circular co-constitution exists between people in love, so that shared aims can include positive and negative outcomes. In loving social contexts, people understand each other. Husserl's ambition for his psychology had different scopes and contexts and included analysing actual relationships and social contexts in general, so that maladaptive forms of relating can be studied also.

An important work by Eduard Marbach, a one-time student of Jean Piaget, makes it clear that it is both necessary and acceptable for Husserl to substitute findings

from natural science and natural psychological science, as long as they have been formulated into intentional processes to safeguard their meaning for lived experience in a social whole, a social phenomenon. Marbach's chapter on Husserl's genetic method makes it clear that deconstructive imaginative variation can work on givenness and accept empirical findings from developmental psychology, for instance. The point of the exercise is to create an applied or empirical phenomenology by formulating or interpreting findings from outside of phenomenology, and forge ahead in creating theoretical support for practical psychological work and research. In child development research, eidetic imaginative variation could, for instance, be employed to study the stages of infancy and re-interpret the changes in children's abilities from birth onwards.

David Woodruff Smith provides a concise overview of Husserl's project in one chapter to sum up key aspects of intersubjectivity and its cultural objects. It gives an overview of the all-inclusive nature of Husserl's analyses of social wholes, social phenomena, either as specific real occurrences, or as modelling, mapping or theorizing lived experiences in general. Smith walks through intersubjectivity as it was analysed by Husserl from 1905 to 1935 approximately. He characterises a part of Husserl's conclusions as the importance of indexical semantics or logic of how social wholes are comprised around the actual perspectives of "I", "other I", "we" and "our cultural lifeworld". The object of attention was understood in a style that has many influences. One is the Berlin School of Gestalt psychology.

The basic social situation for Husserl concerned embodied consciousness, which is capable of receiving manifold senses of the same cultural object. The methods of reflection, analysis, and imaginative seeing of possibilities and actualities concerning face-to-face human encounters, differentiate between constant and variable moments of their whole. Through processes of social learning since childhood, people build up stereotypes about categories of things, ideas and people, generally and specifically, so that they come to know how to navigate social and geographical space. Smith spells out those sections in *Ideas II* (Husserl, 1952/1989) that provide an overview of ideal sociality.

The importance of bodily expression as understandable through empathy is stressed. This conclusion is made, but without drawing out the consequences of this type of a conclusion, although Smith makes a brief aside to Edith Stein's PhD thesis in which she explored the dimension of the emotional lives of others. Smith's aside to Stein is helpful, because, in Stein's work, the basic human encounter is expressed in brief. Whilst Stein's manner of writing is different, her short work is roughly equivalent to Husserl's, where a minimal social whole is being idealised. Edith Stein's contribution (1917/1989) is the inclusion of emotions and gendered personality

in gendered social space in relation to the incorporation of the sexed body into phenomenology.

Smith's chapter concludes on how social spaces as extant - and designated in language by the words "I", "you", "this", "she", "he", "they" - and the processes of inter-connection between them as lived experiences of others, are the ideal conclusions that Husserl sought. Husserl's treatment was of actual social wholes (face-to-face social encounters) and also social wholes of any sort; and, separately still, the means of mapping social encounters across a number of his manners of interpretation and his methods. When I write "social wholes", I am referring to how meaning is social with respect to self, other, and anyone, about the cultural objects of which they are aware.

While the perspectives of others, their intentions and motivations, were always what Husserl had wanted his psychology and philosophy to capture, it is the centrality of the expressive human body as nonverbal communication that is basic in it. Bodies continually signal their participation in the cultural world. The phenomenon of empathy is overlooked in the natural attitude; it's just everyday chitchat and social interaction, or watching TV,

or listening to radio, and being immersed in the moment. Only on starting reflection does it become possible for the ego to compare how social wholes differ and share similarities, in their parts and wholes of various sorts.

The type of ideal theoretical or philosophical psychology that Edmund Husserl urged is a developmental social psychology, which needs further qualification in the scope and manner of its theoretical processes. Its style emphasises interdisciplinarity between biological, social and psychological human sciences of ever increasing contextual sizes. Its scope extends towards historical and even archaeological contexts. One aspect of it focuses on the first acquisition of abilities in childhood and thereafter, developmentally. It is a focus on meaning like Gestalt, but in a developmental social learning perspective also, somewhat like Jean Piaget, social constructionism or radical constructivism, but with numerous intricate explanations and qualifications of its scope and nature that defy sound-bite definitions. The scope of Husserl's psychology further includes the analysis of references or associations that go far beyond individual differences and intentional sociology, and extends to the point of an intentional anthropology of home and alien worlds, and into history.

About the Author



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A UKCP registered psychotherapist since 1995, Dr Ian Rory Owen has, since 2001, worked for the Leeds and York Partnerships NHS Foundation Trust where he is currently a Principal Integrative Psychotherapist and provides individual brief therapy for adults. He was previously a Senior Lecturer in Counselling Psychology at the University of Wolverhampton in the UK, where he led a MA/MSc programme in Counselling, and also participated in the teaching of the PhD programme in Counselling Psychology.

In addition to graduating from Regents College, University of London, with a MA in Counselling and Psychotherapy in 1991 and a PhD in 2005, he also holds qualifications in Medical Anthropology and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. He became a Graduate Member of the British Psychological Society in 1999.

Dr Owen is the author of 76 refereed papers and three books on the original writings of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, attachment and phenomenological theory of mind as they apply to the theory and practice of individual psychotherapy. He has drawn on the common influences between Husserl and Heidegger and the work of Aron Gurwitsch, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Alfred Schütz and Paul Ricoeur in producing the intentionality model, a theoretical integration, to support therapy practice.

In his spare time he is interested in African, Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean dance and music and has a number of artistic hobbies.

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