On Habermas's Critique of Husserl

Matheson Russell

Abstract   Over four decades, Habermas has put to paper many critical remarks on Husserl's work as occasion has demanded. These scattered critical engagements nonetheless do add up to a coherent (if contestable) position regarding the project of transcendental phenomenology. This essay provides a comprehensive reconstruction of the arguments Habermas makes and offers a critical assessment of them. With an eye in particular to the theme of intersubjectivity (a theme of fundamental interest to both thinkers), it is argued that Habermas's arguments do indeed show up deficiencies in Husserlian phenomenology and yet that they do not succeed in proving that we must abandon the methods and tasks of phenomenological research. On the contrary, it is argued that phenomenological methods may well be needed in order to investigate certain philosophical questions that Habermas's theory of communication has thus far only partially addressed.

Jürgen Habermas's writings are interlaced with critical interpretations of the history of philosophy, and his constructive theories are habitually justified through an immanent critique of earlier theories and paradigms. The result is a web of critical relationships to past thinkers that is crucial to the internal structure of his theoretical system. In this web, the relation to Edmund Husserl holds an especially central place. Over four decades, Habermas has put to paper many critical remarks on Husserl's work as occasion has demanded.[1] These scattered critical engagements nonetheless do add up to a coherent (if contestable) position regarding the project of transcendental phenomenology. In this essay, I aim to provide a comprehensive

---

[1] The major critical discussions of Husserl appear in Habermas (1972, pp. 301ff.; 1987a, pp. 117ff.; 1991a, pp. 34–48; 1998, pp. 239ff.; and 2001, pp. 23–44).

M. Russell (✉)
Department of Philosophy, University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand
e-mail: m.russell@auckland.ac.nz

reconstruction of the arguments Habermas develops and to offer a critical assessment of the most central of them.

1 Habermas's Appropriation of the Concept of the Lifeworld

The appearance of Habermas's master work, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987a), announced a significant re-appropriation of Husserl's famous concept of the lifeworld. The routes by which Habermas discovered this concept (via Alfred Schutz and others as well as through direct reading of Husserl) have been well documented, and the character and the cogency of the concept as it appears in *The Theory of Communicative Action* and other texts has been much discussed. My modest aim in this first section is simply to bring to the surface the implicit and explicit criticisms of Husserl that underpin the transformations that the concept of the lifeworld undergoes in the course of Habermas's appropriation. This analysis shall set the scene for a more detailed discussion of criticisms regarding Husserl's commitment to the supposedly obsolete philosophy of the subject (Sect. 2) and regarding his account of intersubjectivity (Sect. 3); and this shall be followed by a critical analysis of Habermas's arguments (Sect. 4).

As is well known, the concept of the lifeworld became a major theme in the late research manuscripts of Husserl and also appeared prominently in some of his late publications, most notably in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Hua VI). Commentators have struggled to discern among Husserl's many and various remarks on the topic a single concept of the lifeworld. It has been suggested that we would need to distinguish at least two major senses of the term (Claesges 1972; Landgrebe 1984).

(i) On the one hand, the term appears to designate the world that is always already familiar to each of us and which we experience and interact with directly in our everyday dealings. The lifeworld in this sense is our *Umwelt*, our surrounding world or environment, in which material and social objects are entwined with practical and cultural meanings. The lifeworld is that which is taken for granted and indeed relied upon *as valid* by each of us individually and collectively in our everyday activities. It is structured according to meanings, relations and expectations that are in part the products of history and culture; and, for this reason, it is intelligible to speak of a *plurality* of lifeworlds corresponding to the multiplicity of cultural traditions (Hua VI, p. 150/147). This historically and culturally contingent dimension of the lifeworld is sometimes referred to by Husserl as the "spiritual sphere", "cultural world", or "horizon of civilization" (Hua VI, pp. 317f./272f., 366/354, 369f./358f.).

(ii) On the other hand, the lifeworld is simultaneously characterized by Husserl as the singular, unitary *world-horizon* within which we take ourselves to exist along with everyone else and everything else that exists (Hua VI, Sect. 37). In this sense, the lifeworld is the *universal horizon of experience* which we always already presuppose and which structures in advance our experiences *as* experiences belonging to one, coherent spatio-temporal whole. This horizonal aspect of the lifeworld underwrites our attempts to reach rational consensus with one another

about how things stand in the world; for we tacitly assume in advance that there is a single world-reality about which to agree and to which we each have our own access. This assumption also leads us to envisage the possibility of a universal consensus, transcending all linguistic and cultural particularities. In short, Kant's idea of the world "in the transcendental sense" is, according to Husserl, an assumption written into the very structure of our everyday lived experience; it is not at all an idea that first emerges as an idealization of empirical observations, let alone scientific observations. (How it might nonetheless be philosophically grounded is an ongoing matter of interest to Husserl, however, as we shall discuss.)

The lifeworld, despite complexities and ambiguities in its various definitions, is consistently identified by Husserl as that stratum of lived experience which is prior to and logically independent from those conceptions of the world developed through the application of scientific methods. According to Husserl, the lifeworld furnishes the material from which the abstractive and idealizing procedures of the sciences take their start and upon which scientific theories ultimately depend for their validity. He argues, however, that scientific theory has become detached from the fabric of the lifeworld out of which it has grown, and that the sciences have subsequently come to regard themselves erroneously to be autonomous, free-standing pursuits. The "crisis" of the title of Husserl's famous work, then, consists in the uncoupling of the project of scientific inquiry from the soil of human life. This dangerous development, Husserl claims, has even been institutionalized in philosophy under the banner of "positivism". And now it falls to transcendental phenomenology, as the form of philosophy devoted to rediscovering in the constitutive activities of transcendental subjects the common foundations underpinning both everyday naïve experience and scientific experience, to overcome the alienation that has come to characterize contemporary science and thus to rescue European humanity from its crisis and reconnect it to its own idea of reason.

Many features of this account reappear in Habermas's theory of communicative action. To begin with, Habermas endorses Husserl's discovery of the lifeworld as "the forgotten foundation of meaning" (2001, p. 24; cf. 1998, p. 237, and 1991a, p. 35). Indeed, he boldly endorses Husserl's assertion of the priority of the lifeworld over science, stating that "we misconstrue the constitution of the world of possible experience if we choose the object domain of scientific knowledge as our paradigm and fail to see that science is anchored in the lifeworld and that this lifeworld is the basis of the meaning of scientifically objectified reality" (2001, p. 25; cf. 1998, p. 239). Furthermore, Habermas too seeks to overcome the crises of modernity by giving us back (albeit in a different manner from Husserl) a proper appreciation of the rationality inherent within the world of everyday life, out of which the sciences and other expert discourses have emerged. Finally, like Husserl, Habermas believes that the dynamics of scientific and technological development stand over against the lifeworld in a fashion that can alienate us from life—not only through the errors of positivism and objectivism, but also through instrumentalization and rationalization in the sphere of material reproduction. Even more ominously, for Habermas, these developments threaten to erode the processes by which the lifeworld itself is

sustained and reproduced, thus potentially undermining the very structures of meaning and value that orient and give purpose to our lives.[2]

Habermas nonetheless sees a need to give greater precision to the concept of the lifeworld. First, he follows Schutz in distinguishing between two mobile dimensions of the lifeworld: (i) the horizon (or "situation") of lived experience, and (ii) the non-thematic background of implicit knowledge.

(i) The "situation" is the context that is relevant to an agent at any given time. It is understood by Habermas as "a segment" of the lifeworld that is "thrown into relief by themes and articulated goals and plans of action" (1987a, p. 122f.). The idea of the "situation" refers to the *participant perspective* of the agent. It has a *zero-point* that is ordered to the phenomenological standpoint of the agent, and a *foreground* relative to the interests of the agent and the meaning context of his or her speech and action: "The perceived environment, which is embedded in concentrically arranged spatiotemporal horizons that are not perceived, constitutes the center of the speech situation" (1998, p. 241). In short, then, the horizon or "situation" designates that ever-changing portion of the lifeworld that has become thematic for an agent at any given time.

However, while Husserl and Schutz tend to conceptualize the horizon of experience on the model of a perceptual or practical relation to *things*, Habermas gives priority to the model of a communicative relation to *other agents*. For instance, he asserts that it is the speech situation, encompassing two or more speakers, that is the zero-point around which the context is ordered, and not the body of the subject.[3] But this modification, it seems to me, does not yet mark a break from phenomenology as such, since it appears to be proffered on the grounds that it provides a more faithful description of the fundamental structures of the participant standpoint than the received view of the "anthropologizing phenomenology" (1998, p. 244). That is, Habermas provides an account that looks as though it were meant to be accepted as phenomenologically superior: the first-person standpoint is *in the first instance* that of a speaker and actor *alongside others*, not that of a solipsistic subject.[4] Whether or not this is true, it is the kind of claim that would be considered admissible within the phenomenological method.

(ii) At the same time, the lifeworld is characterized by Habermas as the background of implicitly understood know-hows and know-thats that provide order to our everyday lives. A small portion of this background will always be in play as "topic-dependent contextual knowledge" in speech and action, and could relatively

---

[2] For a more detailed comparison of these two thinkers on the topics of lifeworld and crisis, see Baynes (1990).

[3] "The common speech situation constitutes the center—and not, for instance, my body, as an anthropologizing phenomenology has claimed—in which social spaces (staggered concentrically according to depth and width) and historical times (arranged three-dimensionally) converge prior to any objectivation through measuring operations… I, in my body, and I, as my body, find myself always already occupying an intersubjectively shared world, whereby these collectively inhabited lifeworlds telescope into each other, overlap, and entwine like text and context" (Habermas 1998, p. 244).

[4] How this can be squared with his disavowal of the "philosophy of the subject" is, of course, a difficult question, and one that has been pressed against Habermas (and not only by phenomenologists). For an overview of some of the recent German debates on the validity of Habermas's so-called "paradigm shift", see Dews (1995).

easily become the topic of conversation itself; but the bulk of it, Habermas stresses, is "deep-seated background knowledge" which is largely inaccessible and very difficult to problematize (1998, pp. 240–43; cf. 1987a, pp. 130–33). That is, the vast bulk of our convictions and understandings operate under the surface or, to change metaphors, behind our backs. Speech and action only ever succeed in making a very small fragment of the lifeworld thematic at any one time; the thematic "situation" and its horizonal context contrasts with and is far outweighed by the remaining un-thematic or subterranean dimensions of the lifeworld. Mercifully, when in everyday communication or discourse some matter is raised, leading perhaps to the revision of our beliefs about or understanding of that matter, the massive unthematised bulk of our background knowledge provides continuity and "coverage" against the unsettling effects of having to change one's mind or having to learn to think or act differently (1998, p. 237).

There is, according to Habermas, a vast reservoir of such background knowledge, which includes not only understanding of stock interpretive patterns and received beliefs (*culture*), but also practical orientations to social norms, roles and collectives (*society*), and competencies such as our ability to use language and interact with others (*personality*) (1987a, p. 138; 1998, p. 248).[5] By elaborating the "structural components" of the lifeworld in this way, Habermas understands himself to be correcting a "restriction" of the phenomenological conception of the lifeworld to the dimension of culture (1987a, pp. 138f.).[6] (He, however, has been criticized in turn for overburdening the concept of the lifeworld with an incoherent amalgam of functions (e.g. Dallmayr 1987; Fultner 2001). The question of whether this is true or not cannot be pursued here.) Nonetheless, the divergences between Husserl and Habermas we have noted so far are relatively minor. There are yet more significant points of divergence between the two philosophers to be discussed, and we shall turn to these presently.

2 Overcoming Husserl in the Paradigm Shift from the Philosophy of the Subject to the Pragmatics of Communication

A feature of Husserl's late work which Habermas evidently finds particularly attractive is his recognition that, although we always already find ourselves within a

---

[5] This field of background knowledge is further categorized into (i) the kind of unthematic knowledge which is constitutive for a *particular* lifeworld; and (ii) universal, prereflexive unthematic knowledge, which includes the linguistic competencies required to participate in any lifeworld whatsoever as an individual capable of speech and action (Habermas 1998, pp. 237–239).

[6] "The one-sidedness of the culturalistic concept of the lifeworld becomes clear when we consider that communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding; in coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm, and renew their membership in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is 'tested against the world'; they are at the same time processes of social integration and of socialization… While participants in interaction, turned 'toward the world,' reproduce through their accomplishment of mutual understanding the cultural knowledge upon which they draw, they simultaneously reproduce their memberships in collectivities and their identities" (Habermas 1987a, p. 139).

pre-given lifeworld which has been, as it were, *handed down* to us, we are nonetheless capable of actively constituting and reconstituting our interpretations and descriptions of the world, of forming new rationally-motivated judgments about the world which can in turn affect our beliefs, values and actions. The lifeworld, then, functions as both a *resource* for the accomplishment and coordination of our projects and a *product* of our rational activity (Habermas 1987a, p. 135; 1987b, pp. 342f.; 1998, pp. 239–255). To his credit, although Husserl recognizes our linguistic and cultural inheritance as a possibility condition for thought, he does not fall into the trap of absolutizing the historical sway of language as did the late Heidegger. Thus, according to Habermas, while Heidegger makes several important philosophical contributions—e.g. to the further clarification of the nature of interpretation, the relational structure of the world, the historicity of our existence—Husserl remains superior to his protégé to the extent that he recognizes the productive capacity of reflective subjects to "constitute" the world for themselves, in a way not radically limited by the pre-given resources of language or by the so-called "destiny of being" (1991a, pp. 39f.; cf. also 1987b, pp. 142ff., 152ff.). Nonetheless, Habermas argues that, in order to make this broadly Husserlian *resource-product* model truly fruitful, the entire account needs to be transposed into a different key: translated, that is, from the framework of intentional consciousness into the framework of a pragmatics of language use.[7] In the present context, there are two crucial moves that effect this transposition: (i) the re-description of the meaning structures of the lifeworld in terms of *validity claims*; and (ii) the analysis of validity claims in terms of *the trans-individual structures of language* and *the pragmatics of language use*.[8]

  (i) Already in his Christian Gauss lectures of 1971, Habermas had begun to reinterpret the idea of the lifeworld in such a way as to bring it into line with his nascent theory of communicative action. In particular, he asserts that "The meaning structures that constitute the lifeworld exist only in the manifold of validity claims inherent in them" (2001, p. 29).[9] The lifeworld is interpreted, then, as a manifold of latent validity claims already presumptively endorsed by virtue of being tacitly and un-reflectively adopted in the course of life. It is imagined to be a vast web of *implicit* propositionally-structured judgments, the kind of judgments perfectly susceptible to being taken up and asserted *explicitly* in an utterance.[10]

---

[7] Habermas famously declares this to be a "paradigm shift" from "the philosophy of the subject" to a theory of communication. See Habermas (1987b, pp. 294ff.).

[8] In addition to the discussions below, see also Zahavi (2001, pp. 178ff.), for further detailed analysis of and response to Habermas's critique. Zahavi's analysis is largely compatible with my own, notwithstanding some differences of emphasis.

[9] Husserl had himself spoken of the "validities" that make up the lifeworld (Hua VI, pp. 145f./142f., 317f./272f., *et passim*). It is conceivable that Husserl would have endorsed in principle Habermas's attempts to clarify the sense in which the things we come across in the lifeworld are "valid" for us; however, he would no doubt have wanted to know how this related to his own attempts to do the same.

[10] It is possible that we see here the direct or indirect influence on Habermas of Heidegger's account of understanding, interpretation and assertion in Heidegger (1962, Sect. 31–34). On Heidegger's model, assertion is just the linguistic articulation of what is already understood and interpreted pre-linguistically; assertion reflects the "as" structure of the latter through the "is" of a proposition.

And although these implicit validity claims are for the most part tacitly and naively accepted, all the construals of reality embedded in the lifeworld so understood nevertheless "raise a claim to legitimacy, and this legitimacy can be problematized: It can be confirmed or rejected" (2001, p. 26). In short, in Habermas's re-conceptualization, the meaning structures that make up the lifeworld are described as though they were *virtual speech acts*, raising claims to validity. (I say "virtual speech acts" since the very idea of a validity *claim* relies for its intelligibility on a reference to a possible speech act in which the propositional content is actually asserted or otherwise uttered in some form of illocutionary act. I shall return to this point below.)

Habermas sees this re-conceptualization overcoming a problematic and overly stark dichotomy in Husserl between the non-idealized and pre-predicative structures of the lifeworld and the propositionally-structured, idealized discourses of the sciences. For Habermas, it is vital to see that propositionally-structured validity claims *are already a feature of everyday life*—both expressly in speech acts and implicitly in the fabric of the lifeworld—and that they do not merely belong to the province of the sciences:

> Already in everyday communication we connect with our utterances criticisable validity claims which, as claims, transcend all provincial standards. With this, however, the tension between the contingent limitations and the idealizing presuppositions of the practice of reaching agreement breaks into the lifeworld *itself*… The oppositional interplay between explicit knowledge which is dependent upon idealizations and the risk-absorbing background knowledge takes place not only, as Husserl thought, in the competition between empirical-scientific expert knowledge and pre-theoretical certainties. Rather, the lifeworld as background and horizon remains based on an everyday practice whose communicative presuppositions are already dependent upon idealizations. (1991a, pp. 42f.; cf. 1998, p. 240)

What is at stake here is this: If it were the case that the counterfactual idealizations associated with making and testing validity claims were absent from the lifeworld as such, then the lifeworld would be incapable of rationalization within itself. Rationality would be the exclusive possession of the abstractive, idealizing, mathematizing sciences; and, by contrast, the "certainties" of the lifeworld would be relegated to the status of unassailable and dogmatic givens—in short, irrationalities.

Of course, for Husserl there is a third way: the way of *phenomenological* critique, which opens up both the lifeworld and the sciences to rational critique. But Habermas argues that critique is *already* a possibility within the lifeworld thanks to the idealizations that underpin ordinary communication and discourse. If he is correct, then it shows that lifeworld critique does not require an extramundane position outside the everyday as a condition of its possibility, as Husserl thought. On the contrary, it is in fact futile to attempt a critique of the lifeworld from a transcendental point of view, since the criticism of validity claims is only ever undertaken using the resources of the lifeworld and can only hope to achieve legitimacy for its results by participating in the mundane sphere of intersubjective

discourse.[11] Thus, all transcendental modes of thought must be "de-transcenden-talized" if their insights and contributions are to establish their legitimacy.

This continues a polemic against Husserl and transcendental philosophy which had already been developed in some detail in the 1965 lecture, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective", published as an appendix to *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Habermas 1972, pp. 301–17). The *Crisis of the European Sciences*, Habermas notes in that lecture, offers a critique of European science as not only disconnected from the lifeworld but also insufficiently theoretical insofar as they are insufficiently *reflective*. Consequently, Husserl's prescription for overcoming the "crisis" involves not only a critique of the sciences' theoretical disconnection from practice, but also a project of providing an ultimate grounding for the sciences in a *philosophy of origins*—i.e. the theory of knowledge constitution provided by transcendental phenomenology.[12] In this way, Husserl installs philosophy once again in its traditional role as the provider of ultimate foundations. But this "traditional" or "strong concept of theory", as Habermas calls it (1972, pp. 301ff.; cf. also 1992, p. 33, and 2002, pp. 46–48), risks further alienating *knowledge* from its roots in *human interests*. It traces scientific objectification to its roots in the transcendental subject, but does not trace the achievements of the ostensibly "transcendental" subject to their roots in pre-scientific, mundane practices.[13] The false consciousness of the sciences is exposed, but at the price of a new false consciousness: that of a transcendental subjectivism. The project of transcendental reflection, therefore, must be superseded. In the 1965 lecture, the proposed successor to transcendental reflection is a Marx-inspired model of critical self-reflection, motivated by an emancipatory cognitive interest (1972, pp. 310ff.); in his mature work, the proper successor to transcendental philosophy is recast as the "procedure of rationally reconstructing the intuitive pretheoretical knowledge of competently speaking, acting, and judging subjects" (1992, p. 38; cf. 1998, pp. 29ff., and 1973, p. 22).[14] In either case, the extramundane standpoint of the transcendental ego is repudiated.

(ii) If the meaning structures of the lifeworld are implicit validity claims, and validity claims are virtual speech acts, then the lifeworld in essence can only be understood in terms of the practices of language use, i.e. the pragmatics of

---

[11] The critique of science, on the other hand, does still require a philosophical standpoint, according to Habermas (cf. 1991a, pp. 43–48). Nevertheless, even then such a standpoint is not to be understood as transcendental; rather, it consists in the ability to contribute to a fallibilistic reconstruction of the conditions of rationality alongside other relevant theoretical and empirical disciplines. That is, the philosophical standpoint is to be *among* the differentiated discourses of the rationalized modern world rather than occupying the position of ultimate arbiter. See Habermas (1990).

[12] This line of argumentation is most clearly seen in Husserl's Vienna Lecture of 1935, published as Abhandlung III in Hua VI, pp. 314–48/269–99.

[13] As this makes clear, practices of language use play the role of a transcendental ground according to Habermas. And yet, he does not claim, as Karl-Otto Apel does, that the intersubjective field now occupies precisely the position previously held by the transcendental subject. Habermas denies, in particular, that the intersubjectively instituted practices of argumentation could themselves exhibit the fully self-grounding relation that would be necessary to fulfill the traditional criteria of an "ultimate foundation".

[14] Regarding this apparent revival of disinterested, transcendentally-oriented theory in Habermas (a return to Kant from Marx, as it were), see McCarthy (1978, p. 102).

communication. This conclusion is rendered all the more plausible to Habermas by the lessons he takes from the late Wittgenstein. While transcendental phenomenology had attempted to account for the phenomenon of "meaning" by reference to intentional acts of consciousness, Wittgenstein ostensibly shows that meaning must be interpreted by reference to the rule-governed, public language games of communication and discourse (Habermas 1988, Chap. 7; 2001, Chap. 3; cf. also 1987b, pp. 167ff., and 1998, p. 280). Thus, the theory of communication "regards the surface structure of the lifeworld as a system of symbolic forms instead of a stream of intentional experiences" (2001, p. 35). The entire field of meaning that falls under the category of "the lifeworld" is said to be always already structured according to this system of *socially instituted* and *publically intelligible* symbolic forms. If we find ourselves in a lifeworld, this is only possible because we have been socialized into these symbolic forms and the language games in which they inhere; if we are able to rationally revise our understanding of the world, or convince others to think or act differently on the basis of reasons, it is only because we are competent to speak and act according to the *rules of language use*. Hence, "the transcendental rules in accordance with which lifeworlds are structured now become graspable through linguistic analysis in the rules of communication processes" (1988, p. 117).[15] In this second step, then, the re-description of the lifeworld in terms of validity claims is coupled with a *linguistic turn* which explains sense, reference and validity via the categories of language, grammar and rules of language use.

From this linguistic-pragmatic vantage point, Habermas believes it is possible to show the inadequacies of Husserl's conception of truth. On Husserl's model of intentional consciousness, verification is understood by reference to a "fulfilling" experience of evidence: a presentative or intuitive act in which the matter at hand is experienced as "itself given" in the way anticipated by a propositional truth-claim.[16] But this model, Habermas argues, fails to do justice to everyday acts of verification. For instance, it struggles to account for the verification of arithmetic judgments (e.g. $4 + 6 = 10$). Husserl is forced to invent a new class of objects, i.e. "categorial objects", whose intuitive grasping would provide the necessary evidence for the truth of such judgments. But before we resort to positing mysterious acts of categorial intuition, Habermas advises, we should first attend to the normative role played by counting practices: the truth of the proposition "$4 + 6 = 10$" is verified by recourse to the standard procedure of counting.

---

[15] Cf. "If we now relinquish the basic concepts of the philosophy of consciousness in which Husserl dealt with the problem of the lifeworld, we can think of the lifeworld as represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns. Then the idea of a 'context of relevance' that connects the elements of the situation with one another, and the situation with the lifeworld, need no longer be explained in the framework of a phenomenology and psychology of perception. Relevance structures can be conceived instead in interconnections of meaning holding between a given utterance, the immediate context, and its connotative horizon of meanings. Contexts of relevance are based on *grammatically regulated* relations among the elements of a *linguistically organized* stock of knowledge" (Habermas 1987a, p. 124. Emphasis in original).

[16] "The entire life process must be reducible to the performance of acts by a productive subjectivity, which articulates itself in meaning structures of possible objects of intuitive experience" (Habermas 2001, p. 31).

Husserl's problem is solved by seeing that "categorial objects" are in fact "symbolic constructs generated in accordance with rules", and that they are valid in so far as they follow the appropriate rules (2001, p. 33). What counts in the procedure of verification, then, is not the intuitive presence of some object, but the intuitive knowledge of practical rules. The same is true, Habermas argues, even of perceptual judgments. To the extent that valid perceptual judgments require the correct application of categories and forms, they too rely on rule-elements that go beyond what is actually "given" to the senses. And, as such, the verification of such judgments turns on the correct use of language, which refers to the intersubjectively accepted norms of language use, and not merely to private experiences (2001, p. 33). He concludes:

> If, however, there is no recourse to an ultimate, underlying foundation of intuitive self-givenness, and if, as Peirce convincingly demonstrated long ago, we must abandon the concept of truth as evidence, then the claims to validity implicit in intentional experiences cannot be redeemed intuitively, but only discursively. It is not intuitions but arguments that can lead us to acknowledge or reject the legitimacy of claims to validity that have been problematized. (2001, p. 34)[17]

In this way, Habermas believes that he has neutralized the complex questions surrounding *intentional consciousness*, i.e. questions concerning how the transcendental subject achieves a relation to an object construed in such and such a fashion: the assumption that we must investigate the activity of a meaning-constituting consciousness in order to account for the generation of the meaning structures and "positings" that make up the lifeworld is placed in doubt by the recognition of the role that the subject-independent (or rather, intersubjective) field of language and the rules of language use play in making possible meaningfully structured experiences of the world; similarly, the assumption that we must investigate the activity of an object-intuiting consciousness in order to account for the verification of the validity claims that make up the lifeworld is placed in doubt by the recognition of the role that intersubjective practices of justification play in the redemption of validity claims.[18]

In his insistence upon the foundational role played by language and culture in the achievements of reason, it could be argued that Habermas is merely pushing towards conclusions that Husserl himself may have became more willing to countenance towards the end of his life. For instance, in "The Origin of Geometry" Husserl seems to betray a recognition that the world cannot be conceived as a *sui generis* product of a transcendental subjectivity, but must instead be conceived as a system of meanings embedded within language and culture—institutions which have an independent life over against any particular ego (however much they need

---

[17] It is important to note, however, that Habermas has since modified his view and recognized a certain irreducibility of phenomenal evidence in the justification of *epistemic* validity claims; see Habermas (2003, pp. 237–275).

[18] These lines of argument are also found in Karl-Otto Apel's work. For critical discussions of Apel, which in several respects parallel those presented here, see Crowell (1999, pp. 37–41), and Zahavi (2001, pp. 167ff.).

to be "reanimated" by the subject) (Hua VI, pp. 365–86/353–78). Even so, such concessions would appear to render problematic the foundation stone of Husserlian phenomenology, namely the primacy and originality of the transcendental ego to whom the entire world of experience can be traced back as a constitutive accomplishment.

In the essay "Edmund Husserl über Lebenswelt, Philosophie, und Wissenschaft" (1991a), Habermas drives home this point. If the transcendental subject must be responsible for the constitution of all the objects that it relates to, he argues, then it must be responsible for the constitution of its own body, its social personality, its relationships to other people, and even its own culture and history. But this seems to lead to absurdities:

> … the question imposes itself of how the finitude of the *ego cogito*, which in each case comes across itself in its lifeworld, can be reconciled with the sovereignty of a primal ego who constitutes this lifeworld as a whole. This "subjectivity that is ultimately the one acting and executing [the acts of constitution]" is supposed to have generated *in advance* the very sense of everything within which the associated mundane ego comes across itself as a physically embodied, individual subject who is socialized with others. But then, this subjectivity must be stripped of all the attributes of finitude that are due to the internal relationship to the particular ego situated in the lifeworld. The problem is obvious: even a transcendental subject cannot occupy both at the same time – the extramundane position of a sovereign who constitutes the world, and the horizon-establishing internal perspective of an entity before one's eyes in the world, already constituted. (1991a, p. 38)

As we have seen, Habermas's solution to the problem of the dichotomy of transcendental and empirical ego is to "de-transcendentalize" the accomplishments of the "constituting" ego and to acknowledge their dependence upon the intersubjective lifeworld. The consciousness that we have of worldly states of affairs is a function not of our own *sui generis* constitutive feats but rather of the quasi-autonomous rules of the language games that we learn and the talk we participate in. It presupposes, in other words, the language and culture that is reproduced within a society. But if so, then language, culture and sociality cannot feasibly be excised from the sphere of consciousness to leave some "pure" transcendental ego; and it becomes untenable to assert the metaphysical and epistemological primacy of the transcendental ego, as Husserl's transcendental phenomenology appears to do.[19]

But, as is well known, the role of *intersubjectivity* in our constitution of objects was one of the many lines of thought pursued by the late Husserl. Is it possible, then, that Husserl's famous intersubjective turn might provide a rejoinder to Habermas's criticism? As Habermas himself admits (2001, p. 36), a confrontation with Husserl's work on intersubjectivity thus becomes crucial to establishing the legitimacy and

---

[19] There are commonalities between Habermas's critique at this point and the "deconstructive" reading of Husserl offered by Derrida (1973). Indeed, we find Habermas almost completely endorsing Derrida's critique of Husserl in Habermas (1987b, Lecture VII).

rigor of Habermas's proposed paradigm shift. In the next section we shall examine this confrontation.

3 The Problem of Intersubjectivity: the Foundation of Social Relations

In the Christian Gauss lectures, Habermas praises Husserl for making three decisive advances beyond the transcendental philosophy of Kant (2001, pp. 23–26). The first we have already encountered—namely, the discovery of the lifeworld, which represents a more basic structure of temporality and space, and a more basic relation to the world, than the disengaged, observational, object-oriented subjectivity of Kant's theoretical philosophy. The second decisive advance is the willingness to deal descriptively with the full array of objects "given" to consciousness, overcoming Kant's restricted conception of the objects of possible experience. The third decisive advance, which is of particular relevance here, is the recognition that the transcendental subject exists in *the plural*:

> Husserl assumes a multiplicity of transcendental egos who constitute the social lifeworld in relation to one another despite the cognitive priority of each one's own subjectivity. By contrast, Kant (at least in his theoretical philosophy) strictly distinguishes between a plurality of empirical egos and a singular transcendental consciousness in general. Thus the problem of the possible transcendental community of subjects who first monadically produce their world cannot even arise for him. (2001, p. 26)

The advantage of this innovation for a social theory is obvious: it carves out a space for the *intersubjective* or *social world* over against the *objective world* (2001, p. 37).[20] But, as mentioned in the above quotation, it also raises the problem of "the possible transcendental community of subjects". This encompasses both the problem of how the ego experiences the alter ego *as* another ego, and the problem of how the conscious life of the egos within the community of egos is coordinated so as to constitute a common world. In numerous places, Habermas asserts that Husserl's attempt to solve both of these problems is a failure.[21] In only one place—i.e. the Christian Gauss lectures—is an attempt made to demonstrate this claim through a critical examination of Husserl's work.[22]

In the second lecture, Habermas reconstructs Husserl's account of intersubjectivity in the Fifth *Cartesian Meditation* in two steps (2001, pp. 38–9). (a) The first step establishes *the experience of the other*. On the basis of my originary experience

---

[20] For a discussion of Habermas's critique of Husserlian phenomenology from the perspective of the methodological debates in sociology, see McCarthy (1978, pp. 157–62); also Harrington (2001, pp. 82–108).

[21] Habermas and Luhmann (1971, p. 177); Habermas (1987a, pp. 129f.; 1987b, p. 150; 1991b, p. 250; 1992, p. 42 and 161; 2003, p. 193). As well as occasionally referring to his own analysis in Habermas (2001, Chap. 2), in these places Habermas also appeals to the following works to support his claim: Theunissen (1984, Chaps. 4 and 6); Schutz (1970); Carr (1973); Hutcheson (1980); and, more recently, Honneth (1995).

[22] Even then, the discussion of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity is limited to a discussion of Hua I.

of my own body, I perceive the body of another as similar to my own. In an analogizing apperception, the other body is recognized as a *lived* body, which like mine is the body of a *subject* who possesses an inner life and who governs in that body. This "appresentation" of another conscious life introduces the first genuinely "foreign object" into my primordial world. (b) The second step establishes *the community of egos*. The appresentation of the other gives rise to the appresentation of the other's inner life, i.e. it gives rise to the anticipation of the constitutive activity of the other who constitutes the world as it would appear were I there. Thus a horizon of *multiple* world perspectives is established, each of which is interchangeable with my own and thus communicable. And, at the same stroke, a community of transcendental egos is established, correlative to whom the objective world is given as *the world for everyone*.

But, at each of these two steps, Habermas claims, Husserl *begs the question of intersubjectivity*. He argues as follows:

(a) How is the body of the other supposed to be identified *as* an alter ego? What motivates and justifies the "apperceptive transfer of sense"? Husserl offers two explanations. The first appeals to the pairing of similar items: my body and the body over there. But my *subjective* experience cannot provide the basis for an analogizing transfer, since it is dissimilar to the perceived body. (This, it should be said straight away, is among the weakest of Habermas's arguments. Husserl clearly intends the analogy to obtain between the body of the other and my body *not as it is internally experienced but as an external object for me*, i.e. as an "animate organism"; Hua I, pp. 140f./110f.)[23] In any case, Husserl supplements this with a second explanation: the harmonious behaviour of the other validates the presumptive transfer of sense. But the "harmonious behavior" in view here must be more than the *regularity* demonstrated by a material object in perception; rather, the behaviour of the other must be "harmonious" in the sense of conforming to identifiable meaningful or rule-following behaviours. Yet this presupposes the institution of the rules of a symbolic order; it presupposes an intersubjective order of what "counts as" an act of one type or another. Moreover, Husserl's account of the experience of the other presupposes on the part of the primal ego the ability to *recognize* the other's behavior as conforming to that intersubjective order. "Although I am to understand the movements of another body as *gestures* by apprehending them in an analogizing manner, I can do so only if intersubjective knowledge of what the signs are and of the lexicon already exist" (2001, p. 40). That is, Husserl surreptitiously ascribes to the primal ego capacities that could only be the result of having been socialized into a normative order of significant actions. Hence, the question of intersubjectivity is begged.

Habermas, it seems to me, is correct that, in order to form the requisite confirmation of the pairing, i.e. of the assumption that the other is also a *transcendental subject*, the kind of "harmonious behavior" observed in the body of the other must be such that it exhibits the rule-governed character of gesture or symbolic action. What he must mean by "harmonious" is "intentional" (in the

---

[23] Habermas evidently lifts this particular argument without much critical reflection from Schutz (1970, pp. 62–64).

ordinary action-theoretic sense of the term, not in the technical phenomenological sense). And while it is true that Husserl explicitly denies that the body of the other "indicates" the alter ego, it must nonetheless be the case that the bodily action of the other indicates the *intention* of the alter ego, since *qua* action the intentional act of the other consists precisely in its bodily performance and not in some inaccessible mental intention (cf. Hua I, p. 149/120).[24] There is, then, a significant lacuna in Husserl's account. He too quickly passes over the phenomenology of intentional action (again, in the ordinary action-theoretic sense). He simply leaps from the perception of the other as a discrete physical body to the perception of the other's behaviour under descriptions of intentionality, without realizing the chasm he is crossing. I shall say more about this below, but before I do, let us turn to Habermas's criticisms of the second step in Husserl's argument.

(b) Habermas readily admits that Husserl is onto something important when he observes that the community of egos constitutes a common world through the "mutual intertwining of perspectives" (2001, p. 41). To conceive of the world as a common world requires the capacity to take the position of the other, and indeed, in principle, to take the position of all others. "In this reciprocity," Habermas writes, "all participants apprehend themselves, others, and nature simultaneously from their own standpoint and from the standpoint of every other possible subject. In this way, the subjects constitute an objective world in common" (2001, p. 41). In this communalizing procedure, furthermore, the transcendental ego is supposed to undergo an "objectivating equalization" with all others and to rid itself of any solipsistic illusions (Hua I, p. 158/129).

The way in which Husserl seeks to account for this reciprocity and equalization, however, is deeply problematic, according to Habermas. Husserl tries to establish the mutuality between myself and the other by invoking the interchangeability of the "here" of my bodily-centred experience and the "there" of the other's bodily-centred experience. I commune with the other by apperceiving their lived experience *as if I were "there"*. And yet, even before the advent of the other, "I virtually occupy all possible locations" (Habermas 2001, p. 42). If I did not, then I would not be able to apperceive the world experience of the other at all, which is the first move in part (b) of Husserl's argument. But if recognizing the existence of another localized perspective on the world does not add anything that is not already available in principle to my solipsisitic horizon of possible experience, then—contrary to Husserl's claims—apperceptively occupying the position of the other cannot be what challenges the primacy and self-sufficiency of *my own* egoistic consciousness of the world, and it cannot be what establishes the alter ego as genuinely other-than-me.

What's more, Husserl's model of intersubjectivity—an intersubjectivity of interchangeable spatial perspectives—gives no reason to think that there could be meaningful conflict between the respective "standpoints" of two or more subjects, since all possible standpoints are compatible a priori as possible experiences within the one spatial horizon of the objective world. All the existence of a plurality of

---

[24] Also: "What I actually see is not a sign and not a mere analogue, a depiction in any natural sense of the word; on the contrary, it is someone else" (Hua I, p. 153/124).

egos contributes, then, is the chance to aggregate standpoints and simultaneous evidential experiences, all of which are known to be compatible with each other in advance. But there is no *essential* dependency upon the alter ego or the plurality of egos; any "check" that the other provides on my perceptions adds nothing that my own check could not already provide. In short, Husserl's model allows for a community of spatial perspectives distributed between a plurality of egos, but all of these other ego-experiences are assimilated to the totality of spatial perspectives that the original ego already anticipates in advance and virtually occupies. For this reason, Habermas claims that Husserl ultimately does not allow for a transcendental community at all, but only a community in an absurd sense: a community "for me" (2001, p. 42).

> There is a further problem here, since Husserl's egoistic starting point

> excludes in principle the possibility that the others constituted by and for me could have exactly the same relation to me that I have to them as my intentional objects. Rather, in the phenomenological attitude, I am method-ologically forced to assert myself as the primary and foundational original ego against all other egos that guarantee the intersubjectivity of my world. (2001, p. 43)

The phenomenological priority of the transcendental subject always leaves the meditating ego in a privileged position, and hence in an *asymmetric* relation to the other (2001, p. 41). Thus, not only is the spatial model of communalization redundant, it also leaves Husserl unable to properly account for the *equalization* or *mutuality* of standpoints in the community of egos. For these reasons, Habermas concludes that Husserl's model cannot offer any way to account for the "generation of intersubjectively communalized experience" (2001, p. 42).

By contrast, according to Habermas, what makes possible the common world is not the ability to virtually occupy the standpoint of the other—i.e. the accumulation of "*spatial perspectives*". Rather, it is made possible by the capacity to understand the *validity claims* raised by others—i.e. the exchange of "*world perspectives*" (2001, p. 42). I am able to understand your validity claim—you, "there"—and you mine—me, "here". And only on the basis of such *mutual understanding* are we able to achieve *mutual agreements*, which generate social solidarities ("we") as well as a set of common beliefs about the world. Thus: "*Physical* space is replaced by *social* space" (2001, p. 42).

In such a framework, it also becomes intelligible for the first time how there might be conflict between the plurality of (normal) egos. It is only with respect to the intersubjectivity established at the level of social space, i.e. a space of contestable validity claims, that the possibility of meaningful conflict between subjects arises—the kind of conflict that would make necessary acts of understand and discourse. Social interaction of this kind has nothing to do with the possibility of virtually occupying each other's spatial perspectives; it has to do rather with the possession of the cognitive and linguistic competencies required for understanding an utterance and for taking a yes/no position with respect to its validity claims. Moreover, in raising validity claims we are able to relate to ourselves, others and the world in exactly the same way as others—namely, to the extent that we achieve

consensus regarding propositional claims. As such, it becomes comprehensible how we can have (and fail to have) genuine mutuality in our conception of the world and coordination in our purposive action in the world.

The basic element lacking from Husserl's theory, then, is this: "Experience that is intersubjectively communalized in the strict sense cannot be conceived without *the concept of meaning* that is communicated and shared by different subjects" (2001, p. 43; emphasis added). Intersubjectivity rests on communication, and communication rests upon structures of language and language use that are not the creation of a solitary subject. In order to account for intersubjectivity, then, we need to account for the symbolic order itself as well as the practices of communication. To construct such an account, as we have seen, Habermas draws on Wittgenstein, who proposed the model of rule following ("rule"). He also draws heavily on G. H. Mead, who proposed the model of taking over the expectations of others ("role"). The common feature of such concepts as "rule" and "role", however, is that they "must be defined from the outset in terms of a relation between subjects. They circumvent the notion of anything like a private consciousness that only subsequently enters into contact with another conscious being" (2001, p. 43). Intersubjective relations and the use of symbolic expressions are co-originary; each presupposes the other. Habermas thus holds that we must take the communicative relation between subjects as primitive and give up trying to derive it from a monadic starting point.

4 From Habermas to Mead and Back to the Phenomenological Tradition

Habermas's distinction between spatial perspectives and world perspectives is a trenchant one. Indeed, he is right that without this distinction it would be impossible to render intelligible the necessity for a concrete intersubjectivity of communication or to articulate its possibility conditions. And he is undoubtably right that a linguistically mediated subjectivity is the basis for a genuine intersubjectivity.

Nonetheless, the genesis of a normatively governed space of meaning itself needs to be explained. How subjects come to be initiated into a symbolically mediated world must also be explained and not simply posited. Positing "rules" or "roles" as an inscrutable ground will not do. Habermas himself sees this, and he ultimately appeals to Mead's account of the emergence of social consciousness and the significant symbol to do this work (1987a, pp. 3ff; 1992, pp. 171ff.). Here he admits a *pre-linguistic* level of analysis at the origins of symbolic systems, as one is of course forced to do once one faces the ontogenetic and phylogenetic questions squarely (1992, p. 27 n.18, pp. 177ff.). It is significant, moreover, that Mead's own account—which begins with the rudimentary consciousness of an embodied organism in its environment—itself offers a quasi-phenomenological explanation, albeit an explanation that only inconsistently occupies a phenomenological attitude, as I shall explain below. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that an account of the genesis of significant symbols must include an explanation of the *awareness* of significant objects from the perspective of participants in social interaction, and that necessitates some kind of phenomenology of conscious life. After all, as Habermas

himself never ceases to emphasize, lifeworld interactions can only be made sense of from the *participant perspective*; that is, the participant perspective is essential to an account of social interaction qua communicative action. What's more—again as Habermas himself emphasizes—the symbolic system cannot be properly understood in abstraction from the *agents* who hold it as normative for their interactions and who produce and reproduce it. Similarly, the genesis of the communicative capacities of subjects from a *participant perspective* is just as essential to an account of communicative action as an account of the development of the abstract structures of language and language use themselves from an observer perspective.[25] And, for this reason, it is reasonable to assume that at least some components of the genealogical account Habermas seeks will fall under the rubric of a phenomenological philosophy, even if Husserl himself failed to fully work through these issues.[26]

Allow me to just very briefly sketch where I see the two accounts dovetailing. For Husserl (and others, such as Merleau-Ponty), self-consciousness in the ordinary sense is contingent upon the identification of the subjective body of conscious experience with the objective body experienced via the senses in the world. Self-consciousness involves the harmonization of this two-sidedness of embodied life—at once toucher and touched, seer and seen, etc. As Zahavi (2001, pp. 149–66) has shown, in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty the *difference* between my subjective experience and my objective experience of myself is the gap into which the other's experience of myself can be inserted: the condition for the possibility of my self-consciousness (my worldly body) is *at the same time* the condition for the possibility of the other's consciousness of me (the worldly body renders me encounterable in the world to myself and to others). In other words, this "gap" or "difference" between the two sides of my embodied life is the condition for the possibility of intersubjectivity, since it is the gap in which my body comes to function as the first "public object" or "common object" for myself together with others. But the latter is the condition for the possibility not just of a spatial-perspectival intersubjectivity, but also for the emergence of the symbolically mediated intersubjectivity Habermas seeks to privilege. How this is so is seen if we take a closer look at Mead's account of the origin of the significant symbol.

At the basis of Mead's account is the first significant act: the gesture. The gesture is established pre-linguistically as a sign through a complex perceptual act in which a stimulus is associated with a set response; the stimulus comes to stand for the response, even in the absence of the response, insofar as it evokes an anticipation of the response. Now, the crucial point for Mead is that this structure must be shared by multiple agents for it to be established and to function as a sign. And this is only possible because a gesture is able to function simultaneously as a stimulus to myself

---

[25] This is a point Habermas stresses heavily in his confrontation with Luhmann's systems theory (e.g. 1987b, pp. 368ff.), and also in his critique of Charles Taylor (1991b, pp. 215–220). Strangely enough, he nonetheless does not seem to think of this as committing himself to a philosophy of the *subject*.

[26] A similar argument is made at greater length by Zahavi (2001, pp. 188ff.); however, Zahavi is more confident than I am that the resources needed to address the deficiencies in the linguistic-pragmatic approach of Habermas and Apel can be found in Husserl's own work.

and others. So, for instance, my cry can call out a flight response in another and in myself at the same time (cf. Mead 1964).

Now what are the cognitive conditions for the possibility of these basic experiences? (i) All of this is conditioned by the individual's capacity to perceive *the other's act* (e.g. fleeing, growling) in an associative consciousness that couples a stimulus with a response—a complex perceptual act involving temporal phases and associations between these phases—and only together do these components comprise a gesture or significant symbol. (ii) What's more, the complex objects of perception must also be associatively coupled with a response *in myself*. And this association is predicated upon my ability to stimulate myself: I must be able to be an object for myself. For instance, I can hear my own cry and can therefore elicit in myself a response to it (at the same time that I perceive its effect on others). In other words, the requisite association—between the stimulus and response in both self and other—presupposes the very openness of the self to itself-as-other that Husserl has explored in his phenomenology of the embodied subject.

Even the consciousness of elementary significant symbols, then, presupposes the capacity to experience another as a distinct and complex temporal object and the ability to *pair* them with oneself. What's more, the subject must be able to do this habitually before it can be understood to have acquired a rule. In which case, rule following looks far from functioning as an inscrutable ground of subjectivity. It requires a phenomenology of embodiment and a phenomenology of the perception of the other (both of which are interlinked, as we have seen) in order to explicate its possibility conditions. A phenomenology of the body is necessary to show that subjectivity is not closed off within itself. But it shows, at the same time, that the philosophy of the subject is not and never was the barrier to a theory of communication that Habermas takes it to be.

Habermas, furthermore, forgets or ignores what the experience of a plurality of egos is meant to achieve in Husserl's philosophical program: it is supposed to found the categories of *objectivity*, *reality* and *transcendence*.[27] Husserl argues that the phenomenological *inaccessibility* to me of the other's consciousness—the very feature which necessitates that the conscious life of the other be *appresented* (since in principle it cannot be *presented*)—establishes the idea of a *transcendent* other (Hua I, Sect. 48). "Transcendent", in turn, is a sense that attaches to the objects of the other's experience and hence to the world.[28] In this way, Husserl sees the plurality of subjects playing a fundamental role in phenomenologically grounding *the transcendence of the world*. Unfortunately, this entire part of Husserl's account is simply overlooked by Habermas.

---

[27] For a detailed examination of the way in which Husserl's theory of transcendental intersubjectivity is supposed to found these categories, see Zahavi (2001, pp. 1–122).

[28] "[T]he sphere of my transcendental ego's *primordial ownness*, must contain the *motivational foundation* for the constitution of those *transcendencies* that are *genuine*, that go beyond it, and originate first of all as 'others' (other psychophysical beings and other transcendental egos), the transcendencies that, thus mediated, make possible the constitution of an Objective world in the everyday sense: *a world of the 'non-Ego'*, of what is other than my Ego's own. All Objectivity, in this sense, is related back constitutionally to the *first affair that is other than my Ego's own*, the other-than-my-Ego's-own in the form, someone 'else'—that is to say: the non-Ego in the form, 'another Ego'" (Hua XVII, p. 248/241).

Similarly, Husserl's analysis of the apperception of the other's conscious life, a consciousness of the world that is simultaneous with my own, is meant to spell out a condition for the possibility of grounding the idea of the world—in this case, the idea of an *objective reality*. Specifically, Husserl argues that, by virtue of our experience of each other and of ourselves as incarnate subjects, we are provided with the means to situate ourselves within a common objective *spatio-temporal* world (Hua I, pp. 154–56/126–28). In this way, Husserl sees the plurality of subjects playing a fundamental role in phenomenologically grounding *the general positing of the world-horizon*, which is the metaphysical horizon of all mundane speech and action; and *this* is what makes inescapable the idealization of a unitary horizon of sense within the sphere of validity claims insofar as these are about *the* objective world.

In the first instance, then, Husserl's task is not to explain the procedures whereby we communalize our viewpoints, but instead to trace the phenomenological origins of the very idea of the transcendent other and of the transcendent, objective and real world. Such transcendental categories are simply *presupposed* by the communicative and discursive activities of Habermas's language users.[29] His theory is explanatory when it comes to the reception and production of the lifeworld in the *first sense* outlined in Sect. I, but not when it comes to the lifeworld in the *second sense*. Habermas seems content to observe that structures such as the idea of the objective world come to us with a transcendental force, and then to offer a descriptive "reconstruction" of these transcendental "ideas" and "idealizations" (most recently, Habermas 2003, pp. 83–130). But this seems an arbitrary place to interrupt the line of philosophical inquiry. Recourse to something like Husserl's transcendental investigations may, by contrast, furnish the means to ground those very "idealizations" of language use that Habermas finds himself having merely to posit as givens.

But if these observations are correct, then there is no essential incompatibility between Husserl's attempts to explore the phenomenological foundations of intersubjectivity and Habermas's investigations of the quasi-transcendental structures of language use. These two lines of inquiry investigate two *complementary* sets of transcendental structures of being in the lifeworld.

5 Conclusion

So has Habermas shown the necessity of abandoning the monological point of departure and instead starting from an intersubjective and communicative starting point? He would have, if subjectivity were conceived as a solipsistic sphere closed off to genuine otherness or if subjectivity were irrelevant for a theory of

---

[29] "Reaching understanding cannot function unless the participants refer to a single objective world, thereby stabilizing the intersubjectively shared public space with which everything that is merely subjective can be contrasted. This supposition of an objective world that is independent of our descriptions fulfills a functional requirement of our processes of cooperation and communication. Without this supposition, everyday practices, which rest on the (in a certain sense) Platonic distinction between believing and knowing unreservedly, would come apart at the seams" (Habermas 1998, p. 359).

communication. But neither of these alternatives is the case. In fact, as Husserl's phenomenology shows, the subject is precisely not closed off to the other. The embodied self is not a *private*, self-enclosed world unto itself but discovers itself (even pre-linguistically) as a *public* being, with a face to the world; and this, as Husserl shows even in his *Cartesian Meditations*, is a condition for the possibility of intersubjective relationships. I have argued, furthermore, that such structures are also presupposed by Mead's theory of significant symbols, the theory upon which Habermas relies. It is hard to see how the normative and pragmatic distinctions between "rules" and "roles" in communication could be established without some prior, pre-linguistic *experience of difference* between self, other and world; and, again, it is precisely these most basic differentiations that Husserl thinks are established and confirmed at a pre-linguistic perceptual level in the ways he describes.

A normative order in which we *recognize* subjects as communication partners, both distinct from each other and yet related through their communication, may well be embedded in our language use, e.g. through the deictic system of personal pronouns. But an analysis of this symbolic order ultimately stands as a complement to the Husserlian project and does not at all possess the capacity to do away with it. Not only *can* one develop a theory of intersubjectivity from within the paradigm of the subject, but it seems impossible to develop a theory of intersubjectivity without it at least *including* an analysis of the subjective aspects of intersubjectivity.[30] However, we have also located a significant limit to Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity insofar as it leaves unexplained the transition to the symbolic order. Here, I have suggested, Husserl's phenomenological approach would need to be developed in the areas that Mead has attempted, albeit in rather haphazard and contestable ways, to explore.

References

Baynes, K. (1990). Crisis and life-world in Husserl and Habermas. In A. B. Dallery, C. E. Scott, & P. Holley Roberts (Eds.), *Crises in continental philosophy* (pp. 57–68). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Carr, D. (1973). The fifth meditation and Husserl's cartesianism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 34*(1), 14–35.

Claesges, U. (1972). Zweideutigkeiten in Husserls Lebenswelt-begriff. In U. Claesges & K. Held (Eds.), *Perspektiven transzendentalphaeomenologischer Forschung* (pp. 85–101). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Crowell, S. G. (1999). The project of ultimate grounding and the appeal to intersubjectivity in recent transcendental philosophy. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies, 7*(1), 31–54.

Dallmayr, F. R. (1987). Life-world and communicative action. In *Critical encounters: Between philosophy and politics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and phenomena* (D. B. Allison, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

---

[30] This conclusion accords with the conclusions reached independently by others such as Nagl (1988), Henrich (1998) and Frank (2002) in their critical responses to Habermas, none of whom is committed to the phenomenological method as such.

Dews, P. (1995). Modernity, self-consciousness, and the scope of philosophy: Jürgen Habermas and Dieter Henrich in debate. In *The limits of disenchantment: Essays on contemporary European philosophy* (pp. 169–193). London: Verso.

Frank, M. (2002). Self-consciousness and self-knowledge: On some difficulties with the reduction of subjectivity. *Constellations, 9*(3), 390–408.

Fultner, B. (2001). Intelligibility and conflict resolution in the lifeworld. *Continental Philosophy Review, 34*, 419–436.

Habermas, J. (1972). *Knowledge and human interests* (J. J. Shapiro, Trans.). London: Heinemann.

Habermas, J. (1973). *Theory and practice*. (J. Viertel, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon.

Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of communicative action*, Vol. 1 (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (1987a). *Theory of communicative action*, Vol. 2 (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (1987b). *The philosophical discourse of modernity* (F. Lawrence, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1988). *On the logic of the social sciences* (S. W. Nicholsen & J. A. Stark, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1990). Philosophy as stand-in and interpreter. In *Moral consciousness and communicative action* (pp. 1–20) (C. Lenhardt & S. W. Nicholsen, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1991a). Edmund Husserl über Lebenswelt, Philosophie und Wissenschaft. In *Texte und Kontexte* (pp. 34–48). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Habermas, J. (1991b). A reply. In A. Honneth & H. Joas (Eds.), *Communicative action* (pp. 214–264). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1992). *Postmetaphysical thinking* (W. M. Hohengarten, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1998). In Cooke Maeve (Ed.), *On the pragmatics of communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (2001). *On the pragmatics of social interaction* (B. Fultner, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (The Christian Gauss Lectures, 1971.).

Habermas, J. (2002). The German idealism of the Jewish philosophers. In E. Medieta (Ed.), *Religion and rationality: Essays on reason, God, and modernity* (pp. 37–59). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (2003). *Truth and justification* (B. Fultner, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. and Luhmann, N. (1971). *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie: was leistet die Systemforschung?* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Harrington, A. (2001). *Hermeneutic dialogue and social science: A critique of Gadamer and Habermas*. London: Routledge.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row.

Henrich, D. (1998). Subjektivität als Prinzip. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, 46*(1), 31–44.

Honneth, A. (1995). The struggle for recognition: On Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity. In *The fragmented world of the social: Essays in social and political philosophy* (pp. 158–67). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Husserliana I: Husserl, E. (1929). *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*. Den Haag, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950. D. Cairns (Trans.). *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960.

Husserliana VI: Husserl, E. (1934–1937). *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962. D. Carr (Trans.). *The crisis of the European sciences: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.

Husserliana XVII: Husserl, E. (1929). *Formale und transzendentale Logik. Versuch einer Kritik derlogischen Vernunft*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974; D. Cairns (Trans.). *Formal and transcendental logic*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.

Hutcheson, P. (1980). Husserl's problem of intersubjectivity. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 11*, 144–162.

Landgrebe, L. (1984). Life-world and the historicity of human existence. In B. Waldenfels, J. Broekman & A. Pazanin (Eds.) *Phenomenology and marxism* (pp. 167–204) (J. C. Evans, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

McCarthy, T. (1978). *The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mead, G. H. (1964). The mechanism of social consciousness. In A. J. Reck (Ed.), *Selected writings: George Herbert Mead* (pp. 134–141). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Nagl, L. (1988). Zeigt die Habermassche Kommunikationstheorie einen 'Ausweg aus der Subjektphilosophie'? Erwägungen zur Studie 'Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne'. M. Frank, G. r. Raulet and W. van Reijen (Eds.) *Die Frage nach dem Subjekt* (pp. 346–372). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Schutz, A. (1970). The problem of transcendental intersubjectivity in Husserl. In *Collected papers III: Studies in phenomenological philosophy* (pp. 51–91). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Theunissen, M. (1984). *The other: Studies in the social ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Buber* (C. Macann, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Zahavi, D. (2001). *Husserl and transcendental intersubjectivity* (E. A. Behnke, Trans.). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.