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Second-Person Engagement, Self-Alienation, and Group-Identification

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Abstract One of the central questions within contemporary debates about collective intentionality concerns the notion and status of the we. The question, however, is by no means new. At the beginning of the last century, it was already intensively discussed in phenomenology. Whereas Heidegger argued that a focus on empathy is detrimental to a proper understanding of the we, and that the latter is more fundamental than any dyadic interaction, other phenomenologists, such as Stein, Walther and Husserl, insisted on the importance of empathy for proper we-experiences. In this paper, I will present some of the key moves in this debate and then discuss and assess Husserl's specific proposal, according to which reciprocal empathy, second-person engagement and self-alienation are all important presuppositions for group-identification and we-identity.

Keywords Reciprocal empathy · Phenomenology · We-identity · Collective intentionality · Group-identification · Second-person engagement · Recognition

Rich and multifaceted discussions of empathy can be found in the writings of various phenomenologists around the time of World War I. Reacting critically to the work of Theodor Lipps, phenomenologists such as Scheler, Stein, Walther and Husserl conceived of empathy as a basic, perceptually based form of other-directed intentionality, often using the term empathy (*Einfühlung*) interchangeably with terms such as other-experience (*Fremderfahrung*) or other-perception (*Fremdwahrnehmung*) (Husserl 1960: 92; Scheler 2008: 220). They considered empathy to be a basic form of other-understanding, one that other more complex and indirect forms of interpersonal understanding presuppose and rely on. They argued that one in the empathic face-to-face encounter can obtain an acquaintance with the other's experiential life that has a directness and immediacy to it that is not shared by whatever beliefs you might have about the other in his or her absence. Furthermore, they all insisted on the need for a careful differentiation between empathy (*Einfühlung*), sympathy (*Mitgefühl*), emotional contagion (*Gefühlsansteckung*) and emotional sharing (*Miteinanderfühlen*), and were in general critical of Lipps' proposal that empathy involves a form of inner imitation and projection (Gurwitsch 1979: 24–25). Rather than blurring the distinction between self and other, rather than leading to fusion, empathy, on their account, required a preservation of the self-other difference (for a more extensive presentation and discussion see Zahavi 2014a, b, 2017a).

The focus of the phenomenologists soon moved from a concern with individual intentionality and dyadic interpersonal relations to an interest in larger social units. Not surprisingly, many of them went on to argue that their analysis of empathy could feed into and elucidate the nature and preconditions of group formations and we-identities. More specifically, a shared conviction of Husserl, Scheler, Stein, Walther and later on Schutz was that a proper account of communal being-together and shared intentionality requires an exploration of how individuals are experientially interrelated (Zahavi 2017b).

Not everybody, however, were convinced about this approach. Indeed, some phenomenologists, Heidegger being the most prominent, denied that dyadic interpersonal relations is the key to a proper understanding of sociality

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and community and instead argued that group belongingness, rather than being founded upon an other-experience, preceded any such experience.

It is consequently possible to identify an important internal division within phenomenology. It is centred on the question of how best to conceive of the foundations of sociality (cf. Zahavi 1996, 2001; Koo 2016). Should one prioritize the concrete face-to-face encounter and highlight the importance of the difference between self and other (cf. Sartre 2003: 269–270), or should one rather focus on an everyday being-with-one-another characterized by anonymity and substitutability, where others are those from whom "one mostly does not distinguish oneself" (Heidegger 1996: 111)?

To quickly outline the structure of the present article: I will first present some facets of Heidegger's criticism. I will next turn to Husserl's account and attempt to reconstruct his reasons for approaching the question of group-identification and we-identity through an investigation of empathy. As we shall see, one pivotal argument of Husserl's—which is overlooked by Heidegger—concerns the way in which empathy affects our self-understanding. My discussion of Husserl will, however, not merely serve an exegetical purpose. It will serve as springboard for a more systematic defence of the idea that second-person engagement has a crucial role to play in the constitution of we-identities. In a final move, I will then consider and discuss some possible (post-)Heideggerian objections to such a claim.

1 Heidegger's Concern

Let us start out by considering Heidegger's concerns in some detail. In *Sein und Zeit* as well as in lecture courses from around that period, including *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (1925), *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (1927) and *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1928-1929), Heidegger repeatedly spoke out against empathy and denied it and the I-Thou relation any epistemological and ontological primacy. Not only did Heidegger consider the very attempt empathically to grasp the experiences of others to be an exception rather than the default mode of our being-with-others. He also took the very suggestion that a bridge or connection has to be established between two initially independent selves, an I and a Thou, to involve a fundamental misunderstanding. There is no gap to be bridged by empathy, since a basic constituent of Dasein's being-in-the-world is its *being-with*:

> Dasein is essentially *being-with* others *as being-among* intraworldly beings. As being-in-the-world it is never first merely being among things extant within the world, then subsequently to uncover other human beings as also being among them. Instead, as being-in-the-world it is being with others, apart from whether and how others are factically there with it themselves. On the other hand, however, the Dasein is also not first merely being-with others, only then later to run up against intraworldly things in its being-with-others; instead, being-with-others means being-with other being-in-the-world—being-with-in-the-world…. Put otherwise, being-in-the-world is with equal originality both being-with and being-among (Heidegger 1982: 278).

Heidegger's most comprehensive criticism can be found in paragraph 26a of the *Prolegomena*. Elaborating on his analysis of the fundamental being-in-the-world of Dasein, Heidegger argues that we in our daily life of practical concerns are constantly with others. We are living in a public world, and the work we do, the tools we use, the goals we pursue, all contain references to others, regardless of whether or not they are factually present: "The poorly cultivated field along which I am walking appresents its owner or tenant. The sailboat at anchor appresents someone in particular, the one who takes his trips in it" (1985: 240). Indeed, just as Dasein is not first a worldless subject to whom a world is then subsequently added, Dasein is not alone until another happens to turn up. On the contrary, others are there with me even when I am not attending to them, and even when they are not bodily present, and it is because I am characterized by a being-with-others in this fundamental way, that the disclosure of concrete others is at all possible. Indeed, "it is because Dasein as being-in-the-world is of itself being-with that there is something like a being-with-one-another" (1985: 239). When the other is absent, this merely means that my being-with is not factually fulfilled: "It is only insofar as Dasein as being-in-the-world has the basic constitution of being-with that there is a *being-for* and *-against* and *-without-one-another* right to the indifferent walking-alongside-one-another" (1985: 241). When I do in fact encounter the other in his or her bodily presence, this encounter does not have the form of me qua subject standing over against the other qua object. Rather, the encounter is always environmentally embedded and facilitated. I do not encounter the other as a thematic object of cognition, rather I meet the other and understand the other in the context of specific shared concerns and worldly situations (1985: 239).

As Heidegger insists, one problem with earlier empathy theorists was that they failed to realize to what extent the very notion of empathy is committed to a problematic ontological assumption. The assumption is that the I is at first at home in its own ego-sphere and must then

subsequently exit that sphere and enter the alien sphere of the other in order to establish a connection. This is all wrong. Indeed, it is an artificial attempt to solve a pseudo-problem, since Dasein is already from the start outside, and this is also where it encounters the other:

> It is assumed that a subject is encapsulated within itself and now has the task of empathizing with another subject. This way of formulating the question is absurd, since there never is such a subject in the sense it is assumed here. If the constitution of what is Dasein is instead regarded without presuppositions as in-being and being-with in the presuppositionless immediacy of everydayness, it then becomes clear that the problem of *empathy* is just as absurd as the question of the reality of the external world" (1985: 243).

In addition, the empathy theorists failed to grasp to what extent empathy rather than constituting our being-with is first possible on its basis (Heidegger 1996: 117), or as Heidegger writes in *Einleitung in die Philosophie*:

> The With-one-another [*Miteinander*] cannot be explained through the I-Thou relation, but rather conversely: this I-Thou relation presupposes for its inner possibility that *Dasein* functioning as I and also as Thou is determined as with-one-another; indeed even more: even the self-comprehension of an I and the concept of I-ness arise only on the basis of the with-one-another, not from the I-Thou relation (Heidegger 2001: 145–146).

2 The importance of reciprocity

Whatever one holds of Heidegger's positive account, it should be clear that his characterization of empathy has little in common with the account(s) offered by other phenomenologists. Those who did work on empathy did not conceive of it as a process where one tries to worm one's way into the other's inner realm, nor for that matter as some kind of bridge connecting two essentially closed-off interiorities. On the contrary, in their analysis of empathy, phenomenologists such as Husserl, Scheler and Stein very much emphasized the expressive, embodied and intentional nature of the empathizing and empathized subjects (Zahavi 2014b). When I empathically understand the embodied other, the other is not given to me as a pure nucleus of experience, but as a centre of intentionality, as a different perspective on the very world that I also inhabit. Rather than facing the other as an isolated object, her intentionality will pull me along and make me co-attend her worldly objects. As Husserl writes,

> Regardless of how one describes this experiencing-of-another […] more precisely – whether it be called 'empathy' or 'comprehending experiencing' or whatever else – it remains a form of experience. We refer to this now, in order to point out that conjointly with the empathic experience of the other the following peculiarity accrues: when comprehending his experiencing, my experience normally passes through his experiencing and reaches all the way through to what he experiences (Husserl 2008: 617).

This is, of course, one of the reasons why our perception of others is so unlike our ordinary perception of objects. As soon as the other appears on the scene, my relation to the world will change, since the other will always be given to me in a situation or meaningful context that points back to the other as a new center of reference. The meaning the world has for the other affects the meaning it has for me. My own perspective on the world will consequently be affected by my empathic understanding of the other. Indeed, both Husserl and Stein emphasize the connection between the experience of others and the constitution of a shared world, or, if one is to employ a concept coming from developmental psychology, for both of them empathy and social referencing are closely linked. At the same time, however, and this is of particular importance in this context, both Husserl and Stein also stress that I can be part of what the other intends. So again, when I experience others, I do not merely experience them as psychophysical objects in the world, rather I experience them as subjects who experience worldly objects, myself included (Husserl 1973c: 4–5, 1952: 169, 1950: 158). We encounter others as such when we encounter them as experiencing subjects, and this means as subjects that have a perspective not just upon the world of objects, but upon us as well. In fact, through my encounter with an experience of others, I can come to attain a new experience of myself. To that extent, empathy can function as an important source of self-knowledge (Stein 1989: 130, cf. Husserl 1950: 149).

This is point with important ramifications. Standard accounts of empathy often highlight the extent to which empathy allows for a unique kind of experiential understanding of others. But this is only half of the story, at least if we focus on face-to-face encounters. In the latter cases, empathy can occasion a change in one's own self-understanding, and it is this change that we need to study, if we want to understand (a special kind of) group-membership. At any rate, this is what Husserl argues in two intriguing texts from 1921 and 1932 entitled *Gemeingeist I* (Husserl 1973b: 165–184), and *Phänomenologie der Mitteilungsgemeinschaft* (Husserl 1973c: 461–479).

Initially, Husserl discusses how we can imitate another, or love or hate another, or empathically experience another,

but then he writes that none of these acts amounts to truly social acts (Husserl 1973b: 165–166). Why not? Because truly social acts are acts that must be apprehended by the addressee; they require an uptake (cf. Reinach 1913: 705–718). They involve a special kind of reciprocity. Let us consider a situation where I directly experience another, just as he experiences me. Would this provide for the required reciprocity? Would we then have a case where *we* reciprocally perceive each other? Husserl's answer is negative. Each of us could simultaneously be directed at the other without either of us being aware of the other's attention, and in this case the reciprocity would be lacking. But what then if "I experience my counterpart as being experientially directed at myself" (1959: 136–137)? This would be insufficient as well, since the other might remain unaware of my attention. But what then if there were mutual awareness? What if we were dealing with a case of being-for-one-another (*Füreinander-dasein*) in and through reciprocal empathy, where both parties were mutually aware of being attended to by the other? Somewhat surprisingly, Husserl insists that we even then would still not have a case of what he considers the primordial kind of social relation, namely the I-Thou relation, and which he further argues is a condition of possibility for social communalization (*Vergemeinschaftet-sein*) (Husserl 1973c: 471–472). What more is needed? A second-personal address: "What is still missing is the intention and will to intimate – the specific act of communication (of communicating oneself), the community creating act that in Latin is simply called *communicatio*" (Husserl 1973c: 473).

To quickly summarize, in the course of his analysis, Husserl makes the following distinctions:

- In *simultaneous* (or *parallel*) *empathy*, A experiences B, while B experiences A. Both however remain unaware of the other's attention.
- In *reflexive empathy*, A experiences that B is attending to A. B, however, remains unaware of the fact that A has become aware of B's attention.
- In *reciprocal empathy*, both A and B are mutually aware of being attended to by the other.
- The *I-Thou relation* goes beyond reciprocal empathy by requiring more than simply reciprocal perceptual contact. What is also needed is communicative engagement.

As should be clear by now, in most face-to-face encounters we are not simply dealing with situations where one subject empathically grasps the other; rather, bidirectional responsiveness figures prominently. As Frith puts it:

> Communication, when we confront each other face-to-face, is not a one-way process from me to you. The way you respond to me alters the way I respond to you. This is a communication loop. […] This is the big difference from my interactions with the physical world. The physical world is utterly indifferent to my attempts to interpret it. But when two people interact face-to-face, their exchange of meaning is a cooperative venture. The flow is never just one-way (Frith 2007: 175).

In *Gemeingeist I*, one can find further thoughts on this, since Husserl talks there of the I-Thou relation as involving an immediate communication, where both of us, I and Thou, "look each other in the eyes", he understands me, is aware of me, just as I am simultaneously aware of him. I then address him and seek to influence him. I might, for instance, call his attention to a common object by pointing at it. If successful, his attention will shift from my expression to the intended object. In this way, my intention is realized in him (Husserl 1973b: 167–168). Socio-communicative acts involve reciprocity (*Wechselbeziehung*) and lead to a we-synthesis if our intentions interlock in the requisite way (*Willensverflechtung*) (Husserl 1973b: 170). What is distinctive about the I-Tthou relation, in short, is that I does not simply stand next to the other, rather I motivate the other, just as he motivates me, and through this reciprocal interaction, a unity of willing is established that encompasses both subjects (Husserl 1973b: 171):

> I am not merely for myself, and the other is not standing opposed to me as an other, rather the other is my you, and speaking, listening, responding, we already form a we, that is unified and communalized in a particular manner (Husserl 1973c: 476).

But what does Husserl have in mind when he writes that the other in such a situation is given as my *you*? What is so special about addressing the other as a you, rather than simply as a he or a she?

3 Second-person engagement

In recent years, there has been an ongoing debate about whether the two mainstream positions in the theory of mind debate, the theory–theory (in its different versions) and the simulation theory (in its different versions), can satisfactorily account for all forms of social cognition (Gallagher and Zahavi 2012). One idea that has gained increasing momentum during the last 5–10 years, not only within philosophy (cf. Eilan 2014), but also in developmental psychology (Reddy 2008; Carpenter and Liebal 2011) and in social neuroscience (Schilbach et al. 2013) is the idea that both of these dominant positions are limited by their respective privileging of either first-person experience (this would be the simulation theory) or third-person observation

(this would be the theory–theory) and that what is really required is a theory that explicitly targets and accommodates the second-person perspective (Schilbach et al. 2013). One has even started to talk of a 'You turn' (Eilan 2014). But what exactly is a second-person perspective? What does second-person perspective taking involve? In a 2012 article, Pauen offers one proposal. He contrasts social cognition based on evidence available from a third-person perspective, e.g. behavioral features, brain scans, etc., with social cognition from a second-person perspective. The latter comes about when the epistemic subject draws on his or her own experiences when ascribing mental states to other subjects (Pauen 2012: 38). To adopt a second-person perspective is consequently a question of simulating, replicating or imagining the mental states of another (Pauen 2012: 39), which is why Pauen can write that second-person perspective taking is closely related to the processes that proponents of simulation theory have traditionally been investigating (Pauen 2012: 47).

I find Pauen's proposal puzzling. In the previous debate, it has been customary to label simulation theory a first-personal approach to social cognition, since the guiding idea is that the attributor is using his or her own mind or cognitive system as a model for understanding the mind of the other. On Pauen's construal, the difference between first-person and second-person approaches to social cognition collapses, and one might consequently argue that his account simply misses the intended *explanandum*.

In Schilbach et al's influential target article in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, the second-person perspective is instead contrasted with what is called the *spectatorial stance*, and the authors highlight the importance of directly interacting with and emotionally engaging with others (rather than simply observing them from a distance) (Schilbach et al. 2013). This is an advancement vis-à-vis Pauen's account, since it is now made clear why we aren't simply dealing with another version of traditional simulation theory, but the account is still somewhat unsatisfactory. Is the most unique feature of second-personal social cognition really the action part, the fact that one becomes aware of others' mental states as a result of engaging and interacting with them? Consider the personal pronouns. The second person singular pronoun is *you*. This suggests that to adopt a second-person perspective on somebody is to relate to that person as a you, rather than as a he or she. But what does that entail? Let me propose that reciprocal engagement is a crucial and distinctive component. For me to relate to and address another as a you is to relate to someone, an I, who is in turn related to me as a you. Second-person engagement is a subject–subject (you-me) relation where I am aware of and directed at the other and, at the same time, implicitly aware of myself in the accusative, as attended to or addressed by the other. Second-person engagement consequently involves not merely an awareness of the other, but also and at the same time, a form of interpersonal self-consciousness. On such an account, the second-person perspective differs from and cannot be reduced to a combination of the first-person and the third-person perspective. It entails that the involved subjects stand, as Eilan has recently put it, in a particular kind of communicative relation to or communicative interaction with each other (Eilan (submitted)).

In his own account, Husserl is well aware of and in fact explicitly highlights the self-transformative character of the I-Thou relation. As he writes, I come to attain personal self-consciousness, I come to be a personal subject, in the I-Thou relation (Husserl 1973b: 171):

> *The origin of personality* is found in empathy and in the further *social acts* that grow out of it. For personality, it is not enough that the subject becomes aware of itself as the center of its acts; rather, personality is constituted only as the subject enters into social relations with others (Husserl 1973b: 175).

My being as a person is consequently not my own achievement; rather it is a result of my "communicative intertwinement" with others (Husserl 1973c: 603, cf. 1973c: 50).

But why should all of this be relevant for group-membership, we-identity and communal experience? Why does Husserl think that *socialization* (being constituted as full-fledged a social being) and *communalization* (being constituted as a member of social groups and communities) are closely connected, as Szanto correctly points out (Szanto 2016: 148)? Well, as Husserl explains in a central passage in *Ideen II*, when I experience and internalize the other's perspective on myself, when I take over the apprehension that others have of me, and when I come to be in possession of such a socially mediated externalized self-apprehension, "*I fit myself into the family of man,* or, rather, I create the constitutive possibility for the unity of this 'family.' It is only now that I am, in the proper sense, an Ego over against an other and can then say 'we'" (Husserl 1989: 254).

As I interpret Husserl, his guiding idea is that any we-formation, first of all, requires a preservation of plurality. A we, a first-person *plural*, is not an enlarged I. The social unification and integration of the involved subjects never amounts to fusion, to an eradication of difference. Secondly, however, the difference between self and other cannot remain too salient, since this will prevent the required unity and integration from actually happening. Husserl's solution to this challenge is to propose that we can only come to adopt a we-perspective and group-identify, i.e., come to think of and experience ourselves as *one of us,* if the difference between self and others is present

but somewhat downplayed. This is precisely what happens when one comes to experience and adopt the other's perspective on oneself.

> The difference between oneself and the foreign I vanishes; the other apprehends me as foreign, just as I grasp him as foreign for me, and he himself is a 'self,' etc. Parity thus ensues: a multiplicity of feeling, willing I's that are alike in kind and each independent in the same sense (Husserl 1973a: 243–44; cf. Husserl 1973c: 635).

Importantly, the self-apprehension required if one is to adopt and maintain a we-perspective is not immediately available. It is not an innate part of our psychological makeup, it is not a natural component of our own first-personal self-experience, but rather involves a subsequent transformation or modulation of it, namely one that is socially mediated and which involves experiencing oneself through the eyes of the other. It is no coincidence that Husserl occasionally describes this process as amounting to a form of self-alienation (*Selbstentfremdung*) (Husserl 1973c: 634–635). The term might usually have negative connotations, but for Husserl it refers to a self-experience which is enriched and matured through the incorporation of an external perspective.[1]

To fully appreciate Husserl's proposal, it is important to realize that it targets a quite formal requirement. Self-alienation might be necessary for coming to think of oneself in the first-person plural, but it is certainly not sufficient for understanding why one more particularly comes to identify with other philosophers, EU-supporters, Danes, one's close family etc. Here an appeal to more substantive elements such as shared norms, values, emotions, goals etc. seems required. So again, the elements I have highlighted in Husserl's account only make up part of the story.

Husserl's central idea can be compared to ideas found within social psychology, in particular within the so-called *self-categorization theory* developed by John Turner (Turner et al. 1987). We all derive and define our social self-identity from our group-memberships, i.e., from the group and social category to which we feel we belong. But how do people come to identify with a group in the first place? Self-categorization theory is an answer to that particular question. More specifically, self-categorization is the label for the cognitive process taken to underlie social identification, group belongingness and group formation (Abrams and Hogg 1990: 65). As Abrams and Hogg point out, group-identification is "phenomenologically real" (Abrams and Hogg 1990: 7). It involves a feeling of belonging and is not merely a question of falling in one social category rather than another. Although one by birth(right) might belong to and fall in a certain category (family, class, ethnicity etc.) regardless of whether or not one knows or cares about it, and although outsiders might classify one as a member of a certain group quite independently of one's own view of the matter, such externally enforced classifications are not of much relevance, when considering the issues of social self-identity and we-identity. The *we*, the first-person plural, is not an entity observed from without, but rather something experienced from within in virtue of one's identification with and participation in a certain group. Saying this is by no means to say that the identification with and participation in a given group always happens deliberatively and voluntarily or that it cannot be based on shared objective features such a biological kinship. One might be born into and be brought up within a certain family and community, and such memberships might be quite beyond the domain of personal will and decision. But even in such cases, for the memberships in question to have an impact on one's self-identity, they must be experienced from within, they must allow one to experience and think of oneself as one of *us*.

Turner's central idea is that self-categorization involves a component of self-stereotyping, where individual differences are downplayed and de-emphasized, and where similarities between self and other in-group members are instead accentuated such that social uniformity is generated. Turner even speaks of this process in terms of a certain de-individuation or depersonalization insofar as the individual no longer views herself in terms of her unique features, but rather in terms of her shared in-group attributes (Turner 1981).

The similarity to Husserl's proposal should be obvious. One noteworthy difference, though, is that Husserl is far more interested in and pays far more attention to the kind of interpersonal understanding, e.g., the face-to-face encounter, reciprocal empathy, second-personal engagement, that underlies group-identification than Turner.

4 Back to Heidegger(ians)

In the preceding, I have outlined some – often overlooked – reasons for why a phenomenologist like Husserl would approach issues like we-identity, collective intentionality and communal being-together through an investigation of empathy and the dyadic I-Thou relation. My discussion can be seen as a partial response to the Heideggerian criticism (but see also Zahavi 1996). It is hard to know what Heidegger might have said to this response, but in Hans Bernhard Schmid's recent work, we can find a position that

[1] Sartre's discussion of the extent to which the encounter with the other can occasion a self-alienation is better known that Husserl's analysis. For a brief comparison of Husserl's and Sartre's divergent interpretations of this encounter, cf. Zahavi 2005: 94–95.

is partly inspired by Heidegger and which explicitly criticizes accounts like the one just offered. So in place of Heidegger, let us take a brief look at Schmid.

Schmid has argued that the *we* is a fundamental *explanans* and rejected any attempts to explain it further. The we does not originate in any kind of agreement, or commitment, or communication, or joint action. It is not founded upon any form of social cognition, it doesn't presuppose any experience or givenness of another subject, let alone any kind of reciprocal relation between *I* and *you* or self and other. Rather, the *we*, the "sense of us" or "plural self-awareness," precedes the distinction between yours and mine, is prior to any form of intersubjectivity or mutual recognition, and is itself the irreducible basis for joint action and communication (Schmid 2005: 138, 145, 149, 296). To attempt to account for group-membership by arguing that the prospective members have to identify with the group in question, consequently fails to realize that such an identification is always after the fact. It merely confirms a felt sense of "us-ness" that is already in place. Likewise, with any act of communication (including even pre-verbal dyadic attention): Such acts cannot establish shared meaning since they must be jointly accepted as having meaning in order to be at all communicative. To put it differently, communication is an irreducible joint action and therefore presupposes *we*-intentions. It is *we* who are communicating together, and since communication presupposes a pre-existing "sense of us," the former cannot explain or establish or secure the latter (Schmid 2014: 11).

It is important for Schmid to emphasize that the *we* must be understood as minds-in-relation, rather than as some kind of undifferentiated unity. The *we* involves a plurality and is not some kind of larger scale *I* (Schmid 2009: 156). But as we have just seen Schmid also considers the *we* a fundamental *explanans* and rejects the idea that it could be explained on the basis of a specific form of interpersonal understanding. He even distances himself from the proposal that only individuals who are individually self-aware can have plural self-awareness and that plural self-awareness necessarily presupposes or implies singular self-awareness (Schmid 2014a: 21–22). Pointing to developmental research, for instance findings pertaining to *social referencing*, Schmid writes that small children do not seem to draw a clear line between their own goals and the goals of others, nor do they seem to be aware of their own beliefs as theirs, in a singular rather than in a plural way. To argue that group-membership and we-identity presuppose some component of singular self-awareness that is beyond any membership and which is then subjected to a certain alienating transformation is consequently to put the cart before the horse. One first become aware of oneself as a member of a group and only subsequently does one become aware of oneself as an individual. To that extent, singular self-awareness presupposes plural self-awareness (Schmid 2014: 23).

This is not the right place for an extensive discussion of Schmid's proposal, but let me in turn reply briefly to the two challenges.

First the issue of *identification*. I think Schmid is right to the extent that explicit group-identification is indeed often after the fact. When identifying with a certain political cause, a religious community or an interest group, the identification in question is frequently based on a pre-existing sense of belonging, and the former often simply amounts to an articulation of the latter. But explicit acts of identification are not the only identificatory processes worth considering. Take the work of the developmental psychologist and autism researcher Peter Hobson. Over the years, Peter Hobson has argued that the process of "identifying-with" plays a very early and pivotal role in human development by structuring "social experience with polarities of self–other differentiation as well as connectedness" (Hobson 2008: 386). In one paper, the process in question is further described as involving the assimilation of the other's orientation toward self into one's own psychological repertoire (Hobson and Hobson 2007: 415). On Hobson's account, this identifying-with is crucially involved in affective sharing, and he argues that young infants' early affective engagement with others already provides them with interpersonal experiences that encompass an interplay between similarity and difference, connectedness and differentiation (Hobson 2007: 270).

Do such primitive processes of identification also presuppose a preceding "sense of us" or "usness"? Or are they not rather crucial components in a process of socialization that allows for the constitution of such a sense? In all likelihood, Schmid would insist on the former option. But we should consider the cost of this preference. Not only would the "sense of us" serve as a fundamental explanans, rather than figuring as an explanandum of its own. That is, one would basically abandon any attempt at analyzing, let alone explaining it any further. In addition, one might also wonder whether we shouldn't retain a distinction between standing in a social relation and being part of a we? To insist that I constitute a plural self, a *we*, with whomever I am socially related to, regardless of the character of the social relationship (be it commanding, hostile, abusive or dismissive), is to miss out on the peculiarity of *we*-ness. The latter arguably involves a special form of social interaction, integration and addressing. It is a quite peculiar and distinctive social formation, and shouldn't simply be used as a synonym for any kind of social relatedness whatsoever (Brinck et al. 2017).

What about the issue of *self-awareness*?[2] Is it really true that children demonstrate awareness of group membership

[2] In the following, I will use the terms 'self-awareness' and 'self-consciousness' synonymously.

before they display individual self-awareness? Is this something that is borne out by empirical evidence? Schmid (2014: 23) writes that young children do not seem to draw a clear line between their own goals and other people's, but this suggestion is contradicted by the existence of joint attention interactions. The whole point of, and motivation behind, proto-declaratives is to bring someone else's focus of attention in line with one's own (cf. Roessler 2005).

Around 3–4 years of age, children start to show in-group biases and group conformity (Corriveau and Harris 2010; Haun and Tomasello 2011). Such findings are good indicators of the presence of sensitivity to group affiliation, but children display individual self-consciousness much earlier, even on Gallup's quite conservative estimate, which considers the ability to pass the mirror self-recognition task the litmus test for the presence of self-consciousness (Gallup 1977, cf. Rochat and Zahavi 2011). Children can pass this test around 18–24 months of age. According to other definitions of self-consciousness, however, infants are estimated to possess self-consciousness far earlier. Some argue that they have a sense of themselves as differentiated, environmentally situated, and agentive entities from shortly after birth (Neisser 1993; Stern 1985, Rochat 2001), whereas others have argued that phenomenal consciousness entails a low-level form of self-consciousness for which reason infants possess self-consciousness from the moment they have experiences (Zahavi 2005, 2014a, b). In either case, we are dealing with quite minimal definitions of self-consciousness. To claim that such forms of self-consciousness are derived from and enabled by group-membership would ultimately commit one to a radical, and highly implausible form of social constructivism, not unlike the one favored by, for instance, W. Prinz (2003).

5 Conclusion

As should hopefully be clear by now, one intriguing idea that can be found among some defenders of the empathy-based approach to we-intentionality, in particular Husserl, is that the first-person and the second-person singular and the first-person plural perspective are interlinked, and that the latter requires a particular form of interpersonal understanding and a particular transformation of self-experience.

Where does this leave us regarding the debate among the early phenomenologists? Based on the preceding discussion, it shouldn't come as a surprise that I find Heidegger's criticism and deprecation of both empathy and the I-Thou relation overhasty. Any plausible account of intersubjectivity has to factor in the embodied face-to-face relationship. It is not permissible to denigrate it to a mere ontic manifestation of some supposedly more basic ontological structure (cf. Zahavi 1996). Having said that, however, one also ought to recognize that Heidegger is right in assigning an important role to the world when seeking to account for the basic structures of sociality. Even something as simple as a face-to-face encounter takes place in a public world and cannot be understood independently of this common ground. Furthermore, there is obviously far more to our being as social creatures than simply that which plays itself out in the concrete dyadic encounter. Indeed, one fairly obvious limitation of the account offered above is that its focus on the *face-to-face based we* is fairly restrictive. In addition to dyadic forms of we that emerge in and is bound to the here and now, there are also far more sedimented, institutionalized and anonymous forms of we. People can experience themselves as members of a group, can identify with other members of the same group, and can come to have experiences they wouldn't otherwise have had, even if they are not de facto together with the relevant others, and even if they don't know them in person. This is incidentally something Husserl was quite aware of. As he writes in a manuscript from 1932:

> The world is everybody's world, but it is also 'our' world, and what we mean by 'our' can change. It can refer to those of us that are gathered here and now, but it can also refer to us from Freiburg, or us from Baden, or us Germans, or us Europeans, etc. (Husserl 2008: 181).

One might identify with the other people who are waiting in line for the same bus, just as one might identify with one's extended family, a group of friends, a firm, other people who are pursuing the same goal as oneself, a religious community, a specific ethnicity, a profession, a football fan club, a nation, etc. and it is by no means obvious that membership in all these social formations can be analyzed in the same way. Whereas Lickel et al. (2000) highlight the difference between four types of groups – intimacy groups, task groups, social categories and transitory groups – Tomasello has opted for an even more fundamental distinction, namely the one between a second-personal dyadic form of joint intentionality, which is a short-lived relation between ad hoc pairs of individuals in the here and now, and a more anonymous and larger-scale form of collective intentionality that goes beyond the here and now (2014). There is, in short, no question that an account of the we, which only focuses on the dyadic face-to-face encounter, is insufficient. It will have to be supplemented not only by a proper taxonomy of different group-formations, but also by a systematic clarification of how different types of groups, different types of we, are related to each other. Are some forms more fundamental than others, and if so, how? These questions, however, are

not foreign to the phenomenologists, and further informative analyses can be found in the work of Husserl, Scheler, Walther, Schutz and Gurwitsch (see Zahavi 2017b).

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